

BURNSIDE “ORPHANAGES” AND FARM

In 1909 Sir James Burns, the founder of the South Pacific trading company, Burns Philp & Co, offered land at North Parramatta and a gift of 500 pounds to the Presbyterian Church to establish a boys' home for 'orphans and abandoned lads'. The Church accepted the gift on condition that homes to be built on the land would be for girls as well as boys.



The first cottage, 'Blairgowrie', (the 2nd building to the east of control 5) was built and opened in 1911. The project received wide support. Some homes were funded by general donation. Others were given by organisations or wealthy families. By the time Sir James Burns died in 1923, 13 homes had been built on both sides of Pennant Hills Road between the locations of controls 5 and 27 on the SSS course map. The heritage-listed 'homes' remain a landmark because of their size and differing styles of architecture.

The Burnside Homes grew to include 21 homes, an assembly hall, a school, a hospital, dental surgery, a farm and orchard, a gymnasium and swimming pool. At its peak in 1937, 541 children were living in the Burnside Homes.

SSS controls 4, 11, 12 and possibly 13 and 28 are located on former Burnside farmland. 16 year old James Burns and his brother had migrated to Australia

from Scotland in 1862. The Scottish names of the Burnside homes e.g. 'Eskdale', 'Airlie' and 'Dunkeld' (below), and the streets in this part of the map and nearby in Oatlands on the course map, reflect the Scottish heritage.

From its inception Burnside was committed to finding better ways to care for children using separate residences to establish family environments rather than a single large barrack-like building as had been the usual prior practice.

Although the organisation was initially named 'The Burnside Presbyterian Orphans Homes', the majority of the children were not orphans. They were voluntarily placed in care by a parent or relative who, usually due to poverty or death of a spouse, was unable to care for them. The introduction of social welfare payments after World War II meant that many parents or relatives who had previously had insufficient means to care for their children, were now able to do so. This led to a decline in the numbers of children placed in care. The Homes also suffered financial difficulties during the postwar period of rampant inflation.

Sir James Burns had 3 sons. The youngest died on war service in France in 1916 and the second died in 1921 as a result of active service in the Great War. Sir James remained committed to Burnside Homes, donating more land in 1917, providing funds for erection of the large home known as the 'War Memorial' building (on the street corner near SSS control 5) and a substantial bequest of his home and estate, 'Gowan Brae' (now the site of The King's School) in his Will.



Burnside Homes became part of the Uniting Church after 1977. The focus of services provided by Uniting Burnside to children, young people and families has changed over the years. Children are no longer accommodated in institutional homes but are supported in living with their families or foster families.

Uniting Burnside operates a number of different programs at various centres throughout NSW with some of the staff and programs administered from the former homes on the south side of Pennant Hills Road between James Ruse Drive and SSS control 27.

Malcolm Gledhill – January 2021

Burnside 75 Years of Caring : Susan Keen 1986 • UnitingCare Burnside : because children matter (Centenary book 2011) • The History of Burns Philp ; K Buckley and K Klugman 1981

Photos of several former homes between control 27 and James Ruse Drive

'Airlie' (L) opened in 1914, 'Dunkeld' opened in 1913 and Eskdale (R), opened in 1915.

