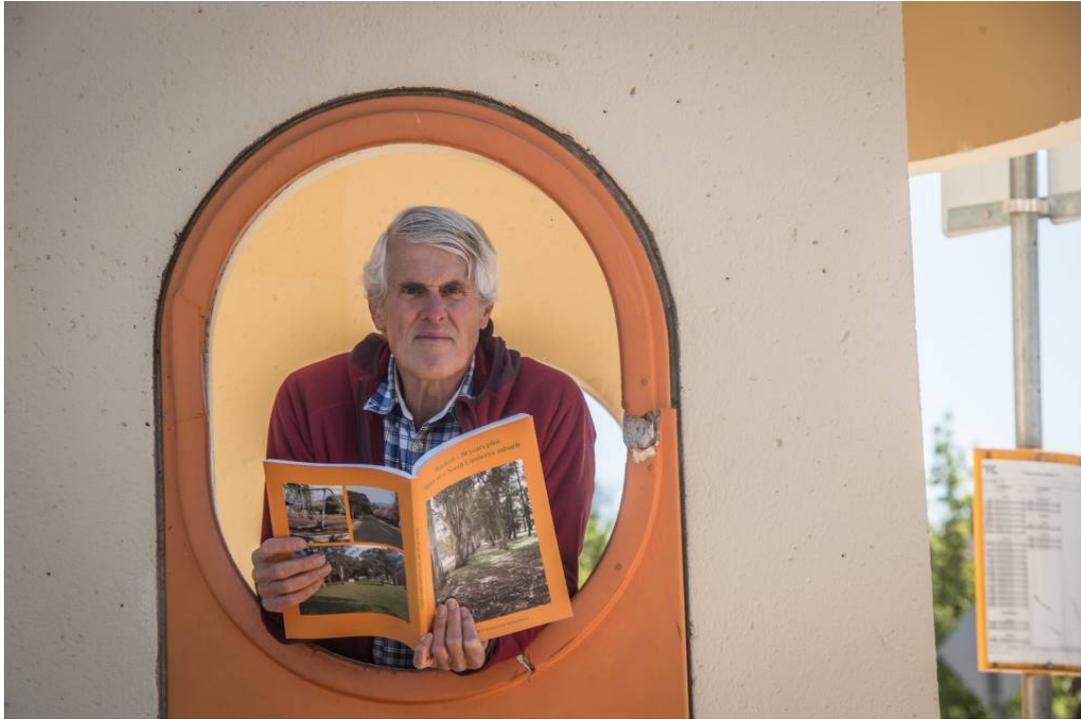


Chris Mobbs flicks through the pages of *Hackett: 50 years plus - Story of a North Canberra suburb*, delighting in the details, the anecdotes, the human touches that give life to the evolution of a suburb.



Hackett Community Association chair Chris Mobbs in his beloved suburb. Picture: Karleen Minney

"Now, he's a lovely little gem," he said, revelling in another insight into the developing years of, not only Hackett, but Canberra.

As chair of the Hackett Community Association, Chris helped put together the book, a celebration of the suburb's first 50 years. The first run of the book quickly sold out. It was reprinted and has been on sale at the IGA, just in time for the next party at the Hackett shops on October 26.



Snow in Hackett August, 1965. Picture: Steve Glaznieks.

Hackett the suburb was gazetted on March 19, 1960 and the first residents moved into their new homes in 1963, now 56 years ago. The suburb was named after Sir John Winthrop Hackett an editor of the *West Australian* newspaper and leading supporter of Federation. In 1963, the population was only 156 but rapidly increased to 2067 in 1964. Its 44 streets are named after scientists.

The Hackett book has anecdotes about everything from a brown snake being found in the cupboard of a home in Rivett Street in 1967 to milk money thieves being arrested the same year to the opening of the JB Youngs Value Plus supermarket in 1966, attended by more than 3000 people, accompanied by slightly politically incorrect newspaper ads about "women fighting over bargains". It also mentions the mystery of the Hackett oval trees and mentions a UFO sighting from the shops in 1978.



A 1959 map showing Hackett in Canberra named Hopetown.

Hackett was also home to Canberra's early experiment with "radical" medium-density housing in 1966. In what seems remarkable now, the blocks for the 50 units in Grayson Street did not excite developers, who were cautious about this new kind of housing when Canberrans were more focused on acquiring their quarter-acre block.

A 1959 map for a water reservoir labelled the suburb "Hopetown" which Chris said might have been a bit of wishful thinking on behalf of the engineers, hoping the then remote part of Canberra would be developed. Hackett Primary School opened in May, 1966, with 167 students and by 1974 had 573 pupils. By 1990 the numbers had declined to 148 and it closed in December of that year. Blue Gum Community School is now on the site.

Chris laughs about the "lovely little bit of bureaucracy" which saw in 1966 the National Capital Development Commission call for tenders to build public toilets at the shops, only to inexplicably announce five years later it would not be going ahead with the plan.

"Fifty-three years later and we still don't have public toilets at the shops," he said.

Chris, who retired from the Department of Energy in 2017, has lived in Hackett since 1993, making the big move from neighbouring Ainslie. He was also a ranger for ACT Parks and Conservation in the late 1970s and 1980s.



Chris Mobbs in Hackett, where the bush meets the suburbs. Picture: Karleen Minney

It's the intersection of the bush and the suburb that he loves most about Hackett.

"Five minutes up the road you can be at Mount Majura," he said. "It's also the space, the openness that you probably don't get in some of the newer suburbs."

Party at the Hackett shops is 11am to 3pm on Saturday, October 26. Music, food, jumping castle, stalls and more.