

Ginninderra Catchment Area Historical Notes

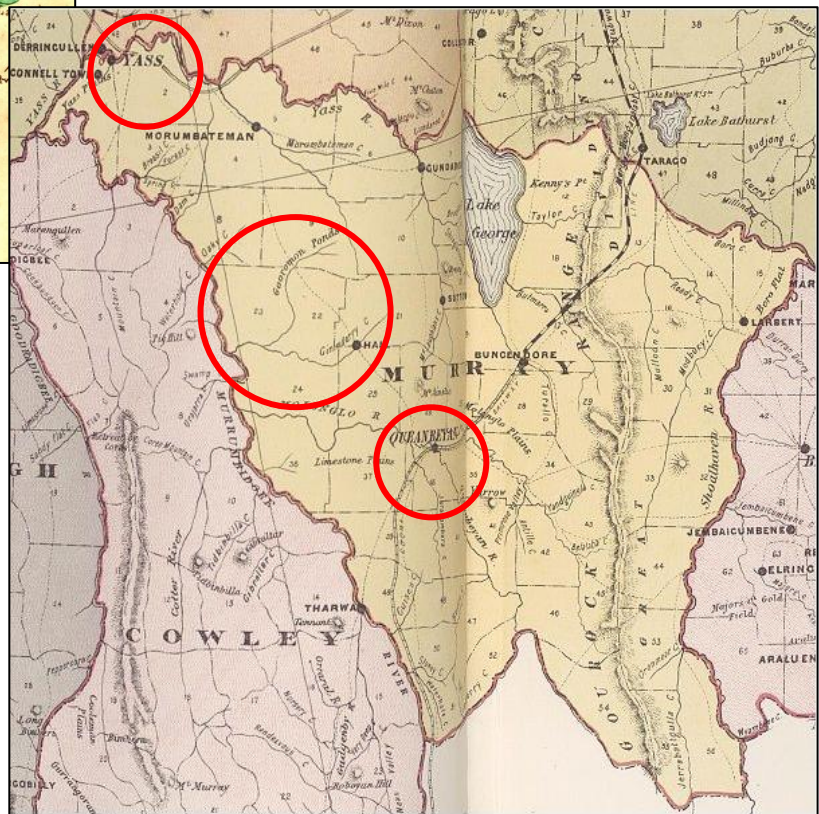
19th Century Surveying and Mapping

Historically the Ginninderra catchment area has been an important link between the 19th century settlements around Yass, Queanbeyan, Lake George and the Limestone Plains.



Murray County map, 1848

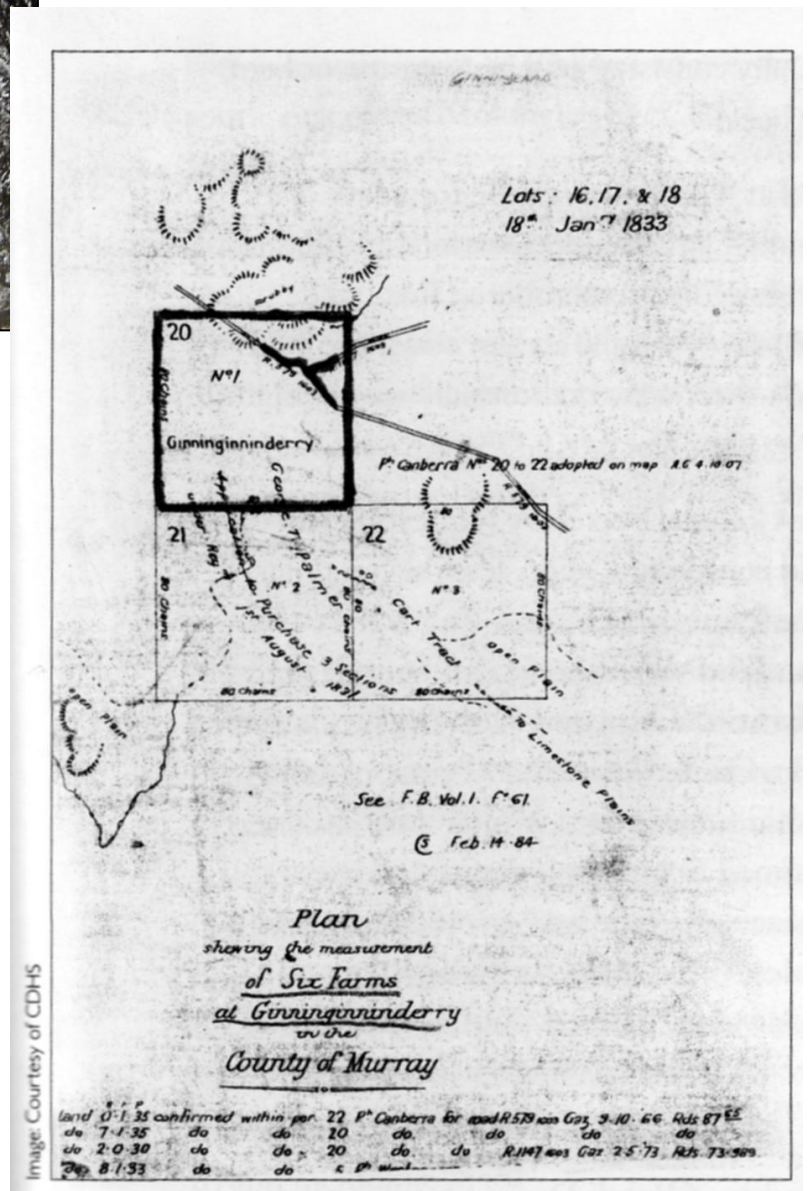
George Palmers established his *Palmerville* Estate in 1826 in Ginninginderry with a homestead located on the banks of Ginninderra Creek adjacent to the present-day suburb of Giralang. The estate encompassed much of what is now Belconnen and southern Gungahlin. It adjoined the Charnwood Estate to the west and Yarralumla Estate to the east. The combined area of the Ginninderra and Charnwood Estates was nearly 20,150 acres (8155 ha). Between the years 1830 and 1836, the colonial surveyor Robert Hoddle made several visits to the district, to survey property boundaries.



Murray County map, 1886

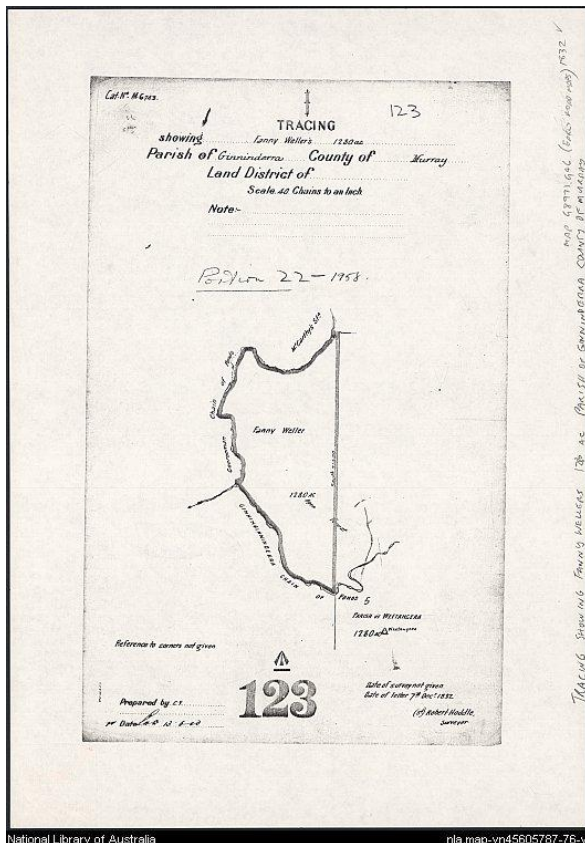


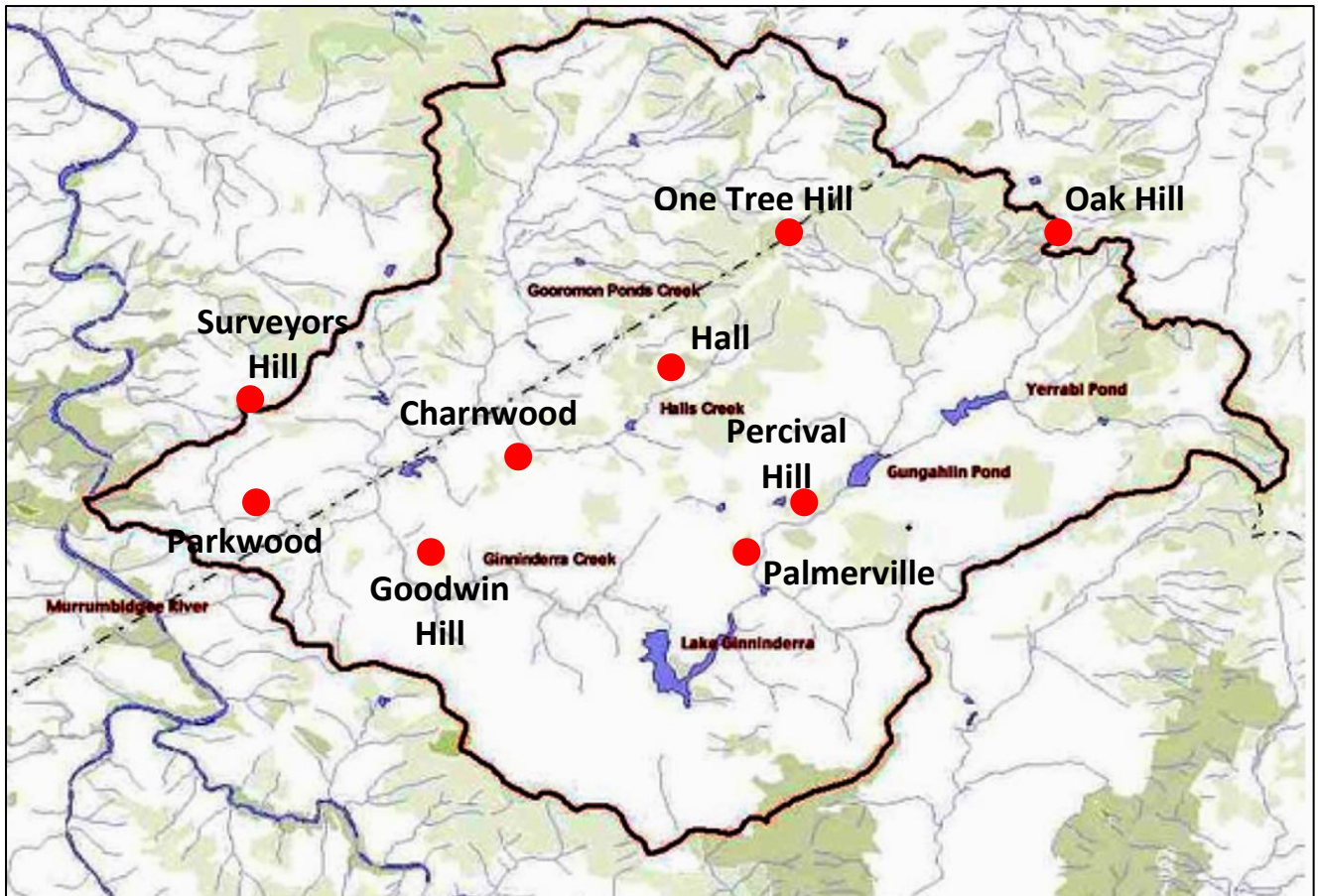
Robert Hoddle sketch of Ginninderra Falls, 1835.



Robert Hoddle map, 1835

The area now known as to us as Gungahlin was originally called after the major waterway, Ginninderra Creek, which begins at Oak Hill, just over the NSW border, and flows west into the Murrumbidgee through Ginninderra Falls. *Ginin-ginin-derry* is said to mean ‘sparkling, throwing out little rays of light’ in the local Ngunnawal language, and is possibly a description of the waterfall (Cooke, 2010).





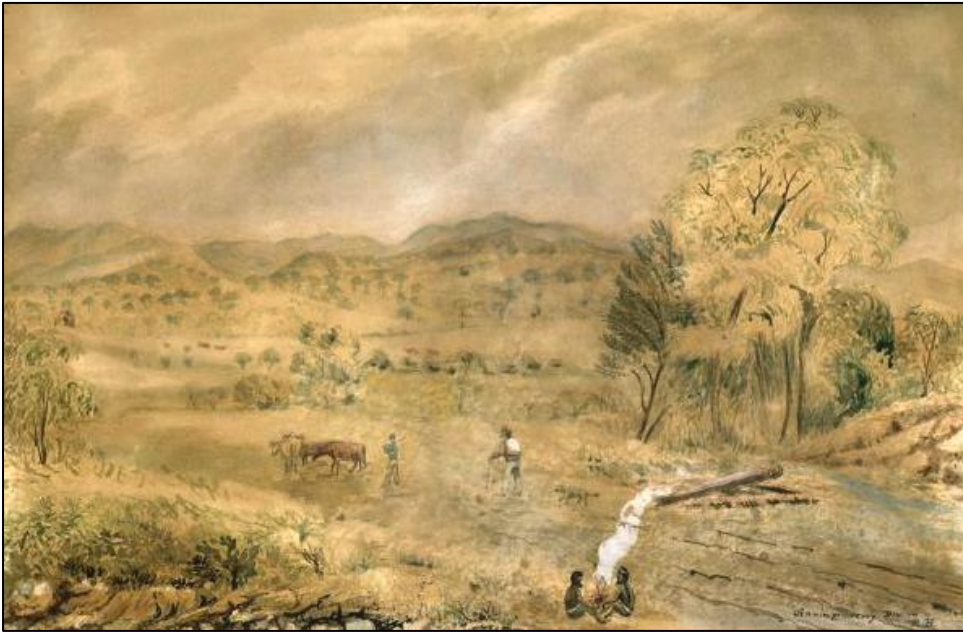
Ginninderra Creek catchment area

In 1824 the “King’s Botanist” Allan Cunningham arrived in the district and on 19 April visited the area around Ginninderra and recorded valuable sheep pastures and a large river winding to the north-northeast (presumably the Murrumbidgee River).

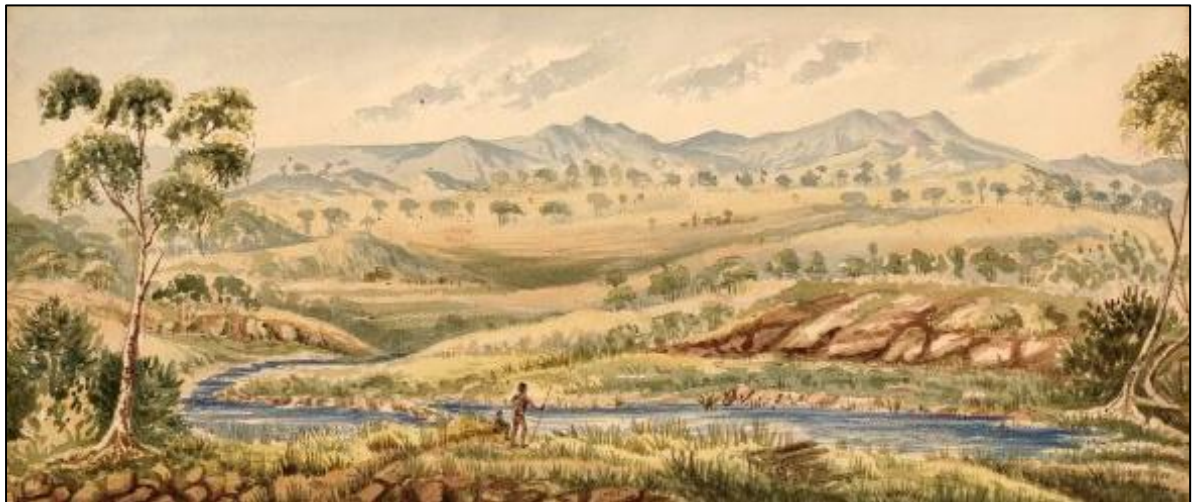
Surveyor Robert Dixon and party traced Ginninderra Creek from the Murrumbidgee to its rise on 6 June 1829, but Palmer’s lands at “Palmerville” were not surveyed until between 1832 and 1835 by Robert Hoddle and by James Larmer in 1836.



Henry and Mary Hall, Photo – L. Smith, 1875



***Robert Hoddle paintings, Ginninginderry Plains, 1832-35
(National Library of Australia)***



Robert Hoddle (1794-1881) is perhaps better known as the surveyor who developed the “Hoddle Grid” street plans for central Melbourne. He was born in UK and trained as a military surveyor. He did survey work in South Africa before coming to Sydney in 1823. He worked extensively in Queensland, Victoria and New South Wales, including development to plans for Berrima and Goulburn.

Aboriginal Heritage

Bibliography:

Belconnen's Aboriginal Past – Peter Rimas Kabaila, 1997

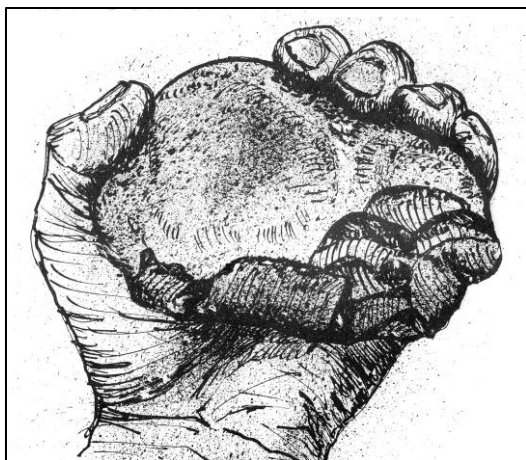
Belconnen's Treasurers – Conservation Council, ACT Region, 2011

A Short History of Gungahlin by Helen Cooke, Canberra Archeological Society, 2010

Radio-carbon dating of charcoal from fireplaces at archeological sites tells us that aboriginal tribal groups have been in the Canberra region for over 20,000 years. The Belconnen area is known to have been the traditional land of the aboriginal Ngambri people and others speaking the Ngunnawal language but other aboriginal family groups undoubtedly traversed across the area. Inter-marriage was common. From early European settler accounts, the area was known to have significant wildlife resources for food, trees/wood for shelters, tools, digging sticks, hunting weapons, eating implements, and skins for clothing – kangaroos, wallabies, emus, fish, wombats, birdlife, koalas, goannas, possums, bogong moths, wild turkeys, honey bees, berries, root crops, herbs and grains. The Ginninderra Creek water catchment area would have been an attractive camping area for any aboriginal family group dependent on hunting for food on a daily basis.

Gossan Hill is one of a number of identified sites where aboriginal artifacts have been found around the Ginninderra Creek water catchment area now including the ACT townships of Belconnen and Gungahlin. There were natural trails and pathways crossing the catchment to neighbouring parts of the surrounding region and across large parts of southern NSW.

Stone tools have been found across the area – stone axes, scrapping tools, and adzes – often recognized by flaking of cutting edges. Good quality flakable chert is found in the suburb of Bruce. Rounded boulders were used for as hammer stones for pounding food and ochres for paint (red, blue, green, yellow) dug from rocks on Gossan Hill and other places.



Places of special significance for ceremonies and mythology are also likely to have been scattered around the Ginninderra Creek catchment area and surrounding hills. The ochre source site on Gossan Hill may well have had “dreaming” significance. Quarrying pits have been identified and a sizable scatter of stone artifacts has been found.

Drawing from Peter Kabaila, 1997: Stone chopper found on Gossan Hill.

One of the aboriginal campsites in the Brindabella foothills closest to the Limestone Plains was on John McDonald's “Uriarra” station (at intersection of Uriarra Road and Cotter Road). John's wife related the story of the local moth harvest to John Gale. She said that large numbers of aborigines gathered to feast on a big flat rock near the stables, which was called “Uryarra” meaning “running, to the feast”. The aborigines collected moths on the high hills west of “Uriarra” and brought them back to the camp.”

Lyall Gillespie noted that numerous implements and flakes had been found at Pialligo, Black Mountain Peninsula and on the slopes of Mount Ainslie. He also recorded the finding of 7000 implements and flakes including axes, choppers and scrapers on “Reisdale”, his mother's farm, situated between Ginninderra and the Gundaroo Road. Those were dated at between 2000 and 5000 years before the present.

At the time of the 1828 census William Davis Wright, an early settler, spoke of there being between 400 and 500 aborigines in the area at the time of European settlement. But by the time of the 1833 census they were outnumbered by the 500 settlers, including 351 convicts. By the 1870 virtually the whole aboriginal

population had been decimated by European diseases or moved away from their traditional lands by aggressive European settlement.

The Aboriginal people of this area belong to the *Ngarigo*, *Wolgal* or *Wolgalu* language group, spoken throughout the Australian Alps from here to Omeo in northern Victoria. The language and cultural groups run roughly in bands, parallel with the coast, with coastal people called *Katungal* - the sea. The Aboriginal people still share family ties along the east coast from south to northern NSW and southern Queensland. The people inland from the coast were called *Paiendra* – tomahawk, useful in their well wooded homelands, taking possums for food and skins. The *Bemeringal* mountain people were generally taller and more robust than the plains people and remarkably athletic, perhaps due to climbing hills every day.

The Ngunnawal people were *Bemeringal* who accessed mountain territory with bogong moth grounds; these little moths come from the north to spend the summer in the cool of granite tors in the mountains. The Aboriginal people stupefied them with smoke and scraped them out of their niches, then roasted them on rock slabs pre-warmed by fire and enjoyed eating their fatty little bodies. Not far from Gungahlin, Uriarra is a version of the Aboriginal term for 'running to the feast' and on Uriarra property itself there is a large, flat rock where moths were roasted. There is abundant evidence of Aboriginal use of the whole region and at times large gatherings were held.

European Heritage

European settlers pushed out from Sydney in the early 19th century in search of new pastures for stock and in 1820 Joseph Wild, James Vaughn and Charles Throsby Smith crossed from Lake George to a camp on the banks of the Molonglo River near Pialligo. Vaughan and Throsby-Smith climbed Black Mountain on 8 December 1820.

In their subsequent report to authorities in Sydney they commented favourably on the pasture. The next year Charles Throsby explored the area further and found the Murrumbidgee River; he also reported limestone outcrops suitable for making building mortar which resulted in the region being called Limestone Plains.

In October 1824 Joshua John Moore took out a "ticket of occupation" for 2000 acres of land on Acton Peninsula "Canberry". He sent ex-convict John McLaughlan and convicts James Clarke and John Tennent to occupy his land.



In 1825 Robert Campbell sent his overseer James Ainslie with a flock of sheep from Yass to establish a property that is now called "Duntroon". Ainslie was guided by aborigines and probably crossed the Ginninderra Creek catchment before building huts on the banks of the Molonglo River at the place called Pialligo (now Piallago).

At the 1828 census there were 21 European settlers living around Canberra and 15 at Ginninderra. But by the time of the 1833 census there were about 500 Europeans in the whole Canberra – Ginninderra area, of which 351 were convicts.

The first European to take up a selection in Ginninderra was George Thomas Palmer who established 'Palmerville' in about 1826. He was introduced to the area by his father, John Palmer the Commissary-General, who had come to Sydney on the Sirius with Governor Phillip and was granted land in Jerrabomberra in exchange for land he had purchased in Sydney.

Convicts were assigned to work the large Palmerville estate which included much of the north of what is now Belconnen and the southern end of Gungahlin. By 1831 Palmer had installed an overseer on his property and had built stone convict barracks and several other buildings of locally hand-made bricks, stone and local timber to house the workers. One of these was Ginninderra Cottage, one of the most comfortable and up-to-date residences in the area³ and the Palmer family stayed in it at times.

In May 1829 George Palmer lodged an application to purchase 14 portions of land on Ginninderra Creek from the Crown. He had to write to the Colonial Secretary a few times to move the bureaucracy along, but he made the purchases between 1833 and 1836. This method of squatting on a choice piece of land, erecting buildings to support residency, applying for permission to purchase and taking up the options was the common method of acquiring land in the early days of settlement.

In 1835 Charles Sturt, in part as a reward for his exploration of the region, was granted land in Murray County and he called the property "The Grange". He subsequently sold the property to Charles Campbell (son of Robert Campbell) in 1838. In 1850 Charles Campbell had a stone house built and renamed the property "Belconon". That house on "Belconnen Farm" still stands today; it is within the boundaries of the ACT.

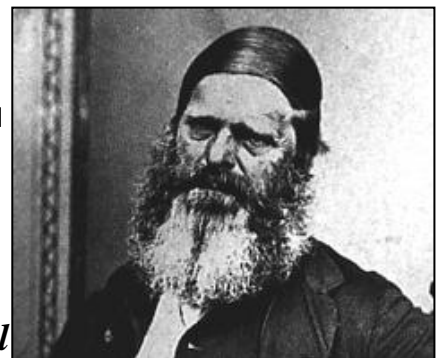
Heritage listed "Belconon" homestead built by Charles Campbell in 1850.



On 23 July 1838 Thomas and Eliza Southwell and their two children arrived at Port Jackson, Sydney, and spent the first two years in the colony near Camden before moving to settle on the lower Ginninderra Creek. In 1854 Thomas purchased 987 acres of land on the creek and named the property "Parkwood". The homestead is still occupied today. Thomas build a wooden slab Wesleyan Church near his homestead in 1863; this was subsequently replaced in 1880 by a fine stone church that still stands today (Belconnen Community Council, 2011).

Crucial to the establishment of rural grazing properties was the reliability of water supply across the whole of the upper Murrumbidgee River catchment area. For the last 150 years the area has been used mostly as grazing country.

Squatters held most of the profitable land in Ginninderra by the mid 1830s, most of them absentee landlords running the properties with overseers and convict labourers. From 1833 the NSW government decided not to remove "squatters" who had established unauthorised stock stations in the interior due the difficulties of removing them and their increasing political influence and respectability.



Thomas Southwell



Heritage listed Wesleyan Church built on the "Parkwood" property by the Southwell family in 1880. It replaced an earlier wooden slab church building built in 1863.

Women of the squatters' class felt the isolation in the new estates and social occasions were eagerly sought, including visiting the houses of the other squatters at Duntroon and Lanyon. In January 1845 some visitors from Woden visited the Palmers at Ginninderra where 'Miss Palmer played the piano while Pemberton Palmer showed some polka steps. Palmer's eldest daughter Catherine married Charles Campbell, son of the Squire of Duntroon, in 1837 and they lived at Ginninderra for several years. Charles agreed to buy the estate and put down a deposit but was unable to meet the installments due to falling wool and stock prices, and the property was resumed by Palmer. So even the comparatively well-off squattocracy did not always have an easy life.

In 1836 Henry Hall became the first resident landholder to settle in Ginninderra, at 'Charnwood', at the same time as the government introduced "depasturing licences" for an annual fee of £10.9 The tenure was from year to year, so the occupier made improvements at his own risk, the land was unsurveyed and the boundaries of the "runs" the subject of negotiation with neighbours.

In 1839 NSW established the "border police" to assist in controlling the situation between settlers and local Aboriginal people, with the cost funded by an annual charge of a penny per sheep, threepence per head of cattle and sixpence per horse. The "unsettled" lands were divided into a number of 'squattage' districts, each under the control of a Crown Land Commissioner. As pastoral expansion continued, the number and arrangement of the districts and the licensing arrangements were changed.

Ginninderra Village grew up as immigrants travelled into the region from Sydney via Gundaroo, seeking land and employment. The roads to Yass and Queanbeyan also passed through Ginninderra. Queanbeyan was the most populous and prosperous of the centres of population in the region and the interests of Canberra are closely interwoven with it,¹² but Ginninderra certainly had a role as a local hub of agricultural endeavour, community services and entertainment.

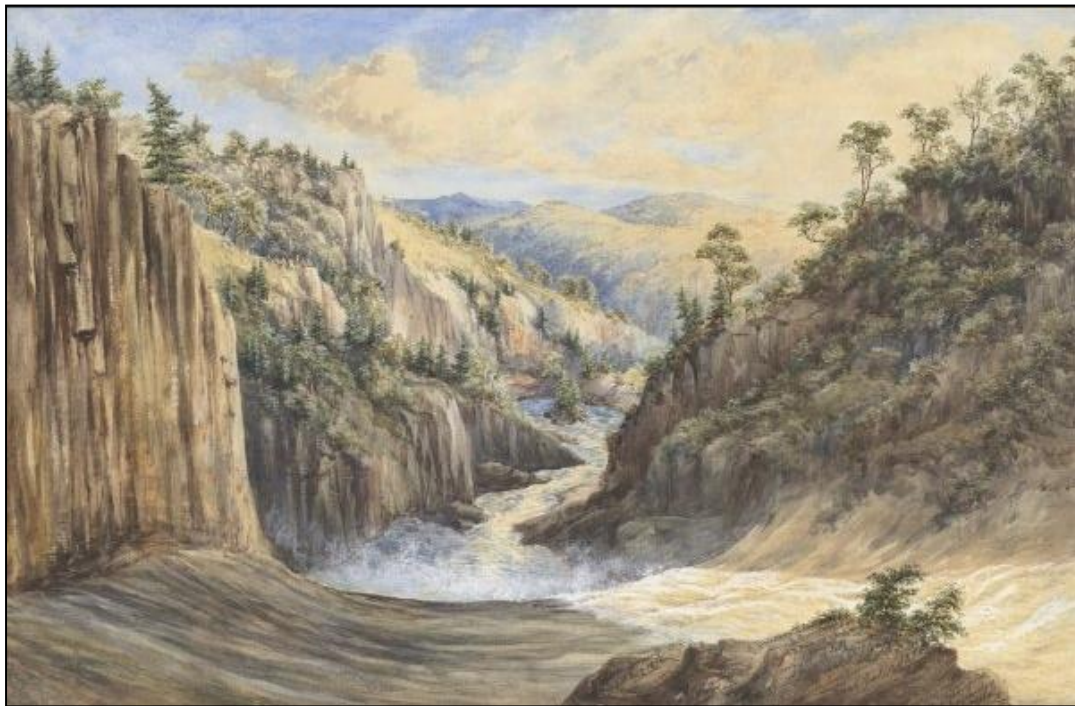
George Thomas Palmer Junior took over the Palmer Estate and came to live in it in about 1845 with his wife and two children, Edwin and Minna Close. Their next child George Charles Frederick was born there on 27 Feb 1846. When William Davis became the manager a year later the estate was known as 'Ginninderra.

William Davis had arrived in the colony in 1837 and soon got a job with the Commercial Bank. Later he was engaged by Charles Campbell as overseer on Duntroon Estate where he gained his first pastoral experience. William bought out his brothers-in-law and became the Squire of Ginninderra.

Davis was a very successful farmer and Ginninderra Estate became a show place under his management. He was well liked as a boss and a great sportsman; he organised sporting teams and encouraged his employees to participate. His favourites were shooting and cricket, but he owned race horses and hunters and with his nephew took them to Sydney to compete.

The Ginninderra Blacksmith's shop, now a derelict bush pole shed with earthen floor and gable roof of corrugated iron (but with close-spaced battens under the iron which indicate an original wooden shingle roof) dates from 1859 and was the first substantial establishment in the village.

The first Ginninderra store and Post Office was opened on 1st April 1859 near Ginninderra Homestead by William Davis for the benefit of his many employees on the Estate and the other people in the district. When the Yass - Queanbeyan Road, near the route of the present Barton Highway, began to carry more traffic, the store was moved across the road near to the Ginninderra Blacksmith's Workshop and the first village in what is now the Canberra region grew along the road.



Gordon Cummings painting of Ginninderra Falls, 1875

The new NSW Legislative Council gained its first representative for the area of Canberra, the counties of Murray, King and Georgiana, in 1842 when Terrence Murray of Yarralumla was elected unopposed; he was reelected in 1848. Government representation and increased policing encouraged more settlers. In Ginninderra more intensive agriculture was possible as more immigrants arrived to work in the new land; increased need for food, crops and wool for the larger population and for trade led to more clearing of the woodlands, more grasslands, and increased stream flow instead of water soaking into bogs and marshes.

Ginninderra was like other rural parts of NSW where the earliest phase of settlement on land grants was characterised by large estates worked by convict labourers and tenant farmers. By the late 1850s the demand for smaller farms increased with the prosperity of these workers, and portions of land outside and on the fringes of these estates were sold at auction to new settlers and the old tenants.