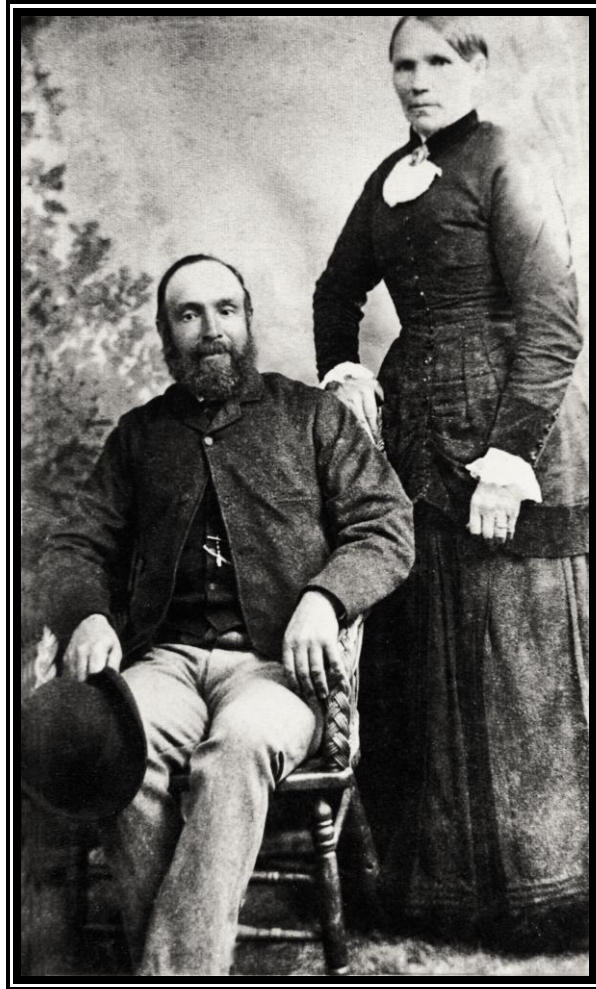


# *COPPINS CROSSING AND BEYOND*



*The Life and Times of John and Catherine Coppin*

*By Rhonda Boxall*

*Cover Photo: John and Catherine Coppin, date and photographer  
unknown*

*Source: Canberra District Historical Society collection)*

*All Other Photos: Taken by the author unless source otherwise stated.*

*Self-published, Wollongong, 2013*

## *Introduction*

*This project started with the intention of writing a few short paragraphs on the life of my great-great grandparents, John and Catherine Coppin, who settled in the Queanbeyan District of NSW in 1859. As I knew very little about John and Catherine, their story was meant to be a brief background to that of their daughter and son-in-law, Ellen and Timothy Kelleher of Rocky Crossing, near Naas - my great grandparents. But my curiosity was awakened - one little bit of information stirred up the desire to find out more - and more... !*

*Along the way I came into contact with Colin McAlister, an enthusiastic volunteer from the Friends of Glenburn Group. He had already published a history of the Glenburn / Burbong area in the Parish of Amungula and was now organising work parties to conserve the ruins. He acquainted me with the site of the Coppin homestead and I soon found myself joining in the efforts to rescue its remnants from the stranglehold of blackberry canes. Thereafter, I became totally immersed in pulling together the threads of their life.*

*This story is the result. It has been an enjoyable, if at times frustrating, and time consuming journey.*

*Rhonda Boxall*

*February 2013*

## *Acknowledgments*

*Without the encouragement and gentle nudging of Colin McAlister to explore just a little bit further and be a little more precise, this story would have been very basic. His knowledge of the ACT, contacts and sources of material have made my job so much easier. My sincere thanks to him for keeping up my enthusiasm, spurring on my research and the constant supply of information, maps and documents along the way. His comments on the final draft were also much appreciated.*

*I would also like to thank my daughter, Anne-marie Boxall, for taking the time out of her busy schedule to check and comment on this story.*

*And lastly, thank you to all those wonderful repositories of New South Wales and the ACT that protect our history and enable a story such as this to be pieced together - in particular State Records of NSW, National Archives, National Library of Australia, the State Library of NSW, Canberra District Historical Society and Queanbeyan City Library.*

## *Abbreviations:*

CL	Conditional Lease
CP	Conditional Purchase
NSW BDM	New South Wales Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages
NAA	National Archives of Australia
NLA	National Library of Australia
SLNSW	State Library of New South Wales
SRNSW	State Records of New South Wales

# COPPINS CROSSING AND BEYOND

## *PART 1: Pre-Queanbeyan Days*

Life in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Britain was a struggle for those of lesser means. For many the answer was to escape to the other side of the world and start all over again. And so it was for my great, great grandparents, Catherine Sheedy and John Coppin, who met and married in Sydney in January 1859. Later in the same year, and long before the idea of Canberra as the Nation's capital had been conceived, they relocated to the Queanbeyan District of NSW. There they lived the simple life of its early settlers. They toiled hard, struggled to overcome the hardships of drought, flood and crop failure; and raised a family of seven children.

They would be proud to know that their memory still lingers in the District. Coppins Crossing Road and Coppins Crossing on the lower Molonglo River in the ACT are named after them. Not far away some fireplace ruins and old garden trees indicate the site of their first independent homestead. In the Kowen Forest the ruins of their subsequent homestead, Cohen, are now being protected and conserved as an example of the lifestyle of the district's early pioneers.

### ***Catherine Sheedy – an Irish Background***

Catherine Sheedy was about twenty four years old when she set out from her home in Ballina, Ireland. (See map Appendix A, Map 1). Paying just one pound for the voyage, she sailed to an unknown future in Australia on the ship *Exodus* which left Liverpool, England on 21<sup>st</sup> April 1855. No doubt her prospects would have been fairly bleak had she chosen, in the aftermath of the Irish Potato Famine, to remain in the land of her birth. The Famine occurred when the potato blight almost destroyed the primary food source of the Irish population from 1845-1849. Various estimates suggest that between five hundred thousand and more than one million people died during those years as a result of hunger or disease. Consequently, many families were forced to emigrate to escape the harsh conditions and there was a massive reduction in the population of Ireland.

Catherine lived through that tragic period. She was born in Ballina, County Tipperary, Ireland about 1831, to Denis and Margaret Sheedy (nee Durie)<sup>1, 2</sup>. (The exact details of her birth are difficult to establish due to the loss of Irish records from that period<sup>3</sup>). Her life as a teenager during those years would have been extremely difficult<sup>4</sup>. When she

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<sup>1</sup> SRNSW: Assisted Immigrant Passenger Lists Arriving in Sydney and Newcastle, 1844-59. *Exodus* 1855 Reel 2137

<sup>2</sup> NSW BDM. Marriage Certificate 1859 (Coppin / Sheedy)

<sup>3</sup> Catherine's Birth Details: After examining numerous official documents I have settled on abt.1831 as her birth date. Her age on these documents varies but as her immigration and marriage records are consistent I have used the date above. The place of birth is recorded on her shipping record as Ballina, Co. Tipperary; her marriage certificate as Ireland; while the death certificate states County Tipperary.

<sup>4</sup> Ballina and Killaloe are twin towns spanning the River Shannon at the southern end of Lough Derg in south-west Ireland (see Appendix A, Map 1). Killaloe is in County Clare and Ballina in County Tipperary.

boarded the *Exodus* in 1855 her shipping record noted that her father was dead (possibly a victim of the famine) and her mother was still living in Ballina.<sup>5</sup> It appears she was escaping to what she hoped would be a better life on the other side of the world. Her shipping record also notes she was Roman Catholic, a cook, in good health and was able to read and write.

### ***Catherine's Arrival in Sydney***

Catherine's arrival in Sydney on 26<sup>th</sup> July 1855 could have been quite frightening had it not been for a chance meeting with one John Patrick Cunningham, a former neighbour in Ireland who had emigrated some time previously.<sup>6,7</sup> A neighbour of the Shumack family in the Queanbeyan District, he happened to be in Sydney when Catherine's ship, *Exodus*, arrived. (*Cunningham had bought property in Sydney following some success on the Victorian goldfields and periodically went to Sydney to collect the rent*). Looking through the list of shipping arrivals he noticed the name of Catherine Sheedy. He went to the ship, met Catherine and helped her find work. Accepting a position as lady's maid for a wage of 6/- a week, she looked after the household of Mr and Mrs Deloitte and their six children. At the beginning of 1859 she married John Coppin and they headed for the goldfields.<sup>8</sup>

### ***John Coppin – An English Background***

John Coppin was born the youngest of four children in the village of Sutton Valence near Langley, Kent, England on 1<sup>st</sup> June 1840.<sup>9,10</sup> (*See Appendix A Map 2*) His parents were Thomas Coppin, a carpenter and wattle-gate maker, and Ann Coppin (nee Tombling / Tomlin).<sup>11</sup>

During the mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century the population of Australia had begun to expand rapidly – largely due to the discovery of gold. The good news had spread and by 1852 prospectors started arriving from overseas hoping to make their fortune on the goldfields. Between 1850 and 1860 Australia's population more than doubled - amongst these newcomers was John Coppin. Back in England the young lad had been working as a farm labourer in Langley, near Maidstone in Kent.<sup>12</sup> Most likely he had heard stories

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*An imaginary line down the middle of the Lough forms the border. Other references throughout her life indicate she might have lived in both towns.*

<sup>5</sup> SRNSW. Assisted Immigrant Passenger Lists Arriving in Sydney and Newcastle, 1844-59. *Exodus* 1855 Reel 2137

<sup>6</sup> Shumack, Samuel. *An autobiography; or, Tales and Legends of Canberra Pioneers*. Canberra, ANU Press, 1967

<sup>7</sup> *This and other stories are sourced from Samuel Shumack's book 'An Autobiography; or, Tales and Legends of Canberra Pioneers'. Although he was credited with having a wonderful memory, their accuracy has not been verified. At the very least, they provide an understanding of the life that Catherine and John probably would have experienced in the days before the city of Canberra was even dreamt of.*

<sup>8</sup> Shumack, 1967

<sup>9</sup> UK Birth Certificate, The Hollingbourne Union, County of Kent.

<sup>10</sup> SRNSW. Lands Dept. Correspondence Files 1877-1951 (NRS 8103. 02/11036). *Application for a Conditional Purchase*.

<sup>11</sup> *John and Catherine's marriage certificate notes his mother's maiden name as Ann "Barton". Other sources record Ann's maiden name as "Tomlin" or "Tombling".*

<sup>12</sup> SRNSW. Assisted Immigrant Passenger Lists Arriving in Sydney & Newcastle, 1844-1859. Reel 2138.

of success on the Australia goldfields and must have decided that life in the colonies was an attractive option. Coppin decided to venture forth and try his luck. He was almost seventeen years old when he emigrated from England and, like Catherine, paid one pound for an assisted passage to Australia on board the *Washington Irving*.

### ***John's Arrival in Sydney***

John arrived in Sydney aboard the *Washington Irving* on 27<sup>th</sup> September 1857<sup>13</sup> – two years and two months after Catherine. He, too, ended up working for Mrs. Deloitte. Just over fifteen months later John and Catherine were married – after a somewhat hasty retreat from the Deloitte household. Samuel Shumack relates the following incident in his memoirs.

Mrs. Deloitte and her daughter had gone out for the day instructing John Coppin to go down to the cellar with her son, Quentin, to bottle some spirits. He was also instructed to be at the gate at 6pm to take charge of the horse and carriage but failed to show up at the appointed time. When Catherine said she had not seen the two men after the ladies departure, Mrs. Deloitte headed hastily to the cellar. There, “*she found the erring two something like Tam o’ Shanter – both were ‘glorious’ – o’er all the hills of life victorious*”.<sup>14</sup> Understandably, she was none too impressed and extracting her son left Coppin in the cellar to recover. When he did so she gave him his marching orders. Catherine took exception to Mrs. Deloitte’s treatment of him insisting that her son, who was much older than John, was to blame. In no uncertain manner she advised Mrs. Deloitte that she would also be leaving and would not work for her even if she doubled her wages. The couple took their departure from the household, married and set out for the Majors Creek goldfields. Their only belongings were a small tent, a pair of double blankets, some clothes and “*the usual bushman’s kit and billy can*”.<sup>15</sup>

### ***Marriage and a New Life***

Catherine and John married at the Roman Catholic Church of St. Augustine, Balmain on the 7<sup>th</sup> January 1859.<sup>16</sup> There was a considerable age gap between the two – eight or nine years. The marriage certificate records John’s age as twenty although he was only eighteen and a half at the time. He probably overstated his age to minimise the age gap and make the marriage seem more acceptable. Whatever the reason, it turned out to be an enduring relationship. The certificate also records they were living in Balmain at the time, with John working as a labourer and Catherine as a housemaid – obviously for Mrs. Deloitte before **the** incident. Although the shipping record noted she could read and write her signature on the marriage certificate is simply a cross with ‘*her mark*’ recorded against it - indicating she could not write. Apparently, it was common for many immigrants of Irish birth to hide their capacity to read and write.

John and Catherine spent two months travelling to the Majors Creek goldfields and, as it was harvest time they were able to find work along the way.<sup>17</sup> Despite their hard work

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<sup>13</sup> SRNSW. *Assisted Immigrant Passenger Lists Arriving in Sydney & Newcastle, 1844-1859*. Reel 2137.

<sup>14</sup> Shumack, Samuel. *An autobiography; or, Tales and Legends of Canberra Pioneers*. Canberra, ANU Press, 1967, p.62

<sup>15</sup> Shumack 1967, p.62

<sup>16</sup> NSW BDM. Marriage Certificate 1859 (Coppin / Sheedy)

<sup>17</sup> Shumack 1967

over seven or eight months on the goldfields they only just managed to survive and, like many others before them, soon found out that making a fortune on the goldfields was not all it was cracked up to be.

## *PART 2: The Ginninderra Era*

### **Early Days**

Again John Patrick Cunningham, the Sheedy family's neighbour in Ireland, appears on the scene. Known as *Paddy-Two-Sticks* or *Paddy* he advised the couple they would be better off looking for a position on a station. As he was actually returning to work at Ginninderra Station in the Queanbeyan District, he suggested the Coppins might like to accompany him there. John and Catherine accepted his offer and four days later they arrived – somewhere in the latter part of 1859.<sup>18, 19</sup> For Catherine it must have been an arduous journey as she was in the latter stages of pregnancy.

The Coppins pitched their tent about four hundred yards from the Shumack home on a thickly-timbered ridge that hid the Ginninderra homestead from view. A few days later their first child, John, was born in the tent. (The tent birth is one of the very few Coppin stories that has filtered through our family). Shumack recalls "*they were my neighbours for years and were industrious members of the community.*"<sup>20</sup>

The day after their arrival John Coppin went to the homestead at Ginninderra and asked William Davis Jnr., the owner, for a job. After initially saying he had no vacancies, he relented and employed Coppin based on *Paddy* Cunningham's recommendation and the fact that Coppin had played cricket back home in Kent. He was engaged at 12/- a week plus rations. Unfortunately, he was unable to provide any accommodation but allowed him to draw his rations straight away. For the first few months they lived with their new son in the tent while John worked as a labourer for Davis.

### **Life at the Goat Station**

In early 1860 John accepted the position of shepherd at the Goat Station – an outstation of Ginninderra on the Lower Molonglo River. Here he looked after one flock of sheep while John *Paddy* Cunningham looked after the other. The Coppins shared the three-roomed hut with Cunningham. As hut-keeper Catherine supplemented her husband's 12/- per week wage by catering for travellers passing through on their way to the Kiandra goldfields. For this she received a small allowance and food rations. When necessary she made up a bed on the hut floor for weary travellers.

Cunningham had indeed been a great friend to the young Coppins. Unfortunately, this relationship was not to last. After discovering that a sizeable sum of money had been stolen from the lining of his coat, he accused Catherine of the theft. She strongly denied being the culprit but Cunningham, unconvinced, immediately left and went to Edge's Station, another part of the Ginninderra property. Some time later the real culprit was

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<sup>18</sup> Shumack, Samuel. *An autobiography; or, Tales and Legends of Canberra Pioneers*. Canberra, ANU Press, 1967

<sup>19</sup> NSW BDM. Birth Index 1859 (John Coppin )

<sup>20</sup> Shumack 1967, p.62



discovered when the body of a beggar who had been travelling through was found with £1000 sewn into the lining of his coat. But sadly, the damage to their friendship had been done.<sup>21</sup> A short time later *Paddy* took over the Lime Kiln (Edge's Station), staying there until 1865 when he returned to Sydney and reportedly married at the age of sixty-five.<sup>22</sup>

### ***Some Hard Times at Ginninderra***

Like many others living on the land the Coppins had their fair share of hard times. After taking over responsibility for the Goat Station, the autumn of 1865 initially provided good crops of pumpkin and potatoes. This was, however, followed by a very severe drought.<sup>23</sup> Water was so scarce that from mid-winter until February 1866 most people had to cart water for miles. There were no supplies of milk and butter – life was very tough indeed. Shumack Snr. had planted two acres of wheat for Coppin but this was all destroyed by rust. Neighbours on a nearby farm purchased the crop for the cost of the seed - five bushels at 7/- per bushel. With this Coppin paid Shumack for the seed but was unable to pay him anything for his labour.

By 1870 the Coppins had five children – their first-born, also named John, b. 1859, Margaret Ann b.1861, my great-grandmother, Ellen b.1863, George 1866 and Thomas William born in 1868. (Another daughter, Laura followed in 1871 and their last child, Albert Henry, was born in 1873). In that year John and Catherine were in the process of building a new house at the Goat Station for their growing family when nature again dealt them a blow. At the end of April the Coppin's new house was flooded to a depth of three feet. A few weeks later a second flood again damaged the house. The following year possums totally destroyed his wheat crop. Life must have been very tough for the family.<sup>24</sup>

At last, a little bit of luck came their way following the death of Ralph Edge. Ralph Edge had been the hut-keeper on the northern edge of the Lime Kiln Waterhole on Ginninderra Station – also known as Edge's Station. Shumack reports that when he died in 1872, aged eighty years of age, "*what little property he had went to John and Catherine Coppin who had looked after him in his later days*".<sup>25</sup> What the "*property*" consisted of is unknown but I would expect that it would have helped make the Coppins' life a little more comfortable.

### ***Schooling***

By this stage a number of the children were of school age although I haven't been able to trace any records of their school attendance. An application in 1875 for a new school at Weetangera<sup>26</sup> listed some of the Coppin children as prospective pupils. Those listed were Margaret, 13, Ellen, 11, George, 9. The list was signed by John Coppin, stating that they lived two and a half miles from the school and that their religion was Church of

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<sup>21</sup> Shumack, Samuel. *An autobiography; or, Tales and Legends of Canberra Pioneers*. Canberra, ANU Press, 1967

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Shumack 1967, p. 73

<sup>26</sup> Clough, Margaret. *Spilt Milk: a history of Weetangera School 1875-2004*. Canberra, 2004.

England (even though Catherine was a Roman Catholic). Presumably, John, the eldest was working by then and Laura and Albert still too young. I don't know why Thomas wasn't listed as he would have been about seven.

The school was opened in April of that year. The book states that irregular attendance was common amongst the children of small farmers as they were often kept home to help with harvesting and other farm chores. In 1877 another application was made to upgrade the school's status to "Public School". It included the names of Ellen, 14, George, 11, Thomas W., 8, and Laura, 6. Another list of potential pupils prepared for the Weetangera School in 1883 did not include the Coppins – probably as they had moved a little further away onto their own selection.

### ***Coppin's Crossing***

John and Catherine and their seven children continued to live in their small hut at the Goat Station. The area later became known as *Coppin's Crossing*. Samuel Shumack who lived nearby claimed in his book "*As neighbours [the Coppins] were excellent. It would be impossible to find a more hospitable couple than John and Catherine Coppin.*"<sup>27</sup>

It seems that, following good rains earlier in 1876, the harvest was successful. Samuel Shumack recalls that when they had finished their own harvesting they helped John Coppin with his - as was the custom amongst the small farmers. He noted that "*Mrs. Coppin was a better reaper than her husband, and Mrs. John Brunning could beat her husband easily; they averaged seven acres a week.*"<sup>28</sup>

An unexpected, but brief, source of income for the family presented itself in July 1876. The owner of Ginninderra, William Davis Jnr., had joined forces with George Harcourt in organizing a shooting party for a group of 'swells' and invited John Coppin to join them. The group returned having shot 2600 wallabies. Coppin himself shot three hundred and also skinned for some of the others. Apparently satisfied with the result he happily participated again the following year.<sup>29</sup> *Imagine the outrage if that were to happen today!*

### ***A Serious Accident***

After working for some years as a shepherd at the Goat Station, John Coppin moved to the head station where he was employed as a general labourer. One day he received orders to take out the ration cart as the usual driver was sick. Before starting on his rounds he enquired of the overseer whether the horse was quiet. '*Yes*', said the overseer, '*a broadside from a "74" would not startle him.*'<sup>30</sup>

His route took him via Emu Bank and Crow Bone to the Ginninderra Falls where he had lunch with the hut-keeper. While there the horse took fright. As Coppin rushed out to

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<sup>27</sup> Samuel Shumack. *An autobiography; or, Tales and Legends of Canberra Pioneers*. Canberra, ANU Press, 1967, p.73

<sup>28</sup> Shumack, 1967, p.106

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Shumack, 1967, p.63



***Coppins Crossing 1924 (pencil drawing by Eirene Mort, 1879-1977)***

*Source: National Library of Australia*



***Coppins Crossing 2012***

control the situation the dray struck a stump, capsized and he was knocked unconscious. Thinking he was dead the startled hut-keeper dragged the unconscious Coppin into the hut and set out for Ginninderra. He covered the nine miles in record time. A cart was sent out to bring in the body while the owner's wife, Mrs. Davis, broke the news to Mrs. Coppin.

When the party arrived at the hut they were astonished to find the corpse had disappeared. It seems that after the hut-keeper's departure Coppin came to again. Although he couldn't remember the accident, the damaged horse and cart reminded him that he had been delivering the rations. So he started out for Ginninderra and along the way met Edwin Palmer, who kindly gave him his horse to ride to the station. He spent a month recovering but during that time he didn't receive any wages – just food rations.

## *PART 3: The Yarralumla Years*

### **Free Selection**

Prior to the introduction of the *Robertson Land Act of 1861* powerful squatters had acquired large tracts of prime land. This new Act was intended to break up the squatters' domination and enable those with meager financial means to purchase small holdings of their own. The Act allowed them to select from 40 to 320 acres of unsurveyed land, pay it off over time and fulfill a number of conditions - mainly related to residency and improvements. Naturally, the squatters' were not always happy about this and resorted to a variety of tactics to circumvent purchase by the free selectors. Shumack records<sup>31</sup> that his father, as well as William Ginn and John Coppin, were amongst many who were '*cheated*' out of blocks of land as early as the mid-60's. The local agent in Queanbeyan was regarded as a '*squatters toof*'. They also tried to '*buy*' the local surveyor but fortunately he stuck to his principles. However, the squatters often still made it very difficult for the free selectors to acquire blocks.

About 1866 John Coppin went to the local Land Office in Queanbeyan to select a block of land. He was assured by the land agent that the land applied for was not there<sup>32</sup>. He then went to the surveyor, J.B. Thompson, who examined the map and assured Coppin there was much more than the area applied for still available. However, he also advised Coppin that his chances of obtaining this land were not good. This proved to be the case when on the following Thursday Coppin went to the local Land Office and found that the land he had applied for had been taken up by one of the Campbell nephews. Coppin was not impressed! This sort of situation was quite common and many meetings were held, unsuccessfully, to try and stamp out the practice. The "*squattocracy*" remained powerful for some time after the Act was introduced and it took some time before the theory of free selection became practice.

### **Success at Last**

In 1878 John Coppin finally succeeded in becoming an independent landowner. He selected, on conditional purchase, two hundred acres (*Portion 107, CP78.170, Parish of Yarroolumla, County of Murray, Land District of Queanbeyan*).<sup>33</sup> His selection was located on the southern side of the Lower Molonglo River. It was not far from the Goat Station (*Coppins Crossing*) where the family had previously lived and where Coppin had worked as a shepherd on Ginninderra Station. The map on the following page shows the boundaries of the Coppin selection as well as the location of Coppins Crossing where the family had previously lived on the Molonglo River.

At the standard rate of £1 per acre his selection cost £200 and was secured on the 29<sup>th</sup> August 1878 by paying a 25 percent deposit of £50. Conditions included paying off the balance annually with an interest rate of 5%. Selectors also had to prove that they were genuinely residing on the land; had to occupy it for three years before disposing of it, and had to carry out improvements to the value of £1 per acre. A Certificate of Title was then given if all the conditions regarding improvements had been fulfilled. Many of the

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<sup>31</sup> Shumack, 1967

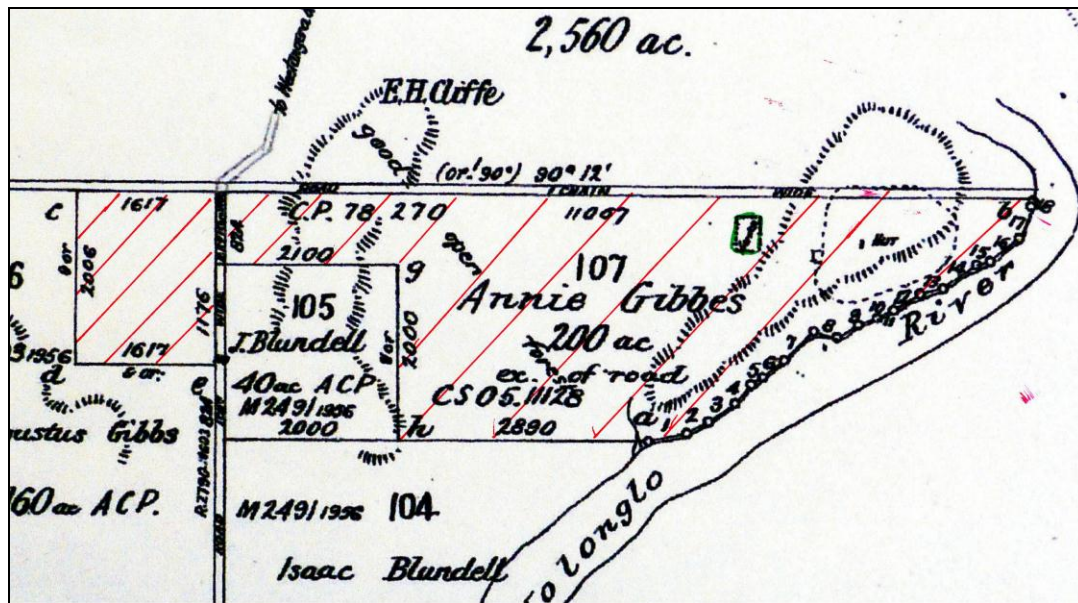
<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> SRNSW. Lands Dept. Conditional Purchase Registers, 1862-1911, NRS 8109, CP78.270





sometimes caused friction with the small landholders. Campbell's letters to Coppin indicate that he was planning to incorporate the Coppin selection in to his estate as part of his master plan.<sup>38</sup>



Extract from 1880 Survey Plan of Portion 107 (shaded area) showing location of hut, garden and fencing improvements. **Note:** Plan was subsequently reprinted to reflect Annie Gibbes as new holder of the mortgage over this parcel of Campbell's land. The full map can be viewed in Appendix B.

The first letter from Campbell was written on 29<sup>th</sup> December 1885 - "Memo of agreement for interchange of use of land between F. Campbell and John Coppin".<sup>39</sup> It outlines a deal for fencing off Coppin's holding. The agreement states that in consideration of any cost to Coppin, Campbell will resume the small portion (30 acres) on the other side of the road leading to Uriarra (today known as Coppins Crossing Road). In exchange he promised to fence off into Coppin's remaining land a portion (15 acres more or less) of Mowatt's land, near Charles Campbell's land, for a period of one year from the 1<sup>st</sup> of April 1886. The deal meant Campbell would be able to consolidate one of the parcels of land he had purchased from Augustus Gibbs.

A second letter was written on the 9<sup>th</sup> August 1886 indicating that Campbell was renegeing on the lease agreement:

"Dear Sir, Now that the season has thoroughly broken, and there is every prospect of a good spring, I wish to resume on the 1<sup>st</sup> Sept. the paddock of mine upon rent. As that will be 5 mos. from the end of the lease, the rent will amount to £1-0-4. "

On 3<sup>rd</sup> February 1891 Coppin's holding officially became part of the Yarralumla estate when George Harcourt transferred Portion 107 to Frederick Campbell for a sum of

<sup>38</sup> The financial relationship between Harcourt and Campbell is unclear as it was not until 1891 that Harcourt formally transferred Portion 107 to Campbell. The letters to Coppin indicate that it was Campbell, not Harcourt, who was then renting the land to Coppin.

<sup>39</sup> SLNSW. Frederick Campbell Letter Books 1874-1923. Vol.1 pps.146, 150

£375.<sup>40</sup> The area became known as Coppins Corner Paddock and is referred to as such in Campbell's list of improvements when it was valued in 1912 for resumption by the Commonwealth Government.<sup>41</sup> By this stage the house was no longer standing. The valuation for Coppin's Corner Paddock recorded "*Plantation. Old trees where house and garden stood.*" The paddock's name is probably derived from its location on a prominent bend of the Molonglo River, adjoining what was previously Cliffe's Craven Estate. The valuation file also contains a letter from Campbell to the Dept. Home Affairs with a list of forty four farmers including John Coppin. He was recorded as farming sixty acres.

John and Catherine, and at least some of the children, remained at Yarralumla until the move to Burbong / Cohen in 1891. Other children had already married or left home. When my great-grandmother, Ellen Kelleher (nee Coppin) married Timothy Kelleher in 1886, John Coppin was still living at Yarralumla.<sup>42</sup> Evidence that Coppin continued farming is found in his application for land in the Parish of Amungula in September 1890. In the application he declared his occupation as "*farmer*" at "*Yarralumla*".<sup>43</sup> At the time the 1891 Census was completed<sup>44</sup> the Coppin household at Yarralumla consisted of 3 males and 2 females. This indicates that, apart from Catherine and John, one daughter and two sons were still living at home - most likely the youngest children Laura, Thomas William and Albert Henry.

### ***The Site in 2013***

Languishing in their original peaceful setting the ruins of what appears to be two fireplaces and some old trees and shrubs (probably planted by the Coppins) are visible reminders of their life and their attempt to become self-supporting members of the community. It is not hard to imagine the many hours Catherine would have spent standing around these fireplaces cooking for the family of nine; nor is it hard to picture the homestead garden contained by the few remaining trees and shrubs forming part of the garden perimeter. The extensive views from the site would also not have changed too much since the time they moved there in 1878. (*This will certainly change though in the very near future as the Molonglo Development proceeds!*)

The large spreading female Osage orange tree stands close to the fireplace remnants – probably grown as a windbreak to protect the homestead. Split down the centre by some force of nature many decades ago, its main trunk now grows sideways in two directions. Even so, it still bears a very good crop of wrinkly-skinned fruit – albeit inedible – and provides shade for the cattle during the hot Canberra days. The nearby Roman cypress, box thorns, hawthorns and briars were most likely planted as a hedge to protect the homestead garden from straying stock. Fences were unknown until Frederick Campbell began consolidating his Yarralumla estate. The homestead's location on higher ground must have been comforting given their previous experiences with flooding at Coppins crossing on Ginninderra.

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<sup>40</sup> SRNSW. Lands Dept. Registers of letters received., 1877-1923, NRS 8098. *Transfer to Fred Campbell*. 91/2679

<sup>41</sup> NAA. Lands and Survey Branch. Correspondence Files. FCT Holdings (Moriarty and Smith Valuations). Series A358 Item 10

<sup>42</sup> NSW BDM. Marriage Certificate 1886 (Kelleher / Coppin)

<sup>43</sup> SRNSW. Lands Dept. Correspondence Files, 1877-1951, NRS 8103. 02/11036. *Application for a Conditional Purchase*.

<sup>44</sup> SRNSW. Census of NSW 1891

Now a rare sight in the ACT, Osage orange trees are a native of USA where the wood was prized by the Osage Indians for making bows. Still used today by modern bowyers, the species is said to have been introduced to Australia by Californian gold seekers in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> Century. The tree was known as a “*living fence*” because of “*its thorns, zigzagging branches, ease of propagation, rapid growth, tolerance to heat, drought, and wind*” - its value deemed to be worth a “*pony and a blanket*” by the Indians.<sup>45</sup>

The Osage orange was commonly used in windbreaks or hedges - just as Coppin seems to have done on his holding. The tree is now a lone survivor of its type on the site. It was once believed that placing an Osage orange under the bed would repel spiders and insects. More recently, scientific studies have shown that extracts from the fruit *do* repel several insect species (mosquitoes, cockroaches, crickets and ticks) although it very unlikely that the Coppins were aware of any of these reported benefits.<sup>46</sup>



*Coppin's original selection at Yarralumla (mid-centre left) viewed from Mt. Stromlo in 2012. Lake Burley Griffin, Black Mt. Tower and the city of Canberra can be seen in the background.*



*View from Dairy Farmers Hill over Coppin's selection – the homestead site is in the foreground in the first clump of bushes above the pines.*

<sup>45</sup> Pair, John C. *Magnificent Maclura – past and present*, p.1 [arnoldia.arboretum.harvard.edu/pdf/articles/865.pdf](http://arnoldia.arboretum.harvard.edu/pdf/articles/865.pdf)

<sup>46</sup> Wikipedia. *The Free encyclopedia. Maclura Pomifera.*





*The Coppin homestead and garden site in 2013. Cattle still shelter from the heat of the sun under the old trees – but not for much longer.*



**Above:** *Looking north-east over the homestead site towards the National Arboretum 2013*

**Below:** *A rare Osage orange tree still produces plenty of fruit.*







**Above:** The remains of possibly two fireplaces indicate where the homestead was situated. Built around 1878 it had disappeared by 1912 when the land was valued for resumption by the Commonwealth Government



**Below:** View NW from the fireplace. Coppins Crossing Road can be seen beyond the Roman cypress tree. The other bushes indicate where the perimeter of the homestead site might have been in the days before fences.



### *PART 3: The Final Years At Burbong / Cohen*

At the age of 50 John Coppin made application for three parcels of land at Burbong totalling 1280 acres. Since arriving in the district over thirty years previously, Catherine and John had struggled through drought, flood and crop failure. Catherine was already in her late 50's. *Why did they decide to start all over again?* I don't know the answer. It is possible that it had something to do with the conditions as a lessee at Yarralumla under Frederick Campbell. Or, maybe after experiencing many crop failures in the past he wanted to change his farming activity to grazing sheep; possibly he saw it as an opportunity to provide a future for his children. It could have been as simple as just wanting to be independent again. But relocate they did.

The application, made on 25<sup>th</sup> September 1890, was for two parcels of land totalling 320 acres (Portions 130 and 46, CP90.153) in the Parish of Amungula. As this was the maximum that could be selected, he simultaneously applied for a conditional lease of a further 960 acres (Portion 131, CL90.118). These three adjoining parcels were located in the Kowen / Burbong area with river frontage to the Upper Molonglo.<sup>47</sup> The survey, undertaken in January 1891, described Portion 130 as "*open forest, thinly timbered with gum, apple and box and is well-grassed and watered.*" Coppin's application was confirmed on 7<sup>th</sup> April 1891 after the deposit of £32 on the total price of £320 was paid.<sup>48</sup>

Some improvements, in the form of 6-wire fencing, had been carried out four years previously by the Campbells of Duntroon. On the smaller portion (No. 46) some fencing and minor ringbarking had already been carried out by Archie McDonald whose earlier application had been declared void. This meant that Coppin was able to include this parcel in his application. The Coppins wasted no time in building their new home at '*Cohen*' in the Burbong area - a locality listed in the 1891 Census with four households and thirty people in the sub-district of Majura.<sup>49</sup>

Only 5 ½ months had elapsed when Inspector Spicer visited the property on 21<sup>st</sup> September 1891 and reported that the land had been improved by a four-roomed house, a kitchen, stable, dairy, garden, and extensive fencing<sup>50</sup>. They had indeed been busy! He also reported that the selector was "*residing with his wife and daughter in a comfortable and homely way.*"<sup>51</sup> The daughter would have been Laura – the youngest and only unmarried daughter at that time. (She later married John McInnes, another Burbong resident).

The Local Land Board was obviously very conscientious in carrying out inspections. One of their main concerns was to prevent already wealthy landowners extending their estates by using "*dummies*". The latter were selectors, ostensibly purchasing land of their own, who were, in reality, acting on behalf of the squatters. After the required residency period had elapsed the selector then sold the land back to the squatter thereby extending his empire. The inspector's role was to ensure selectors were living

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<sup>47</sup> SRNSW. Lands Dept. Correspondence Files, 1877-1951, NRS 8103. 02/11036

<sup>48</sup> SRNSW. Lands Dept. Conditional Sales Register. NRS 8109, Queanbeyan, CP90.153

<sup>49</sup> McAlister, Colin. Twelve Historic Sites in the Glenburn and Burbong areas of the Kowen State Forest, Australian Capital Territory. 2007

<sup>50</sup> SRNSW. Lands Dept. Correspondence Files, 1877-1951, NRS 8103. 02/11036

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

bona fide on the land and to identify what improvements had been made as part of their purchase conditions.

Numerous inspections and delays occurred before final approval was given certifying that the conditions of residency and improvements had been met. On 31<sup>st</sup> October 1895 the Local Land Board declared Coppin's holding "May be gazetted" on the recommendation of Inspector Martin. He had reported that the land was genuinely being used by the selector for grazing purposes and his wife and family were present and living on the land with him. In his report he also noted that the residence contained furniture, provisions, cooking utensils, etc. while poultry and domestic animals were wandering about. It is most likely that the "family" consisted of daughter Laura, previously mentioned, and sons Thomas William and Albert Henry who were then still unmarried. Albert was almost surely living at Burbong as evidenced by an article in the local newspaper describing the Bachelors' Ball held at nearby Glenburn on 25<sup>th</sup> January 1895. It stated that "Mr. A. Coppin acted in the capacity of M.C. to the entire satisfaction of those present".<sup>52</sup> He was still living at Burbong in 1901 when he signed his mother's death certificate<sup>53</sup> and both he and Thomas were listed as labourers, living at Burbong for the 1903 elections.<sup>54</sup>

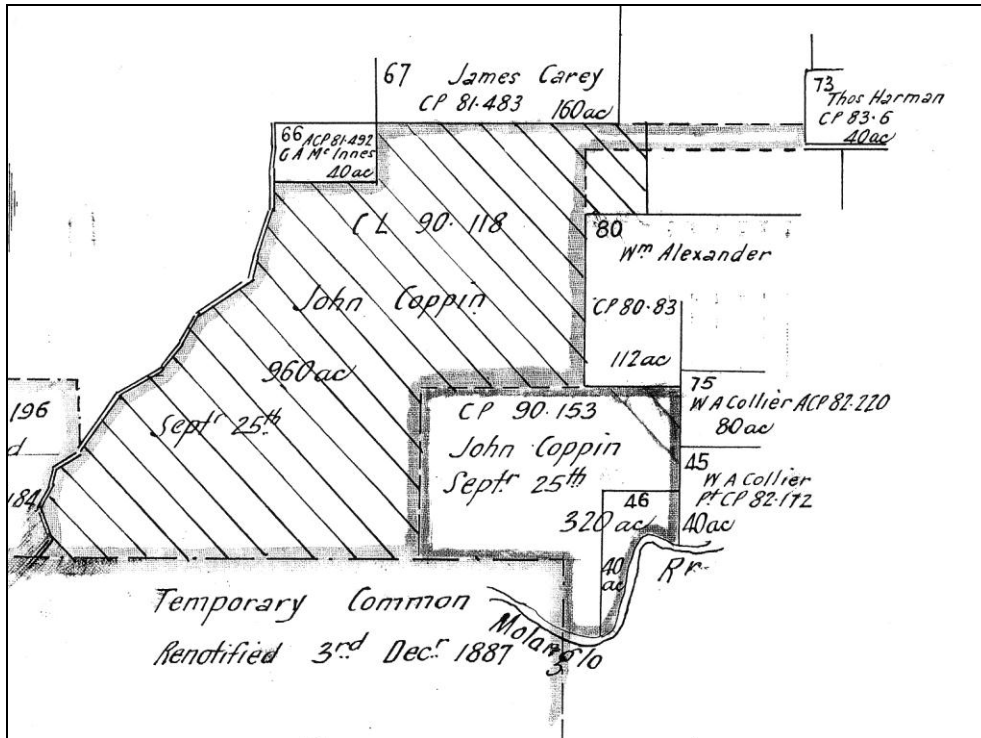


Diagram accompanying the 1891 Application shows the 3 adjoining parcels.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>52</sup> McAlister, Colin. Twelve Historic Sites in the Glenburn and Burbong areas of the Kowen State Forest, Australian Capital Territory. 2007, p.

<sup>53</sup> NSW BDM. Death Certificate 1901 (Catherine Coppin)

<sup>54</sup> NSW Electoral Roll 1903 (microfiche). Bungendore (Werriwa).

<sup>55</sup> SRNSW. Lands Dept. Correspondence Files, 1877-1951, NRS 8103. 02/11036

Finally, on 17<sup>th</sup> February 1896, a *Certificate of Conformity* was issued to John Coppin acknowledging that, with the exception of paying off the balance of the purchase, all the required conditions had been met.<sup>56</sup> It was noted on the document that the delay in completing the transaction was due to difficulty in getting Coppin to come into town to sign the document. Struggling selectors often took a lot longer than the three years to pay off the balance of their purchase. Coppin was no exception. On the 31<sup>st</sup> January 1898 he transferred by way of mortgage, “*all his estate and interest in the conditionally purchased land and conditional lease to the Commercial Banking Co. of Sydney*”.<sup>57</sup> This meant that while the Bank was now the official owner of the property, Coppin retained the right to live and work on his holding and on payment of the outstanding balance, he would again become the owner. The mortgage may well have had something to do with the deteriorating health of both Coppins from around 1897. No doubt the drought gripping the country would also have caused financial hardship.

From around 1896-7 a degenerative muscular disease, *Locomotor Ataxia*, had started to affect Coppin’s ability to carry on. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century he had been forced to curtail his farming activities altogether.<sup>58</sup> It is possible that his sons, Thomas and Albert, helped out until the property was sold in 1902 to Jeremiah Keeffe. According to Cross and Sheedy in 1899 a “John Coppin” was living as a tenant in Elizabeth Mayo’s house on Pound Hill, Queanbeyan.<sup>59</sup> It is unclear whether Catherine was also living there, or, whether she remained at Cohen as her death certificate cites *Cohen* as the place of death. In a later newspaper report on the death of their son, John Jnr., reference is also made to John Coppin Snr. having formerly resided at “Pound Hill”.<sup>60</sup>

### ***Death of Catherine***

Catherine and John had been at Cohen for approximately ten years when she passed away on 27<sup>th</sup> May 1901 as a result of an hepatic abscess.<sup>61</sup> The local newspaper reported.<sup>62</sup>

*“Catherine Coppin passed away peacefully to her last rest ...at the advanced age of 73. She was well-known in the district where she had resided for upwards of 42 years. For the past four years she has been in failing health so that her demise did not come unexpectedly. She leaves a widower, four sons Messrs John, George, Thomas and Albert Coppin, and three daughters Mesdames Cavanagh, of Queanbeyan, Kelleher, of Naas, and an unmarried one (all except Mr George Coppin local residents) to mourn their loss. Deceased was attended during her last illness by Dr Blackall, the immediate cause of death being an internal complaint.*

A later edition of the newspaper reports.<sup>63</sup> *“She was interred in the Roman Catholic Cemetery Queanbeyan on Wed. 29/5/1901 at 3 o’clock following the last solemn rites of*

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<sup>56</sup> SRNSW. Lands Dept. Correspondence Files, 1877-1951, NRS 8103. 02/11036

<sup>57</sup> Ibid. Mortgage Document. 98/16297

<sup>58</sup> NSW BDM. Death Certificate 1901 (John Coppin)

<sup>59</sup> Cross, Rex and Sheedy, Bert. *Queanbeyan Pioneers – first study. Queanbeyan*, Queanbeyan Books and Prints, 1983

<sup>60</sup> *Queanbeyan Age* 31/1/1905

<sup>61</sup> NSW BDM. Death Certificate 1901 (Catherine Coppin)

<sup>62</sup> *Queanbeyan Age*, Wed. 29/5/1901

*the Church at the grave.* It also reports the remains of Mrs. Coppin of Burbong were followed by a large number of relatives and friends.

There are few references to John and Catherine's life in the Burbong locality but there seems to have been a strong sense of co-operation and community in this small rural area. Regular social gatherings were held in the homesteads of local residents and it was common practice to help each other out with work on the land. Another report<sup>64</sup> refers to Mr. John Coppin (probably Jnr.) acting as MC - just as his brother, Albert, had done previously - at a farewell party to Mr. Gilbert McInnes held in the "*spacious dining room of Mrs. John McInnes.*" Presumably this house belonged to Laura's future parents-in-law who were long-time residents of the area.

### ***Sale of the Coppin Property***

The late 1890's had been a period of rural hardship - chronic drought and depressed prices. With Catherine's death and John now being cared for by his daughter, Ellen Kelleher, at Naas, the time had come to sell the Cohen property. Consequently, about six weeks after Catherine's death, to establish the value of his land John Coppin applied to the Local Land Board for appraisal of his property.<sup>65</sup> The application was supported by Jeremiah Keeffe, of Guises Flat near Williamsdale, who had taken over the mortgage on 1<sup>st</sup> July 1901.

#### *Property Description*

John Still O'Hara from Bungendore inspected the property on 30<sup>th</sup> July, 1901 providing a report which probably gives the best overall description of the Coppin property.<sup>66</sup> He reported it was four and a half miles from Queanbeyan Railway Station and the road was steep and hilly but in fairly good condition. The Coppin selection contained hills, slopes and gullies and was of granite and slate formation. It was timbered with gum, stringy bark and box trees - none of which were of commercial value; and none of it was fit for profitable agriculture. Four acres of the land was being cultivated by the family for domestic purposes.

With frontage to the Molonglo River it had permanent and sufficient water supply. The country was suitable for grazing and had the capacity of 1 sheep per 1 ½ acres. It had been improved by ringbarking and scrubbing to the value of £86/8/-. The unimproved capital value of the conditional purchase land was estimated at 15/- per acre whereas the conditional lease portion was only suitable for grazing 1 sheep per 3 acres. The unimproved capital value of the latter was estimated at only 10/- per acre.

Although Coppin had paid £1 per acre for the 320 acres of conditional purchase land, it was now only worth 15/- per acre. The report advised against referring the appraisal to the Land Appeal Court. No doubt the depressed values were a consequence of the drought and were similar throughout the district.

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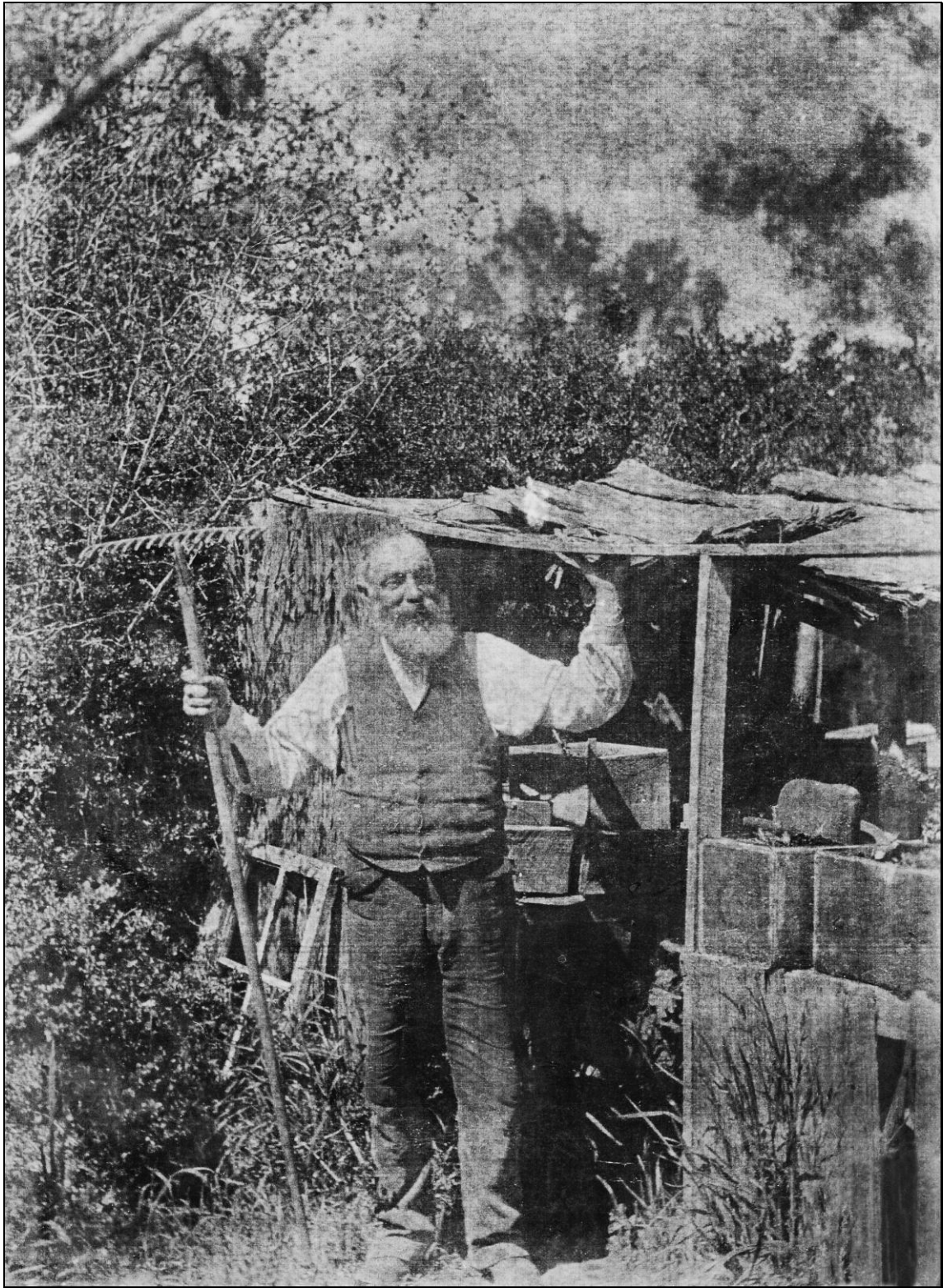
<sup>63</sup> *Queanbeyan Age*, Sat.1/6/1901

<sup>64</sup> *Queanbeyan Age*, 11/2/1903

<sup>65</sup> SRNSW. Lands Dept. Correspondence Files, 1877-1951, NRS 8103. 02/11036

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*



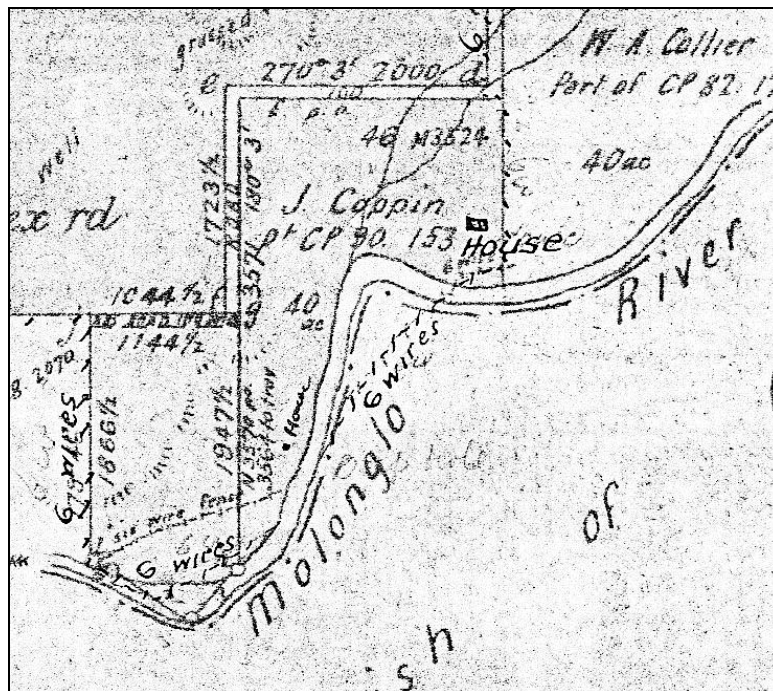


*John Coppin standing outside his shed – date unknown, but possibly at Cohen during the 1890's.*

A court hearing was held on 21<sup>st</sup> February 1902 to approve the appraisal. John Coppin was too frail to attend and was represented by his son, Thomas William. In a letter presented to the court John authorised Thomas to act on his behalf, John's scrawly signature clearly indicating his failing health. The letter was accompanied by a certificate from Dr. Blackall stating that John Coppin was suffering from *Locomotor Ataxy* and unable to follow his occupation or attend the Court hearing. The chairman of the Board stated that the total holding of 1280 acres was only sufficient to sustain the family. Consequently, on behalf of his father Thomas accepted the appraisal and the sale to Jeremiah Keefe went ahead.

### **A Second House on the Property?**

One of the requirements of the appraisal report (31<sup>st</sup> July 1901) was that the position of the applicant's homestead be noted on a copy of the 1890 Survey Plan. <sup>67</sup> Interestingly, this copy shows not one, but two, houses on Portion 46 although there had been no previous reference to a second structure. The main house is recorded above the River near the border of W.A. Collier's Portion. The second house is recorded on the lower part of Portion 46 several hundred metres south-west of the known homestead site. As it is recorded in smaller writing than the other house, I assume it was not much more than a hut. While the ruins of the main dwelling have recently been reclaimed from the stranglehold of blackberries (see *Epilogue*) no evidence has yet been found of the second house. As both the younger Coppin sons, Thomas William and Albert Henry, were recorded as living at Burbong it is remotely possible they had built their own accommodation. Maybe some future exploration of the site will provide some details?



Extract from copy of 1890 Survey Plan of Portion 130, 46 showing two houses.  
Source: NSW State Records (Correspondence File 02/11036)

<sup>67</sup> SRNSW. Lands Dept. Correspondence Files, 1877-1951, NRS 8103. 02/11036



### ***Transfer to Jeremiah Keefe***

The transfer to Keefe took place in 1902 following a hearing to determine the value of the Coppin property. The actual documents pertaining to this sale have so far eluded me but the relevant Conditional Purchase Register records the transfer as well as correspondence to and from Coppin and Keefe dated 19/12/1902.<sup>68</sup> A card record at the Goulburn Land Office notes that the lease was transferred to Keefe on 20<sup>th</sup> September 1902. Presumably the Conditional Purchase sale of Portions 46 and 130 was finalised somewhere between those dates.

As Keefe had property elsewhere in the District, it appears he never actually lived at Cohen after his purchase of the holding from Coppin occurred. By 1912 was well aware that his property would soon be compulsorily acquired by the Federal Government as part of establishing the Australian Capital Territory. In a letter dated 26<sup>th</sup> November 1912 to the Shire Office he claims “...I am desirous of giving into their [government] pursuits and it is useless for me to endeavour to sell to a private buyer”. The transaction with the government took place on 24<sup>th</sup> May 1913 following a valuation of the property by Moriarty a few months earlier.<sup>69</sup>

Moriarty’s valuation referred to a dam in good condition and sheepyards as well as a hut and orchard of mixed ornamental and fruit trees. The hut was described as having “slab sides, bark roof, unfloored, two glazed window sashes and two ledge doors – about 100 good slabs. Condition bad, value ten pounds”. The homestead had apparently deteriorated considerably since Coppin’s departure. However, this description is at odds with Bulbeck and Boots<sup>70</sup> 1990 assessment of the site and what still exists today. (See *Epilogue*). There is no mention of the fireplaces, well or other structures. The valuation did not mention a second house as marked on the survey plan attached to the Inspector’s report. The settlement was effected on 30<sup>th</sup> July 1913 with Keefe being paid £604.14.8 after the amount still due to the Crown was deducted from the property’s final valuation of £718.<sup>71</sup>

Following the property’s resumption the previously typical Australian gum forest was eventually replaced by pine trees to control wattles growing on the abandoned grazing land. The ruins of Coppin’s homestead complex and his holding now lie deep within the Kowen Forest under the control of ACT Parks.

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<sup>68</sup> SRNSW. Lands Dept. Conditional Purchase Registers, NRS 8109. Queanbeyan. CP90.153

<sup>69</sup> NAA. Federal Territory of Lands. Acquisition of Jeremiah Keefe’s land 1280 acres. Series A358. Item 63 in the Parish of Amungula.

<sup>70</sup> ACT Heritage Library . Bulbeck, David and Boot, Philip. *Kowen District Cultural Resource Survey and Conservation Plan: final report, 4 June 1990*. Section 5.7.3 p.38.

<sup>71</sup> NAA. Federal Territory of Lands. Acquisition of Jeremiah Keefe’s land 1280 acres. Series A358. Item 63 in the Parish of Amungula.

### ***Death of John Coppin Snr.***

Two and a half years after Catherine's death, and not long after the sale of his property to Jeremiah Keeffe, John Coppin passed away at the home of his daughter, Ellen Kelleher. His death certificate of 22 November 1903 records he was sixty three years of age, occupation "grazier" and that he had been ill for seven years.

*The Queanbeyan Observer (Tues. 24/11/1903) reports that "Mr. John Coppin Senior, a well-known and much respected identity of the Queanbeyan District has gone to rest at the age of 63. For some time Mr. Coppin had been invalided and was affectionately and filially cared for by his eldest [actually 2<sup>nd</sup> eldest] daughter, wife of Mr. Timothy Kelleher, of Naas Valley. The memory of the deceased will long be cherished as one of the gentlest and kindest of men."*<sup>72</sup>

Another article reports: "The deceased had been amongst the oldest of the residents of this district, and followed farming pursuits generally, in different localities. He was of advanced age, and for some time past had been too infirm to follow his vocation. He leaves a numerous family of children and grandchildren. During his long career the late Mr. Coppin was noted for his gentle and peaceable disposition, and these, with other admirable traits of character made him respected wherever he was known."

### ***Summary***

The story of John and Catherine Coppin is typical of many mid-nineteenth Century immigrants arriving in a new and strange country in the hope of a better life. Like so many others their dreams were only partly realised. This hard-working couple struggled to make a living as they raised a family of seven children. But at the very least they achieved independence and enjoyed a healthy lifestyle as well as the benefits of living in a rural community. They set the pattern for their children to follow.

More than a century has passed since John and Catherine died but memories of their pioneer life still linger in the Queanbeyan / ACT districts. Two sites in the district have now been discovered that contain remnants of the homesteads where they forged their life of independence. Preservation and conservation efforts for these sites are described in the *Epilogue*.

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<sup>72</sup> Queanbeyan Observer 24/11/1903

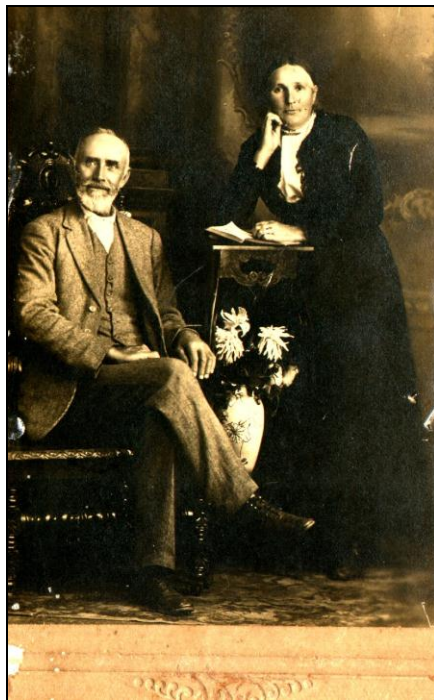
## *The Next Generation*

John and Catherine were survived by their seven children - most of whom had married by the time John Snr. had died. Luckily, the parents did not have to live through the trauma when their eldest child, John Jr., was shot dead by his partner's 12 yr-old son. The tragedy occurred when the lad tried to protect his mother following a violent quarrel with Coppin. The story made headlines throughout Australia and proved to be a very painful period for the remaining family.

Most of the children and their families initially stayed in the district where at least some of them continued the farming tradition. The youngest son, Albert Henry, was a businessman in Queanbeyan and later became an alderman on Queanbeyan Municipal Council. Eventually, like all families, many of them drifted away to other areas.

One of those who remained was my great grandmother, Ellen Kelleher (*nee Coppin*) and her husband, Timothy. He was an Irish immigrant hired by Frederick Campbell from the ship on his arrival in Sydney in 1878 and brought directly to Duntroon. When Campbell moved to Yarralumla following his purchase of the property from Augustus Gibbes in 1881, Kelleher transferred with him. The following year he took up a selection at Coolamine but after marrying Ellen Coppin in 1886, sold the property to Campbell and moved back to work again at Yarralumla then later at Cuppacumbalong and Naas Stations. In 1901 the Kellehers obtained their own selection at Rocky Crossing, near Naas. The Coppin family story will be continued through the line of my great-grandmother, Ellen Kelleher (*nee Coppin*).

*Timothy and Ellen Kelleher  
(nee Coppin)*



## **EPILOGUE**

### ***The Coppin Legacy***

#### **1. *Coppin's Crossing***

'Coppins Crossing', a sign on Coppins Crossing Road heading south in the direction of Mt Stromlo, announces the approach to the area where John and Catherine first settled following their arrival in the Queanbeyan district. Previously known as The Goat Station, the area was an outstation of the Ginninderra Estate on the Lower Molonglo River. It was there John worked as a shepherd and Catherine catered for travellers on their way to the goldfields. Only half a kilometre further south on Coppins Crossing Road, John later selected two hundred acres on conditional purchase to become a farmer in his own right. As I write (February 2013) the area around Coppin's Crossing is still rural although it is likely that the new suburbs will soon consume this area and destroy its peacefulness forever.

#### **2. *Coppin's Corner Paddock – Portion 107***

All that remains of the Coppin homestead are two piles of rocks - probably fireplaces - a mature female Osage orange tree, a Roman cypress and other ornamental shrubs described previously in the story. Interestingly, a very large male Osage orange tree is also still growing on the Burbong homestead site. It was possibly a seedling from the one at Yarralumla transplanted when the Coppins relocated from Yarralumla to Burbong (Cohen).

A cultural heritage study was undertaken on the homestead site by BIOSIS Research in 2010 as part of the Stage 2 Molongolo Development. Parts of the Conservation Management Plan have been released to us by the ACT Heritage Council.<sup>73</sup> The Plan notes that the site has some heritage value and should be retained in an area of open parkland.

#### **3. *Coppin Ruins at Cohen / Burbong***

Overgrown by blackberries, the ruins of the Coppins final homestead were hidden away in the Kowen Forest for the best part of a century and have only recently come to life again. The ruins are located off a small forestry track about 80m north of the Upper Molonglo River at Burbong. In May 2007 they were visited by Colin McAlister of the Friends of Glenburn group.<sup>74</sup> He reported on the status of the Coppin ruins at that time noting the standing remains of the chimney and fireplace as described on the next page by archaeologists Bulbeck and Boot.<sup>75</sup> It was reported that urgent stabilisation work was required as the chimney was in danger of collapse. He also noted the site was covered in copious amounts of blackberry bushes.

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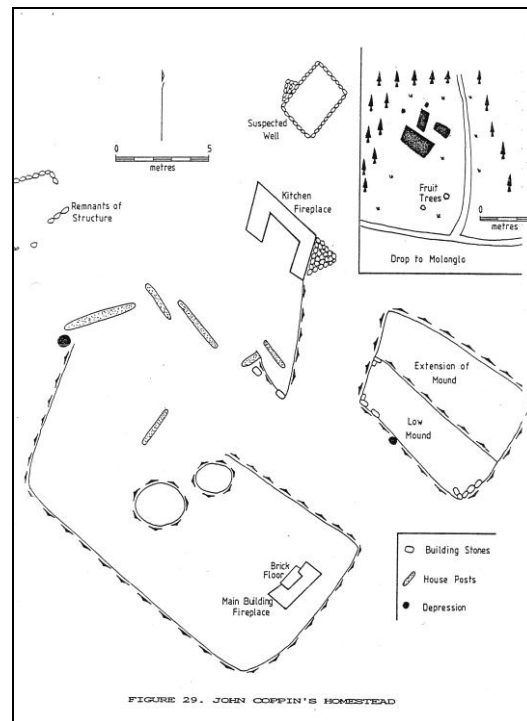
<sup>73</sup> Extracts from BIOS Research Molonglo Future Development Stage 2, Historic Site MHS1 and MHS2 – Conservation Management Plan, April 2011 (Parts released to us by the ACT Heritage Council)

<sup>74</sup> McAlister, Colin. Twelve Historic Sites in the Glenburn and Burbong areas of the Kowen State Forest, Australian Capital Territory. 2007

<sup>75</sup> ACT Heritage Library . Bulbeck, David and Boot, Philip. *Kowen District Cultural Resource Survey and Conservation Plan: final report, 4 June 1990*. Section 5.7.3 p.38.

## **Bulbeck and Boot**

Prior to McAlister's visit, a report was prepared in 1990 by archaeologists David Bulbeck and Philip Boot on the cultural resources of the Kowen District.<sup>76</sup> The report compared the Coppin ruins with the nearby and more imposing Colliers homestead. Their conclusion was that the Coppin ruins had "...equally high integrity as a homestead complex and a high heritage value as a set of structures built by a family of modest means."<sup>77</sup> The diagram below outlines the ruins and relics found on the site.



*Bulbeck & Boots' Diagram of Cohen Ruins 1990. Fig. 29*

The following is their description of the site:

5.7.3: *"The dominant features of the site are two standing fireplace ruins. The southern one, which would have belonged to the main building, stands up to three metres high and includes part of the chimney. It had a brick floor. The northern one, which we interpret as the kitchen fireplace, stands about 1.5 metre high, and includes at one corner one of the stones sloping in towards where the chimney had been. Two iron bands project from the back of the kitchen fireplace, and the triangular pile of stones at the east probably represents the former outdoor bread oven. Both fireplaces are of similar construction, made of slate and conglomerate schist blocks laid in double course rubble with smaller stones used for the inner course. Mud was used as the mortar.*

5.7.4: *The main building and the kitchen were oriented more or less perpendicularly as shown by the mounds extending from the fireplaces. These mounds measured 18*

<sup>76</sup> ACT Heritage Library . Bulbeck, David and Boot, Philip. *Kowen District Cultural Resource Survey and Conservation Plan: final report, 4 June 1990.* Section 5.7.3 p.38.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

*metres by nine metres for the main building and nine metres long for the kitchen (which was about four metres wide judging from the fireplace). Another smaller structure, possibly a dwelling, is indicated by a low mound measuring about nine metres by seven metres with some building stones, including two or three sets of corner stones, in place. At the north of the site are two smaller structures. The less complete is only patchily represented and of uncertain function but was possibly a privy. The more complete, which measures three metres by two metres, is associated with a slight depression and appears to have been a stone-lined well. 30 metres south of the site are two old fruit trees amongst the scrub. Three fragments of a stoneware transferware plate were seen on the track passing the site.”*

### **Current Conservation Efforts**

#### *ACT Parks and The Friends of Glenburn / Burbong*

ACT Parks, keen to conserve the heritage of the Glenburn / Burbong area, have teamed up with The Friends of Glenburn to rescue and conserve the remnants of this pioneering era. Under the enthusiastic and capable leadership of work party convenor, Colin McAlister, volunteers have been very busy working on the various sites. During 2012 several well-attended and successful work parties have cleared the blackberries from the Coppin homestead site and the only orchard tree remaining from that era. As mentioned previously, it is very likely that this tree, a mature male Osage orange tree, was transplanted when the Coppins moved to Cohen from their home at Yarralumla where a lone mature female Osage orange tree still grows. National Botanic Gardens staff recently identified the tree – previously thought to be a pear until disputed by one of the volunteers.

ACT Parks are funding an interpretative sign about the Coppin ruins to be erected on the site in the near future. I'm sure both Catherine and John would be overwhelmed to think that they have been recognised as a symbol of early pioneering life in the Queanbeyan district. This recognition is a great honour - given that they now rest in unmarked graves in separate sections of Queanbeyan Cemetery.

The ruins include the main chimney and surrounds of their 4-roomed house; a large stone fireplace belonging to the separate kitchen and a stone-surrounded sunken well. Permission is being sought to prop up and re-point the main chimney before it collapses. The remains of an old portable washtub, bits of broken china, timber slabs, mounds and stones lie scattered around the site. The Coppin's former orchard is located just below the homestead. Efforts are being made to preserve the tree

Volunteers from the Group have cleared away massive amounts of poisoned blackberry canes that covered the homestead and orchard sites. Despite the discomfort of blackberries getting their prickly revenge, the workers have cut, raked and tugged untiringly till the site was cleared and all revealed. Meanwhile, Col with his trusty lawnmower mowed everything in his path – rocks, blackberries, thistles, etc. – to make the work easier and to encourage any green remnants to revert to soil again. A similar effort cleared away the blackberries starting to strangle the Osage orange tree. Parks staff will dispose of the debris and poison new shoots as they re-appear.

*The following photos are a record of this wonderful effort at the Coppin Ruins.*



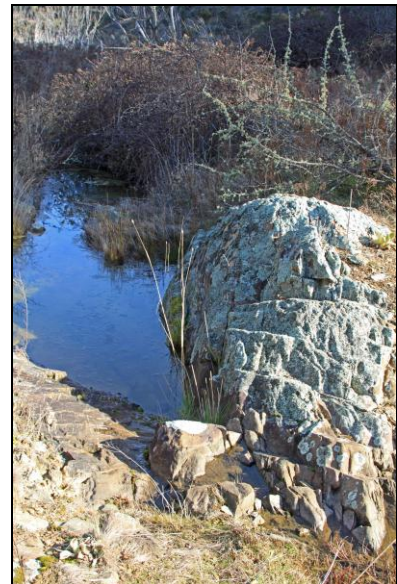


*Before: Coppins Ruins before the clearing - 2012*



*After: In November 2012 after the blackberry clearing— both fireplaces and other remnants are now exposed*

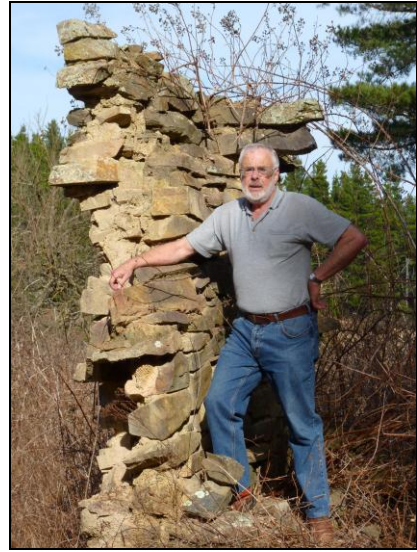
*On the Coppin holding, Cohen  
2012*







*The main chimney rises above the poisoned blackberries*



*Col McAlister - Friends of Glenburn work party convenor*



*Discovering the old kitchen fireplace*

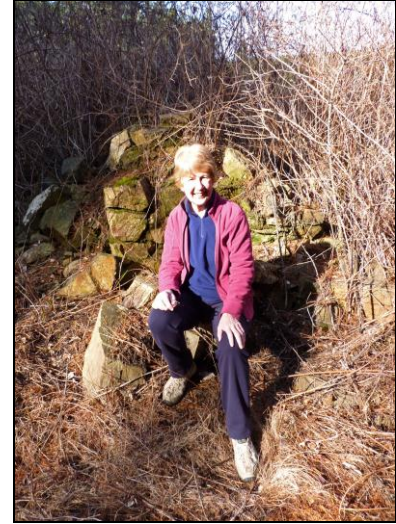


*Amongst the remnants – an old washtub*



*Finishing touches - Col McAlister at work*





*The author connecting with her great-great grandparents Photo: Col McAlister*



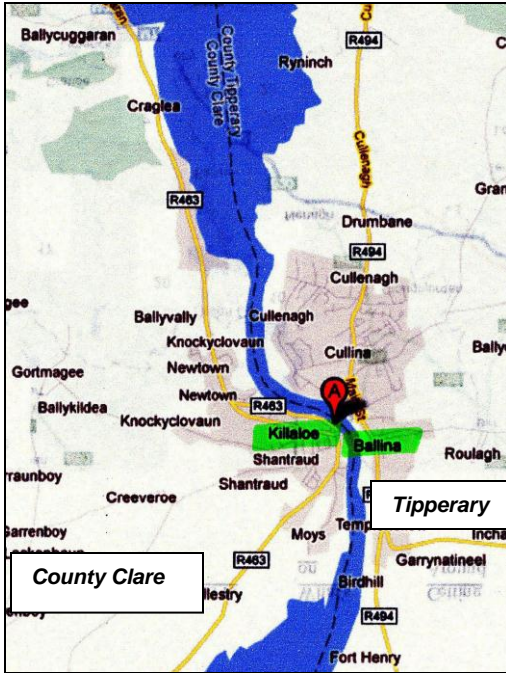
*Left: The only remaining orchard tree July 2012*

*Below: Rescued – November 2012*

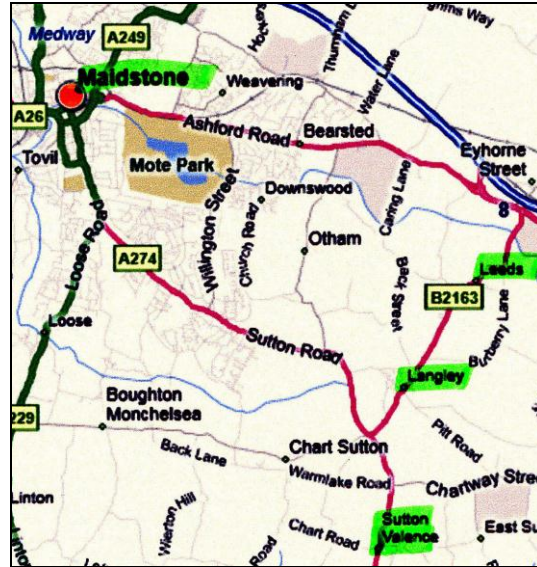




## APPENDIX A

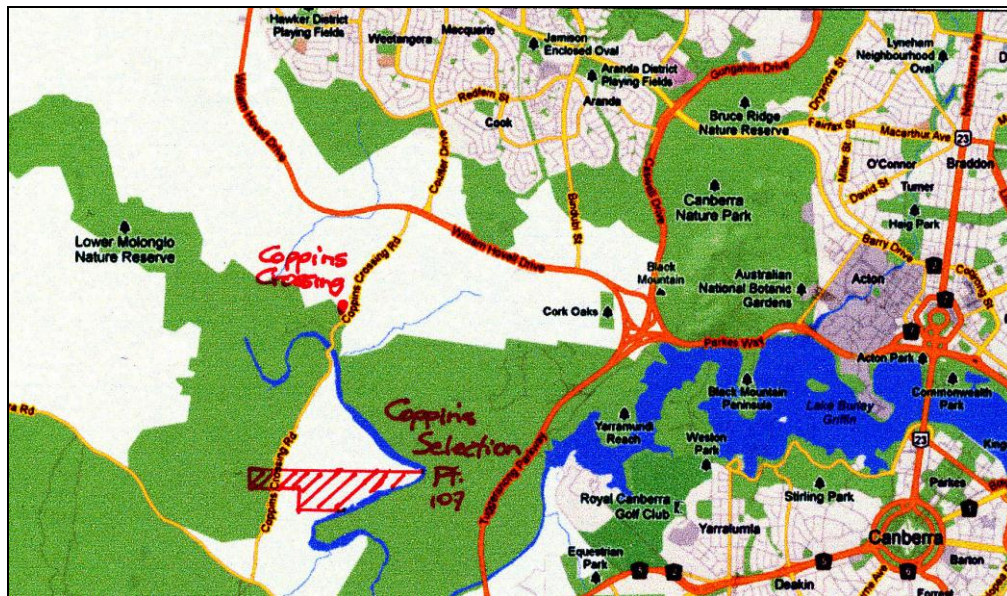


**MAP 1 :** Birthplace of Catherine Sheedy – Ballina, Co. Tipperary, Ireland. Ballina is on the River Shannon on the eastern shores of Lough Derg in SW Ireland.



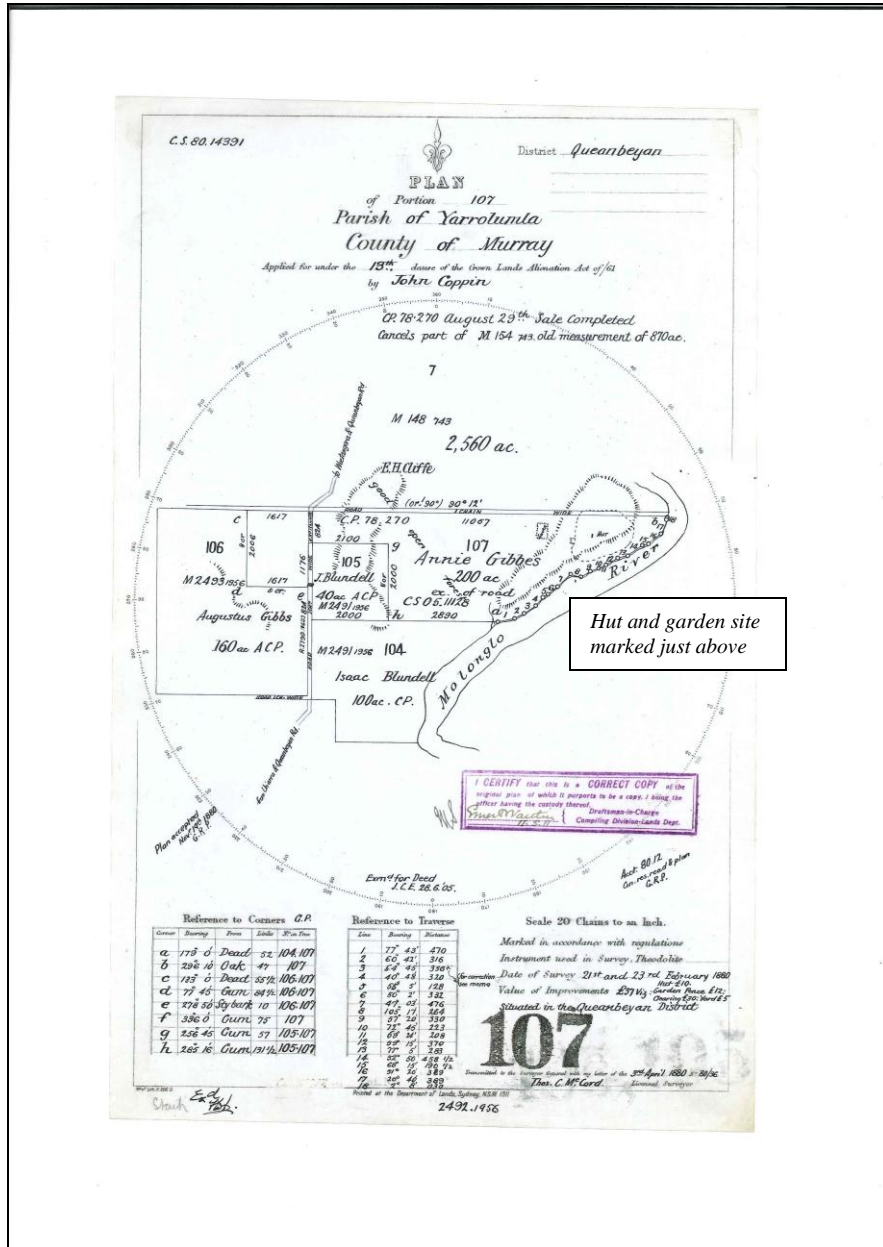
**MAP 2:** Birthplace of John Coppin – Langley, near Maidstone, Kent in England

**MAP 3:** Coppin's Crossing and site of Coppin's 1<sup>st</sup> selection in 2012



Source: Google Maps.

# APPENDIX B

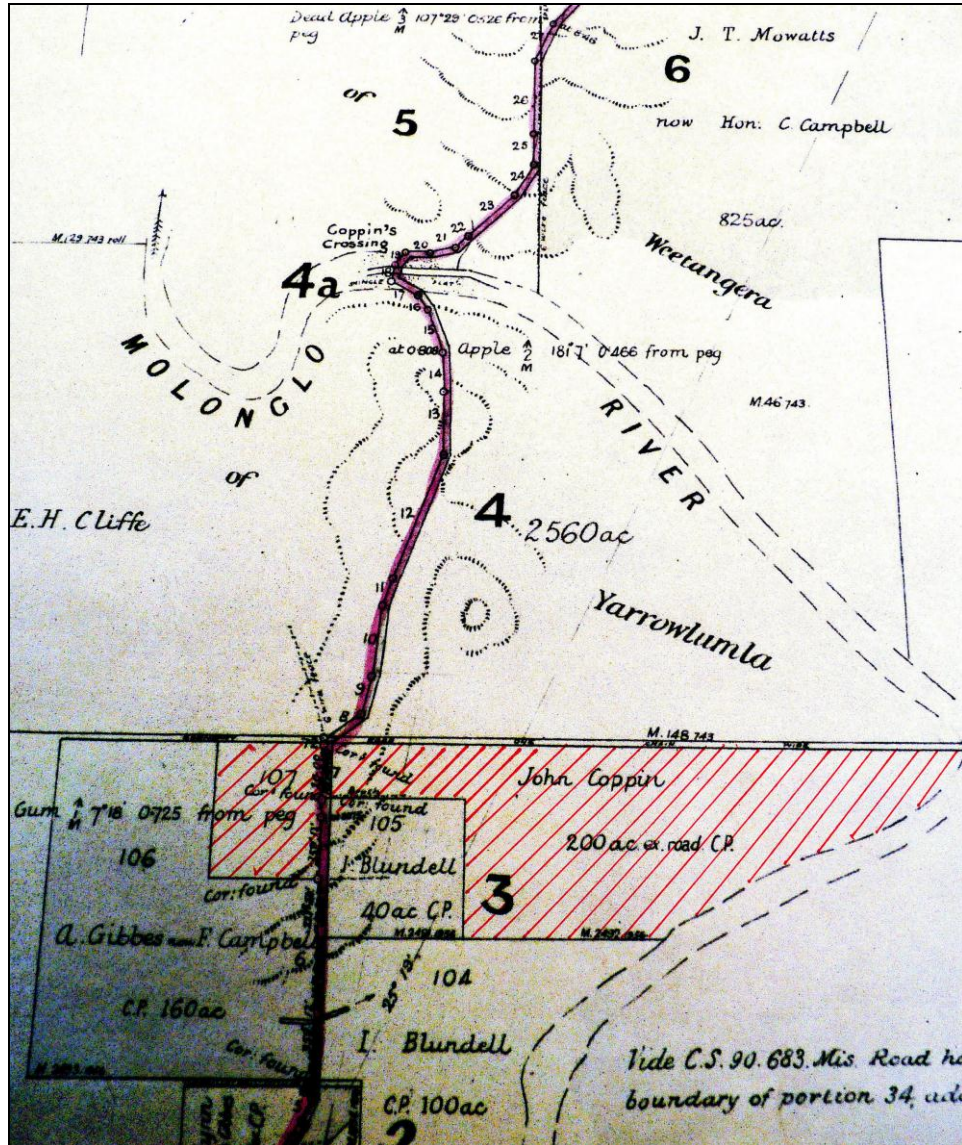


1880 Survey Plan of Portion 107 showing location of Coppin's hut and improvements made at Survey date. **Note:** This version has been updated to reflect Annie Gibbs as mortgagee for the land subsequently purchased by Frederick Campbell.

Source: Dept of Lands



# APPENDIX C



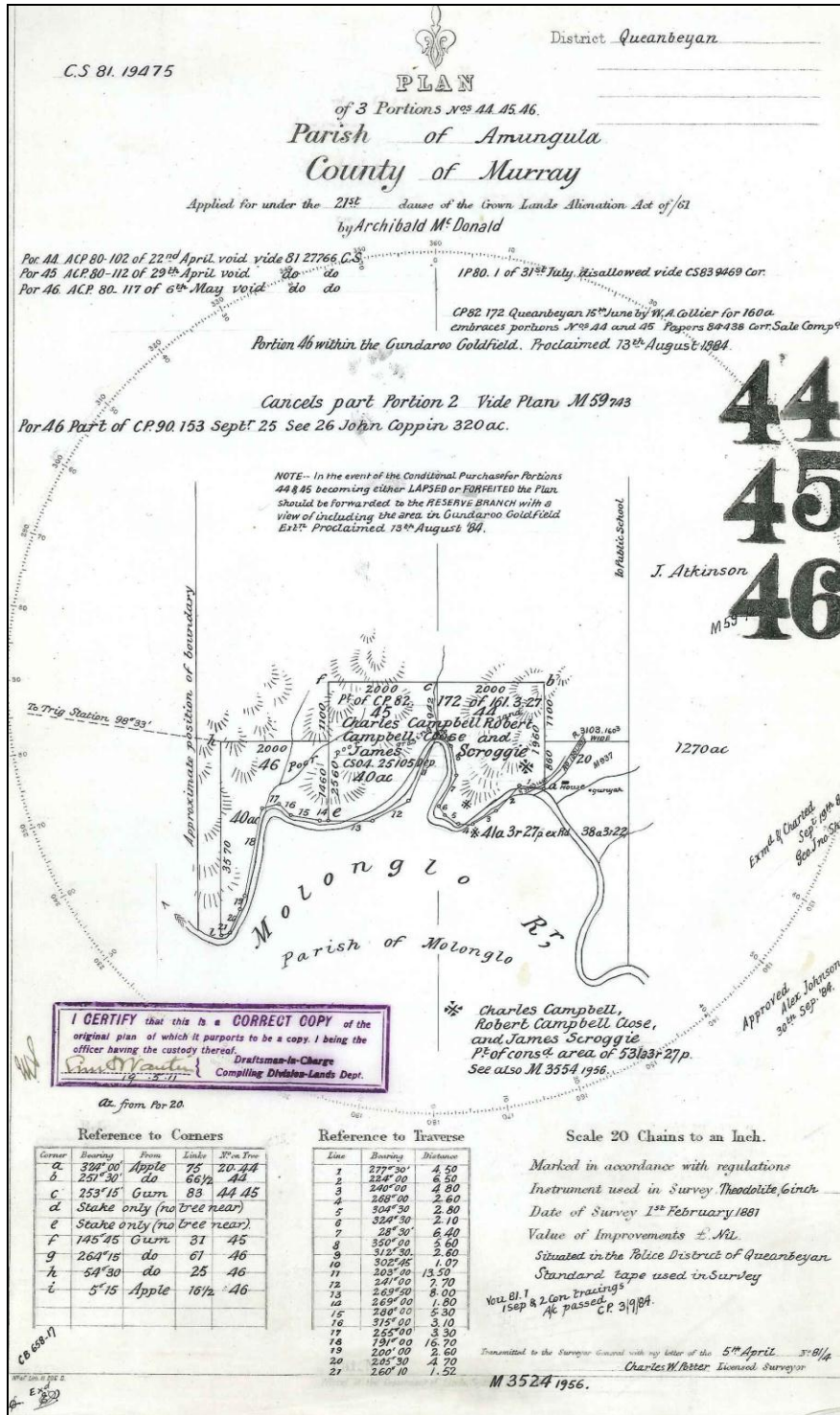
Extract of Plan of a road leading from Queanbeyan to Uriarra Road to Queanbeyan to Weetangera Road 1884. Shaded portion is John Coppin's selection Portion 107

Source: National Library of Australia (Map G8791.G46 1884 (Early Road Maps, Copy 2))





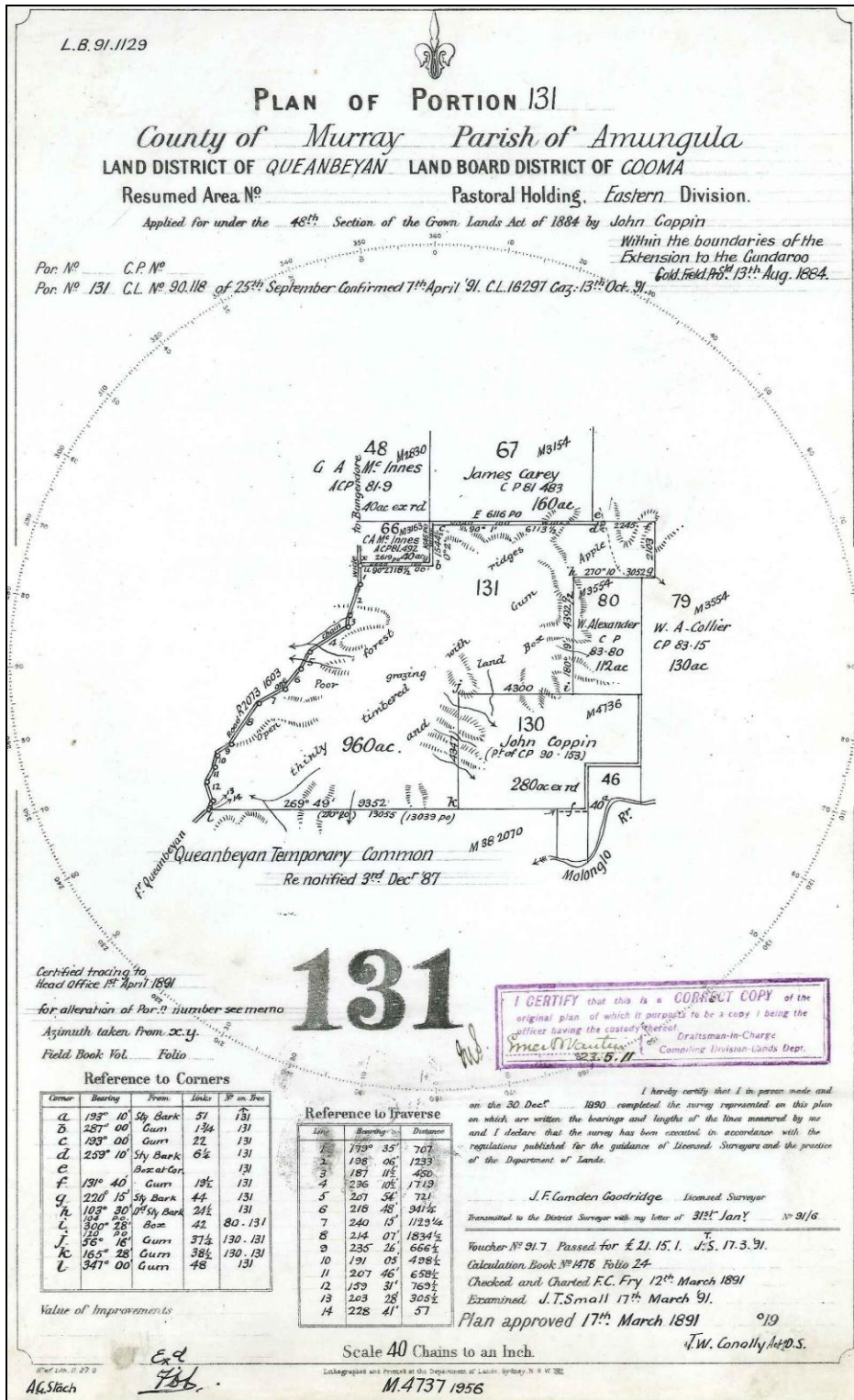
MAP 2 (Appendix D)



Portion 46 - 40 acres combined with Portion 130 of 280 acres - CP 90.153

Source: Dept. of Lands

**MAP 3 (Appendix D)**



Portion 131. Conditional Lease of 960 acres adjoining Coppin's conditional purchase CL 90.118

Source: Dept. of Lands

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