

# Heritage (Decision about Provisional Registration of the Nil Desperandum Homestead and Surrounds, Paddys River) Notice 2015

Notifiable Instrument NI2015–151

made under the

**Heritage Act 2004, s34 Notice of decision about provisional registration**

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## **1 Name of instrument**

This instrument is the *Heritage (Decision about Provisional Registration of the Nil Desperandum Homestead and Surrounds, Paddys River) Notice 2015*.

## **2 Registration details of the place**

On 9 April 2015 the ACT Heritage Council decided to provisionally register the Nil Desperandum Homestead and Surrounds, Paddys River to the ACT Heritage Register. Registration details of the place are at [Attachment A](#): Provisional Register entry for the Nil Desperandum Homestead and Surrounds, Paddys River.

## **3 Reason for decision**

The ACT Heritage Council decided that the Nil Desperandum Homestead and Surrounds, Paddys River meets one or more of the heritage significance criteria at s 10 of the *Heritage Act 2004*. The provisional register entry is at [Attachment A](#).

## **4 Date of provisional registration**

9 April 2015

## **5 Indication of Council's intention**

The Council intends to decide whether to register the place under Division 6.2 within 5 months of provisional registration.

## **6 Public consultation period**

The Council invites public comment, within 4 weeks after the day the notice is notified, on the provisional registration of the Nil Desperandum Homestead and Surrounds, Paddys River to:

The Secretary  
ACT Heritage Council  
GPO Box 158  
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Email: [heritage@act.gov.au](mailto:heritage@act.gov.au)

Jennifer O'Connell  
Secretary (as delegate for)  
ACT Heritage Council  
9 April 2015



ACT Heritage Council

**AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY  
HERITAGE REGISTER  
(Provisional Registration)**

For the purposes of s. 32(1)(b) of the *Heritage Act 2004*, a provisional entry to the heritage register has been prepared by the ACT Heritage Council for the following place:

**Nil Desperandum Homestead and Surrounds**

**(Part) Block 143, Paddys River**

DATE OF PROVISIONAL REGISTRATION

9 April 2015 Notifiable Instrument: 2015–151

PERIOD OF EFFECT OF PROVISIONAL REGISTRATION

Start Date 9 April 2015 End Date 9 September 2015

Extended Period (if applicable) Start Date \_\_\_\_\_ End Date \_\_\_\_\_

Copies of the Register Entry are available for inspection at ACT Heritage. For further information please contact:

The Secretary  
ACT Heritage Council  
GPO Box 158  
CANBERRA ACT 2601  
Telephone 13 22 81

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This statement refers to the location of the place as required in s. 12 (b) of the *Heritage Act 2004*.

#### **LOCATION OF THE PLACE**

Nil Desperandum Homestead and Surrounds, (part) block 143, Paddys River, Gilmore's Road.

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This section refers to the description of the place as required in s.12(c) of the *Heritage Act 2004*.

#### **DESCRIPTION OF THE PLACE**

Nil Desperandum Homestead and Surrounds, (part) Block 143 Paddys River, which includes original portions 31 and 32 selected by Staunton and:

- The Pisé homestead and house paddock, including remains of Hygeia toilet;
  - native regenerated bushland;
  - portions of Hurdle Creek and Gilmore Creek related to establishment of camellia grove, pool, and distillery;
  - cleared grazing paddocks indicating European land use, ditch-and-bank earthworks bordering the field;
  - Ashbrook cultivation paddock including exotic plantings;
  - remnant hearth foundations;
  - eucalyptus distillery including surrounding eucalypts with evidence of coppicing;
  - camellia plot; and
  - swimming pool.
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This statement refers to the heritage significance of the place as required in s.12(d) of the *Heritage Act 2004*.

#### **STATEMENT OF HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE**

Nil Desperandum Homestead and Surrounds is important to the course of the ACT's cultural history as an example of vernacular pisé construction that demonstrates the main attributes and advantages of the building method in the era of European settlement. Pisé was a form of inexpensive architecture, as materials were locally sourced and readily accessible, and few examples of pisé buildings from the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries survive in the ACT. *[criteria (a) (b) (d)]*.

The homestead and surrounds are also significant to the course of the ACT's cultural history in displaying practises of settlement and land use over successive phases of occupation, which are no longer common in the ACT. The practises are evidenced by the use of locally sourced and quarried building materials, used in construction of Ashbrook in around 1880, by which time more selectors began to occupy the Tidbinbilla area, and materials used in construction of the pisé homestead in around 1895. *[criteria (a) (b)]*.

The cultural landscape at Nil Desperandum Homestead and Surrounds encompassing the cleared landscape, exposed stone sources, hearth foundations, and exotic plantings associated with Ashbrook also reveals the ingenuity and principal characteristics of small holdings of free selectors in the ACT. The eucalyptus distillery is also included in this landscape, and is a representation of a significant industry in the ACT in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and also stands as evidence of the presence of Czechoslovakian migrants, and thus the importance of the place in ACT

citizenship and migration history [(criteria (a) (d))].

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### CONSERVATION OBJECTIVE

The guiding conservation objective is that the Nil Desperandum Homestead and Surrounds shall be conserved and appropriately managed in a manner respecting its heritage significance.

The ACT Heritage Council may adopt heritage guidelines applicable to the place under s25 of the *Heritage Act 2004*.

For further information on guidelines applicable to the place, or for advice on proposed works or development, please contact ACT Heritage on 13 22 81.

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### REASON FOR PROVISIONAL REGISTRATION

Nil Desperandum has been assessed against the heritage significance criteria and been found to have heritage significance when assessed against criteria (a), (b), and (d) under s.10 of the *Heritage Act 2004*.

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### ASSESSMENT AGAINST THE HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA

The Council's assessment against the criteria specified in s.10 of the *Heritage Act 2004* is as follows.

In assessing the nomination for Nil Desperandum Homestead and Surrounds, Paddys River, the Council considered:

- the original nomination and documentary evidence supplied by the nominator;
- information provided by a site inspection on 2 October 2014 by ACT Heritage; and
- the report by ACT Heritage titled, *Background Information Nil Desperandum Homestead and Surrounds*, January 2015, containing photographs and information on history, description, condition and integrity.

Pursuant to s.10 of the *Heritage Act 2004*, a place or object has heritage significance if it satisfies one or more of the following criteria. Future research may alter the findings of this assessment.

**(a) importance to the course or pattern of the ACT's cultural or natural history;**

Nil Desperandum Homestead and Surrounds, Paddys River, meets this criterion.

Nil Desperandum Homestead and Surrounds is important to the course of the ACT's cultural history as the homestead is a pisé construction, a vernacular building style of the era, and the place has a strong association with the eucalyptus distillation industry, and European rural land use during the early colonisation of the ACT.

The place has a strong association with European settlement and evolution of the district that subsequently became the ACT. It represents a cultural landscape demonstrative of the rural settlement of the Tidbinbilla Valley with a time-depth occupation from the selector-era, development of the Federal Capital Territory, to incorporation of Block 143 into the Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve. Recreational, pastoral and agricultural land use, spanning over a century, took place at Nil Desperandum Homestead and Surrounds, evidenced by cleared areas of the holding, particularly the cultivation paddock, the camellia grove, swimming pool, and the distillery. These

reveal different aspects of land use and management since the 1880s, with Block 143 being one of the last freehold blocks of land resumed by the Territory.

The remains of John Staunton's 'Ashbrook,' including stone foundations, cultivation paddock, and stand of exotic trees, was the northernmost portion selected in the Tidbinbilla Valley, and represents the presence, economy, and methods of land use employed by free selectors in the district. The cultivation paddock, hearth footings, quarry areas and exotic plantings are still present and demonstrate methods and conventions of farming and construction, of fields and dwellings.

The homestead is a vernacular pisé building, constructed in the 1890s. Pisé was adopted as a result of economic conditions, enabling European settlers to construct homes from inexpensive, readily available materials. This demonstrates the resourcefulness of settlers and the environmental, social, and economic demands of the era and location. The building maintains a plan common for rural structures of the day, namely dwellings in which rooms did not permit internal access, but used an external space such as a veranda for access. This footprint is also evident at nearby places Orroral Valley and Rock Valley homesteads.

Over 100 distillery plants operated in the ACT area by 1950, and it represents one of the few industries based entirely on Australia native plants. The Eucalyptus distillery at Nil Desperandum has a strong association with this important industry, with enough remaining fabric to demonstrate how the distillation process operated.

Nil Desperandum is also important in its association with the migration and citizenship history of the ACT. The possible Chilean connection in the 1870s reflects the many places people journeyed from in the colonial period and the varied cultural skills they contributed to colonial society. The presence of the Czechoslovakian eucalyptus distillers in Tidbinbilla and at Nil Desperandum in the early 1940s coincides with the disturbances in Eastern Europe leading up the Second World War. The role of one of the Nil Desperandum distillers, Jan Jandura, in the first Australian Citizenship Ceremony in 1949, gives a glimpse of the huge changes in Australian society brought about by the post-war migration program. In particular it highlights the historic creation of Australian Citizenship in the 1948 *Nationality and Citizenship Act* which established that Australians were citizens of Australia rather than subjects of Britain.

**(b) has uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of the ACT's cultural or natural history;**

Nil Desperandum Homestead and Surrounds, part Block 143 Paddys River, meets this criterion.

Nil Desperandum Homestead and Surrounds has rare and endangered aspects of the ACT's cultural history. The homestead is a pisé construction, a rare and endangered building type in the cultural history of the ACT. In addition, the place demonstrates patterns of land use adopted by early European settlers which represent rare aspects of the ACT's cultural history.

The Pisé homestead is a rare and endangered example of vernacular architecture adopted by European settlers in the region that later became the ACT. In 2001 there were 42 known pisé buildings in the ACT, with only 14 in good condition, seven of these surviving without being subject to major modification, with several of these affected by bushfires in 2003.

The homestead and surrounds reflect patterns of land use and construction adopted by European settlers, some of which are practised rarely, or are no longer practised. The patterns indicating late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century cultivation and recreational land use are evidenced by

land clearing, vernacular rural construction, informal industries (the camellia grove) and eucalyptus distilling and coppicing for the distilling process. These reveal different aspects of land management and utilisation since the 1880s, displaying self-sufficiency and resourcefulness rarely a necessity on contemporary rural holdings in the ACT.

**(c) potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of the ACT's cultural or natural history;**

Nil Desperandum Homestead and Surrounds, Paddys River, does not meet this criterion.

There is insufficient evidence before the Council to suggest that the place will provide important new information contributing to a wider understanding of the ACT's cultural or natural history. The Council does not recognise a strong presumption of research potential at the place in one or multiple fields of scholarship.

**(d) importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural or natural places or objects;**

Nil Desperandum Homestead and Surrounds, Paddys River, meets this criterion.

Nil Desperandum Homestead and Surrounds is important in demonstrating the principal characteristics of pisé construction, late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century rural properties including architectural styles, adaptability, and settlement patterns. Further, it is important in demonstrating the principal characteristics of the eucalyptus distillation process.

The pisé homestead underwent a process of damage and renewal prior to, and after bushfires in 2003. The fires revealed the advantages of using rammed earth as a building material in the ACT local environment during the selector era, as the survival of the core pisé structure demonstrates its fire retardant qualities. In addition, fires exposed portions of the original matrix, revealing construction techniques, and the restoration of the place required some in-fill of the walls using locally available materials, mimicking original construction methods.

Eucalyptus distillation was an important industry in the ACT and surrounding region in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The still has enough remaining fabric to demonstrate the distilling process operational at the time, including the boiling tank, reservoir, fire pit, flue, condenser pipe and surrounding coppiced eucalypts.

The cleared landscape, exposed stone sources, hearth foundations, and exotic plantings associated with 'Ashbrook, 'reveal the industry, custom, and ingenuity of small holdings of free selectors in the ACT. That the cultivation paddock and the remainder of the block was farmed, utilised, and adapted by subsequent occupants – resulting in construction of the pisé homestead, swimming pool, eucalyptus distillery and camellia plot – demonstrates the resourcefulness required of occupants of rural holdings in the last century.

**(e) importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics valued by the ACT community or a cultural group in the ACT;**

Nil Desperandum Homestead and Surrounds, Paddys River, does not meet this criterion.

Nil Desperandum Homestead and Surrounds are situated in a picturesque visual setting and incorporates an attractive cultural landscape. However, they do not possess landmark qualities,

artistic excellence, or visual prominence demonstrated to be valued by the wider ACT community or a cultural group. While the place is valued by professional and special interest groups, these are not connected through the same way of living, which has been transmitted from one generation to another, and do not share a cultural or ethnic background, and therefore do not fall within the definition of a cultural group as defined by the Council in its *Heritage Assessment Policy 2014*.

**(f) importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement for a particular period;**

Nil Desperandum Homestead and Surrounds, Paddys River, does not meet this criterion.

While the homestead provides a good example of pisé construction, there is insufficient evidence before the Council demonstrating a high degree of technical or creative achievement more than other similar places in the ACT.

**(g) has a strong or special association with the ACT community, or a cultural group in the ACT for social, cultural or spiritual reasons;**

Nil Desperandum Homestead and Surrounds, Paddys River, does not meet this criterion.

While Nil Desperandum Homestead and Surrounds are important to interest and professional groups, previous occupants and their descendants, the association does not extend to the ACT community or a cultural group, is not easily recognisable to the broader ACT community, and is not an association beyond the ordinary. These groups are not connected through the same way of living, which has been transmitted from one generation to another, and they do not share a cultural or ethnic background, and therefore do not constitute a cultural group defined by the Council in its *Heritage Assessment Policy 2014*.

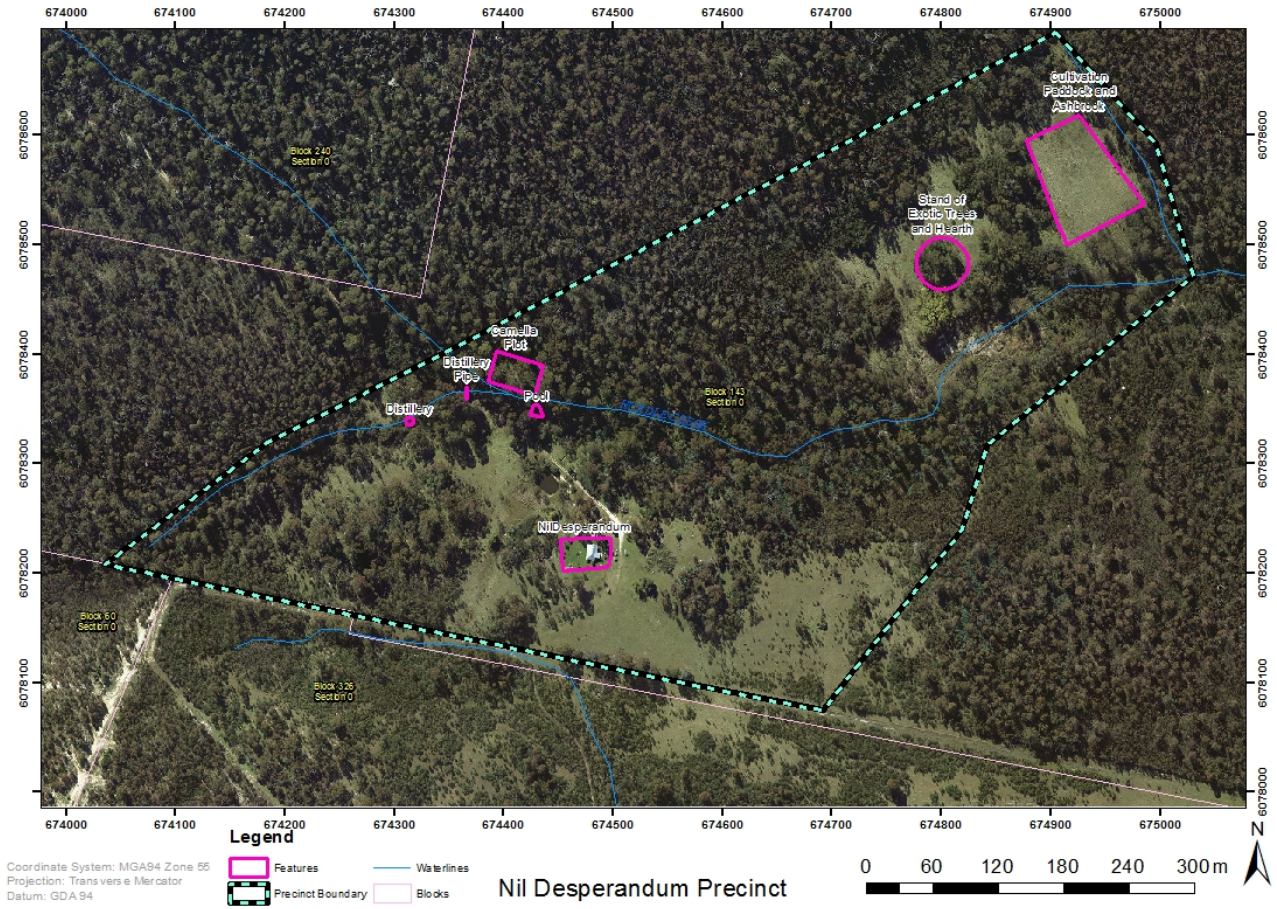
**(h) has a special association with the life or work of a person, or people, important to the history of the ACT.**

Nil Desperandum Homestead and Surrounds, Paddys River, does not meet this criterion.

While the pisé homestead is associated with the Greens and Hatcliffs who were pioneering families, and notable builders of pisé homesteads in the area, it is not demonstrated that these individuals have been instrumental to the history of the ACT. The homestead has some connection with the Wrights and the Cunninghams, prominent figures in the development of the Tidbinbilla and Tuggeranong Valleys, however, this connection is not demonstrated to be special, as required to meet the threshold for listing under this criterion.



# SITE PLAN



**Image 1** Nil Desperandum Homestead and Surrounds