



Research Paper  
No. 25 2000–01

As it was in the Beginning (Parliament House in  
1927)

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I N F O R M A T I O N   A N D   R E S E A R C H   S E R V I C E S

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No. 25 2000-01

As It Was In The Beginning  
(Parliament House in 1927)

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## Introduction

*As It Was In The Beginning* is a re-release of a paper I wrote in 1988 at the time when the national Parliament moved from the old provisional house to the new Parliament House on Capital Hill. At that time there was a degree of interest in the history of the old Parliament House and the paper was designed to give a 'feel' for what Parliament, and to a lesser extent Canberra, was like in 1927 when the national Parliament began sitting there. As well as giving an overview of the reasons for Canberra being chosen as the site for the national capital, the paper details the background of the main political players of the time, the major issues confronting the Parliament and information on the physical design and construction of the building itself. A number of photographs are contained as an appendix to the paper.

Given that 2001 is the year when we celebrate the Centenary of Federation, it was decided that a re-release of the paper may be of interest to Senators and Members and other participants and observers of the federal parliamentary process. Some minor changes have been made to the original paper, including additional photographs of the old Parliament House and the Lodge. As well, some material contrasting the Parliament then and the Parliament now has been added to the 2001 version. It is interesting to note that some of the main issues discussed in the Parliament in 1927 remain just as relevant today as they did then. This is particularly the case with immigration, Aboriginal affairs and the free trade/protection debate. The evident tension between the Parliament and the Executive that was there in 1927 is still there today and even the negative attitudes towards Canberra (held by some of those living outside the ACT) are still alive and well today.

Also worthy of note is the fact that the press/media, right from the beginning, were given office space in the building and this has ensured that they have had a very direct and close relationship with the parliamentarians, a relationship that is arguably closer and more influential than is the case in many other parliamentary democracies.

In the original version I speculated that 'no decision has yet been made on the future use of the old building but it is almost certain to be maintained in its present condition as an historical memento of Australia's parliamentary past'. After some debate about this subject, this has in fact happened and included in the building today is the National Portrait Gallery where visitors can view an extensive range of portraits and images of sporting greats, scientists, explorers and musicians. Visitors are also able to undertake guided tours of the building and view various special exhibitions related to the political history of the old Parliament House.

## Background

May those who enter this open door govern with justice, reason and equal favour to all.  
May they do so in humility and without self interest. May they think and act nationally.  
(Prime Minister Bruce at the opening of Parliament House on 9 May 1927).

The idea for a national capital (and National Parliament House) found its expression in the Federation debates of the 1890s. If the States were to federate and become one nation it would be necessary to choose a site for the seat of national government. The two largest states (New South Wales and Victoria) wanted the national capital to be situated in their respective capital cities and, because agreement could not be reached, a compromise was achieved. The new national capital was to be situated somewhere between Melbourne and Sydney. Accordingly, it was written into the Constitution that 'The seat of Government of the Commonwealth ... shall be within territory which shall have been granted to or acquired by the Commonwealth, and shall be vested in and belong to the Commonwealth, and shall be in the state of New South Wales, and be distant not less than one hundred miles from Sydney' (Section 125).

In the interim period whilst a suitable site was being selected and the attendant planning and construction was completed, the new national Parliament, which opened in 1901, was to sit in Melbourne.

The first ten years of Federation saw intense competition between various towns and districts in southern New South Wales as they vied for the honour of being selected as the site for the new capital. The established towns of Bombala, Tumut, Yass, Dalgety and Albury were all considered as potential sites. A Royal Commission of Inquiry was set up by the Federal Government in 1903 to investigate possible sites but the Inquiry was unable to arrive at a unanimous recommendation. The Parliament itself could not agree on a site, with the House of Representatives voting for Tumut and the Senate opting for Bombala. By 1904, after a delegation of federal politicians visited the area, the Parliament selected Dalgety as the site for the new capital. However, the New South Wales Government had not been consulted and vetoed the decision. Finally, in September 1908, a majority of federal politicians agreed to the Yass-Canberra area, and with New South Wales' concurrence, that became the official site for the new national capital.

One of the more interesting reasons the Canberra site was chosen was given by former Deputy Prime Minister in the Bruce government, Sir Earle Page. Writing in the early 1960s, Page recalled how some of the older members of parliament (Page was elected to the House of Representatives in 1919), engaged in selecting a suitable site, had told him that Canberra was chosen after 'a cavalcade of members travelling between Yass and Canberra ... stopped at a wayside village where their hearts were torn by the sight of an ancient man weeping bitterly ... they alighted and asked the old man why he wept. He replied that his father had just given him a sound hiding. 'But', they replied, 'surely your father cannot still be alive; you yourself must have passed the age of eighty. Why have you been beaten?' To which he answered, 'For throwing stones at my grandfather'. So the



members of parliament made up their minds. If men could live to such a vigorous old age in this environment then surely politicians could survive longer!<sup>1</sup>

The necessary legislation was passed and on 1 January 1911 the Federal Capital Territory came into being. At that time the Territory had a population of only 1714 as well as 224 764 sheep and 1762 horses. It covered an area of only 2356 square kilometres.<sup>2</sup> On 20 February 1913 the then Minister for Home Affairs, King O'Malley, led an inauguration ceremony on Capital Hill to mark the commencement of construction of the new national capital. Three weeks later in a ceremony at the same site, Lady Denman, wife of the then Governor-General, officially named the national capital 'Canberra'. In the following year the Federal Government announced an international competition for the design of a Parliament house. The outbreak of the First World War led to the postponement and ultimately the abandonment of the competition—at significant cost to the Government. It was forced to pay 78 architects a total of just over £3000 compensation for their work.<sup>3</sup>

In 1921 a Federal Capital Advisory Committee suggested that, for cost reasons, a temporary Parliament House could be constructed. This suggestion was taken up by the Government and on 23 July 1923 the Cabinet approved the construction of a provisional Parliament House. At the time it was estimated to cost £220 000 and take two and a half years to complete. The aim was that the building should last 50 years and provision was to be made for 112 Members and 80 Senators even though in 1927 there would only be 76 MHRs and 36 Senators. In fact the building was to end up costing £664 600 plus an additional £250 000 for furniture and fittings.<sup>4</sup> At present day prices the building cost \$30.7 million<sup>5</sup> compared to the latest price for the new and permanent Parliament House of \$1056 million. The life of the building as a legislative chamber was to stretch to 61 years and by 1988 there were 148 Members and 76 Senators. (Also see section on Building and Support Facilities.)

By 1927, when the building was completed, Canberra was still very much a small town lacking many of the amenities that other capital cities enjoyed. 'The capital itself was hardly evident in the landscape, consisting of rows of bungalows in scattered suburbs and three small shopping centres at Civic, Manuka, and Kingston and five temporary hotels providing for the needs of about 5000 people. The Parliament House and two ugly secretariat buildings, East Block and West Block, which were about 400 metres to its rear stood out starkly in the plain which was criss-crossed with dusty roads seemingly leading nowhere through paddocks fully planted with trees'.<sup>6</sup>

The official population of Canberra at the time was 5915.<sup>7</sup> By June 1928, when an official census was taken, the total population of the Federal Capital Territory was 8011 being made up of 4515 males and 3495 females. There were 6116 people who lived in the city area of Canberra. The largest suburb was Duntroon with a population of 839, followed by Fyshwick with 636, Acton 619, Ainslie 598, Yarralumla 514 and Braddon 510. The smallest suburb in the city area was Deakin with only 20 people, of whom 18 were female. By way of contrast Parkes had a population of 59 of whom 57 were male. Outside the city

area 407 people resided at Jervis Bay, 526 at Molongo, 129 at Hall, 58 at Tharwa and 8 at Kambah.<sup>8</sup>

The hotels that existed were 'dry' as prohibition was still in force and people wishing to imbibe had to travel to Queanbeyan. In 1927 it cost £3 per week for a single room at the Kurrajong Hotel and £5 per week for a single room at the Hotel Canberra.

There were 15 public and one private school—St Gabriel's Church of England Girl's Grammar. There was a total of 41 teachers, 33 of whom were employed by the Government. A total of 1265 students were enrolled at the public schools and 64 at St Gabriel's.<sup>9</sup> Canberra was a very expensive place to live, especially when compared to the other State capital cities.

The weighted, cost of living price index figures in regard to food, groceries and housing for the final quarter of 1927 show that Canberrans had by far the highest prices to pay for these necessities. The figures were (with the 1911 base year figure being 1000): Sydney, 1872; Melbourne, 1800; Adelaide, 1747; Perth, 1608; Hobart, 1686; and Canberra, 2368.<sup>10</sup>

At the top end of the housing rental market were timber and brick cottages which the more senior public servants tended to occupy. As at September 1928 the rental range for timber cottages was £2 to £4/16/- a week, whilst for brick cottages the weekly rent ranged from £2/18/- to £4/13/-. There were also 315 workers tenements that were let for between six shillings and thirteen shillings a week. Wages at the time varied between approximately £19/5/- a week for federal politicians to £5/5/- for waiters at Parliament House.<sup>11</sup> According to Frank Green, who moved to Canberra in 1927, and became Clerk of the House from 1937 to 1955, the conditions in the capital were considered so primitive that 'Members of Parliament regarded themselves as enduring the hardship of pioneers, and found that three days a week was as much as they could stand, so railway services were improved to allow them to arrive at the latest hour and leave at the earliest moment consistent with their parliamentary duties ... It was Percy Deane (then Secretary of the Prime Minister's Department) who described the best view of Canberra as 'from the back of the departing train'.<sup>12</sup>

Parliament last met in Melbourne on 24 March 1927. After Speaker Groom announced in the House of Representatives that the House will next meet in Canberra on 9 May the Members present all joined hands, and in best farewell traditions, sang *Auld Lang Syne*.

## **The Opening and First Day of Sitting**

I earnestly hope that we in this Parliament, in common with all other parliaments of the British Commonwealth of Nations, will ever strive to present the peace of the world and direct our efforts to the promotion of the progress and best interests of our people. (Senator Needham, ALP, Western Australia, 9 May 1927).

The formal opening of Parliament House (which was broadcast over radio stations in Queensland, NSW, Victoria and SA and reached over one million people) took place on 9 May 1927 when the Duke of York (later King George VI) used a gold key to unlock the doors of the building. The Duke then handed the key to the Prime Minister, Mr Bruce. The fact that the key was handed to the leader of the Executive and not the true custodians of the Parliament—the Speaker of the House and President of the Senate—was seen to be elevating the Executive to a level above the Parliament. Former Speaker Sir William Johnson 'wrote to his successor, Speaker Groom, protesting that the Duke should hand the key directly to the Speaker or the President as custodians of the respective houses'. 'As it is', he wrote, 'both offices have been by the proposed procedure subordinated to that of the head of the Government'.<sup>13</sup>

Following the unlocking of the doors, the Duke unveiled a statue of King George V in Kings Hall and then proceeded to the Senate Chamber where, in the presence of MHRs, Senators and invited guests, he formally proclaimed the inauguration of parliamentary sittings in Canberra.

The formalities of the opening highlighted the strength of Australia's allegiance and ties to the Crown and the 'Mother Country' in 1927. Bruce, addressing the Duke of York in the Senate Chamber, continually stressed Australia's attachment and devotion to Britain. 'His Majesty the King is the visible symbol of our unity. He is the centre of all our loyalties ... We ask you to convey to His Majesty our devoted homage, and an assurance of our loyalty and affection to his Throne and Person ... We remember with gratitude the fostering care of the Mother Country and the protection we have enjoyed under the British flag. Today it is our solemn duty to reaffirm our faith in our country, and our devotion to the Crown and Empire'.<sup>14</sup>

After the opening ceremony both Houses sat on that day for the first time at 5pm.

In the Senate further formalities related to the opening were completed, notification was given of certain bills that had been assented to and several papers were presented. Senator Pearce (Nat, WA: Vice President of the Executive Council) then moved that leave of absence be granted to all Senators until the day the Senate next sat. This was necessary because the Senate was not due to meet again until 28 September. Section 20 of the Constitution states that 'The place of a Senator shall become vacant if for two consecutive months of any session of the Parliament, he without the permission of the Senate, fails to attend the Senate'. Thus, the granting of leave to all Senators would ensure that the constitutional properties were observed.

Senator Pearce went to great lengths to explain (because 'certain statements, particularly in sections of the Press') why the Parliament would be having such a long recess—from May to September. He outlined the size and complex nature of the administrative machinery related to Parliament and why such a prolonged recess was necessary to facilitate the shift from Melbourne to Canberra.

The final business of the day was the Adjournment Debate. The first disagreement and dispute in the new Senate occurred when Senator Pearce announced that the tabling of a report by the Joint Committee on Public Accounts on the activities of the Australian Commonwealth Shipping Line would be held over until September. He said that this was agreed to by the Leader of the Opposition, Mr Charlton (ALP), in the interests of avoiding party political conflict on such an auspicious occasion as the opening of Parliament House. However, Senator Givens (Nat, Qld) objected strongly 'What right has the Government or any individual member to prevent the Committee from presenting its report today if it desires to do so? Is the Committee prepared to sacrifice its privileges? ... It is deplorable that a violent attack should be made today on the rights of the community and the Senate in such an important respect as this'.<sup>15</sup>

Senator Kingsmill (Nat, WA) strongly supported Senator Givens when he said 'the report is now ready, and I deeply regret that it cannot be tabled today. I disclaim on behalf of the committee, and its chairman, any responsibility for the delay. It cannot be attributed to the committee'.<sup>16</sup>

Despite Senator Givens and Senator Kingsmill's protestations, the report was not debated that day and another incident had occurred that highlighted the tension between the Executive and the Parliament.

In the house similar procedures and formalities occurred, including notification of assent to certain bills. The Speaker, Sir Littleton Groom, then announced the resignation of the Hon. Sir Granville Ryrie (Warringah) and informed the House of the date for the by-election, 21 May. The Prime Minister, Mr Bruce, then moved a motion on similar terms to the one in the Senate that leave be granted to all Members until the House next sat. This motion, indicating the long adjournment until September, brought forth the first hostile comments in the new House from several Members, notably Billy Hughes (Nat, North Sydney). Hughes, an ex-Prime Minister and Member of the House since Federation in 1901, was particularly critical of the long recesses between parliamentary sittings which characterised, according to him, Bruce's stewardship. 'About sixteen months of the term of this Parliament has expired; during that period, it has been in session for about four months. This country would be better governed, and our legislation would be more calculated to promote the prosperity of the country, if we sat more regularly, and if, on being called together at infrequent intervals, we were not obliged to work at high pressure, the Government forcing through legislation almost at the point of a bayonet'.<sup>17</sup>

It is interesting that, even with the best efforts and intentions on such an historic occasion when political and parliamentary differences would be expected to be sublimated to the greater cause (the opening), the Parliament versus Executive tension surfaced so strongly.

## The 1927 Parliamentary Program

I should like the Prime Minister to give honourable members some idea of the date upon which the House will reassemble. It has seemed like one long adjournment since this Government has been in office. (John West, ALP, Member for East Sydney, 9 May 1927).

The parliamentary program was shortened somewhat because of the time needed to shift the Parliament from Melbourne to Canberra. Nevertheless, during the year the House sat for a total of 59 days and the Senate for 44 days. A total of 38 acts were passed of which 35 were initiated by the House and three by the Senate. There was one petition presented to the House and none to the Senate. In the House there were 25 adjournment debates, six matters of public importance and 48 divisions. The committee system (see Appendix 1) was very much underdeveloped when compared with today and most of the deliberations of the committees dealt with domestic housekeeping matters (for example, the Library and printing, as well as the new Parliament House which was dealt with by the Public Works Committee).

The Parliament only sat briefly on 9 May and then, following the long winter recess, it sat from 28 September until 15 December. An interesting question put on the Notice Paper over the recess by Walter Parsons (Nat, Angas SA) related to the place of origin of oranges provided by Canberra hotels at the time of the opening of the new Parliament House. In particular, Parsons wanted to know why Californian oranges were provided and not oranges from South Australia. Charles Marr, the Minister for Home and Territories, replied that the Federal Capital Commission had obtained the Californian oranges for the hotels concerned because the Australian 'market was absolutely bare of local oranges. Difficulty was being experienced in procuring suitable fruit, and there was not time to alter the receipt of the (Californian) oranges in question to make other arrangements' he added that, 'It is a general rule of the Commission to give preference to Australian products'.<sup>18</sup>

Preliminary proceeding got off to a sad start in the new building. The House of Representatives lost two Clerks in quick succession—on 27 July Walter Gale died in his Parliament House office, and his successor, John McGregor, died on the night of 28 September. Frank Green (who was then Clerk Assistant) described the latter event thus: 'I was sitting in an alcove (in the Chamber) from where I could see the new Clerk, and had arranged for him to give a certain signal if he wanted me. As I was watching McGregor I saw him slump suddenly in his chair. I hurried to the back entrance of the Chamber, and as I got there he was being carried out by two doctor Members, Earle Page and Sir Neville Prowse. I took the vacant seat and business proceeded. McGregor died that night'.<sup>19</sup>

Within minutes of Green taking over from McGregor, the Treasurer, Earle Page was back in the House to bring down his fifth consecutive Budget. He started his delivery at 4.23 p.m. and spoke for one hour and twenty minutes. He explained that the Government planned to raise about £62 million in revenue for the 1927–28 financial year and spend an amount just less than that. As it turned out his plans for a small surplus were frustrated

when the projected returns from customs and excise revenue were not met. Page outlined reductions in both income and land tax rates and gave details of an ambitious scheme to place Federal–State financial relations on a more stable and secure footing. At this time the Commonwealth's main revenue raiser was customs and excise levies (estimated to raise approximately £44 million) with direct taxes, notably income tax, only contributing approximately £14 million.

On the expenditure side, the Budget allowed just over £14 million for payments to the States; over £9 million for invalid and old age pensions and £100 000 for the purchase of 10 grams of radium for use by hospitals in the fight against cancer. There was to be an increase of almost £17 000 in the estimates of the Parliament to help cover the cost of the shift to Canberra.

During debate on Supply Bill No. 2 (1927–28) the thorny issue of immigration was raised by the Leader of the Opposition, Matthew Charlton. He maintained that 'two years ago the Prime Minister said that we were maintaining a certain balance and that all but about 10 per cent (of total immigrants) were British ... The figures for six months ended the 30<sup>th</sup> of June show clearly that there has been one non British immigrant to every three British immigrants'. Charlton was not only concerned about the number of non-British immigrants but also the number of immigrants in total ... 'We cannot afford to allow thousands of our own workmen to remain unemployed while strangers come here and secure work. We must, therefore, do something to restrain the influx of these migrants'.<sup>20</sup>

Before the Budget debate was completed Mr Charlton moved a motion of no confidence in the Government for its decision to sell the Commonwealth Shipping Line. Hughes, who was Prime Minister when the Shipping Line was established, was particularly critical of the decision. 'The Line is my progeny and whether it be unique or a monstrosity I, like most parents, am still attached to the poor thing'.<sup>21</sup>

The Government maintained that the Line was too expensive and caused higher freight rates whilst the Opposition claimed that it saved the key primary industries that exported agricultural products millions of pounds. The Opposition motion was defeated 40 to 23 and the shipping Line was sold to Lord Kysant, on behalf of the White Star Line, for £1 900 000. However, the Government did not collect all the proceeds from the sale. 'Lord Kysant took the ships, paid a deposit and two instalments, and Australia was left as an unsecured creditor of Lord Kysant to the extent of about seven hundred thousand pounds'. He was later 'sentenced to one year's imprisonment for fraud'.<sup>22</sup>

Debates on matters of public importance covered a variety of issues including aboriginal affairs, the purchase of radium and the import duty charged on empty Australian wine casks. On 20 October, related to the first issue, the Member for Angas, Walter Parsons (Nat, SA), presented a petition (the only one presented to the Parliament in 1927) from 7113 residents of Australia stating that the Aboriginal races are dying out, and praying that a model Aboriginal State be established. Eight days later a matter of public importance on the 'Exploitation of aboriginal labour in North Australia' was debated. The motion was

moved by Harold Nelson (ALP, NT) who went on to outline why he believed exploitation of Aboriginal labour was taking place. He maintained that Aboriginal workers were being paid three shillings a week when the award wage was £5 a week. The Member for Bass, David Jackson (Nat, Tas.), stated that, 'We have been in possession of those lands for nearly 150 years, yet what have we in spite of our superior civilization done towards educating them (the Aborigines) along these lines? I assert that more has been done to 'syphilize' than to civilize them'. He went on to say that 'the aborigines of the Northern Territory are of fine stature but with the mind of an infant'.<sup>23</sup>

When the question was put, the House divided along party lines with 17 ayes and 32 noes.

In his Budget, the Treasurer, Sir Earle Page, outlined plans for the Government to purchase £100 000 of radium to be used in the fight against cancer. The fact that the radium was to be purchased from overseas led the Member for Grey, Andrew Lacey (ALP) to move, on 15 November, that the House adjourn to discuss the matter. Lacey argued that there was an Australian company at Mt Painter (SA) producing radium and that the Government should purchase the radium from that company and not from Belgium as planned. The Government case was put by Sir Neville Howse, the Minister for Repatriation, who argued that the Australian company was not capable of delivering the radium in the time span required and that the Government therefore had no choice but to purchase the radium from overseas.

On 18 November the Senate debated a matter of public importance as moved by Senator Sir Henry Barwell (Nat, SA), namely, 'The action of the Government in charging a tariff duty on empty wine casks of Australian manufacture which having been exported with Australian wine are afterwards re-imported to Australia for refilling'.<sup>24</sup> Sir Henry told the Senate that until 'recently the casks were re-admitted to Australia free of duty, but a month or two ago a duty of £1/9/9 per cask was imposed, although the second hand value of the casks in London is only seven shillings and sixpence each'.<sup>25</sup> He blamed the Coopers Union (whose members made wine casks) for pressuring the Government into imposing the duty. Presumably the Union foresaw more work for its members if less wine casks were re-imported. The Government side was put by Senator Crawford (Honorary Minister) who led off by saying that 'after the debate that has taken place this morning honourable Senators will agree that the old saying, "empty vessels make the most sound", is one worthy of all acceptance'.<sup>26</sup> Crawford argued that the wine industry could afford to pay such a duty and generous industry support was provided by the Government to the tune of £500 000. At the conclusion of the debate Senator Sir Henry Barwell, satisfied that he had brought the matter before the Senate, withdrew the motion.

On 24 November Senator Grant (ALP, NSW) moved a motion that, 'immediate steps be taken by the Government to establish, equip and operate a transmitting station at Canberra to secure the broadcasting of Senators' speeches'.<sup>27</sup> Grant argued that, 'wireless ought to be fully utilised whenever possible' and because the press do not adequately cover the proceedings of Parliament, a broadcasting station should be set up in Canberra 'so that the speeches of honourable Senators may be heard with pleasure by thousands of people'. He

estimated that the cost of a 5 kilowatt broadcasting station would be £12 000 plus the cost of land and buildings.<sup>28</sup> Opposing the motion Senator Duncan (Nat, NSW) stated, 'have we no pity for the poor unfortunate electors? ...The people are not interested in the doings of this parliament to the extent of desiring they hear individual addresses'. However, he did advance one reason as to why the broadcasting of Parliament might be a good idea. He said that for some time the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research 'has been seeking a means of combating the prickly pear, which in portions of Australia has become a pest. If the poison gas from this chamber could be conveyed to the areas affected by prickly pear it might confer a benefit on Australia'.<sup>29</sup> Senator Grant's motion was defeated and it was not until 1946 that parliamentary broadcasting via the ABC began.

An issue that had its gestation in late 1927 and which was to continue to be an issue in 1928 and ultimately bring the Government down in 1929 was industrial relations and wage fixing. In December 1927 a complex Bill was introduced into the Parliament which aimed to give the Government more direct control over wage levels. Included in the Bill was a requirement 'that before making any award or certifying any agreement the (Arbitration) court should "take into consideration the probable economic effect of the agreement or award in relation to the community in general and the probable economic effect thereof upon the industry or industries concerned". In reply to Labor's outcry, the Government denied its intention was to reduce wages, and, in token of that, exempted the basic wage from this directive'.<sup>30</sup> The Bill also contained provisions that would enable the Court to deregister unions or other organisations that failed to take adequate steps to stop strikes or lockouts. The court could also fine organisations for inciting violence or threats of abuse that were aimed at stopping workers from working in accordance with an award. Predictably the unions were outraged at the provisions of the Bill.

Within months of the new Arbitration Act being passed in 1928 'the industrial scene erupted into lawlessness—defiance of the Arbitration Court's authority and defiance of the law by men left unemployed when others had taken their jobs'. However, the unions were not collectively strong enough and with 10 per cent unemployed 'the unions were defeated'.<sup>31</sup> Ironically, it was when the Government changed tack and attempted to abandon the field of industrial arbitration to the states in August 1929 that several backbenchers sided with the Opposition and brought the Government down. (Also see section on The Ministry p. 14).

## **The Politicians**

Politicians receive many hard knocks. No doubt they enjoy compensating privileges, but I believe that very few people outside recognize how strenuous is parliamentary work, how great a toll it takes, and how great a draft it is upon the vitality of men who conscientiously do their duty. (Frank Brennan, ALP, Member for Batman, 24 March 1927).



There were 112 politicians in the Federal Parliament when it moved to Canberra in 1927. (See Appendix 1 for a full list of Senators and Members in 1927.) There were 36 Senators and 76 Members. The Nationalist/Country Party Coalition was in Government and clearly had the numbers (see Appendices 13 and 14 showing party affiliation) in both Houses. The Parliament consisted only of men and it was another 16 years before the first woman was elected. (Dame Enid Lyons was elected to the seat of Darwin [Tasmania] in 1943). Their salary was £1000 per annum and there was no general change in that salary until 1947, when it was increased by £500. (In fact during the Great Depression politicians salaries were reduced. In 1932 they received £750 per annum and it was not until 1938 that they were restored to their 1927 level.)

The politicians who took their seats in 1927 were a diverse lot (except that they were all male). There were 34 New South Welshmen (28 MHRs and 6 Senators); 26 Victorians (20 and 6); 16 Queenslanders (10 and 6); 11 Western Australians (5 and 6); 12 South Australians (7 and 6); 11 Tasmanians (5 and 6) and 1 from the Northern Territory. There were 29 farmers, graziers and pastoralists; 15 lawyers; 6 miners; 6 journalists and 4 school teachers. The average age of the MHRs was 52 compared with 56 in the Senate. The youngest Member was Roland Green, 32 (Richmond, NSW), who had lost a leg in the Great War. The oldest Member was John West (East Sydney NSW), 76, a plumber by occupation. Eighty three of the 112 Members were born in Australia and the remainder were born in either New Zealand or the United Kingdom. Thirty per cent of Members had a secondary education and 22 per cent had a tertiary qualification.<sup>32</sup>

(By the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century this profile of Senators and Members has changed quite dramatically from that of 1927. There are now 55 female Members sitting in the Federal Parliament, 22 in the Senate and 33 in the House of Representatives. The average age of Senators is now 50.6 years and the average age of MHRs is 48.6 years. The oldest sitting Member of Parliament is now 68 years of age and the youngest is 28 years of age. The current Parliament has 195 Australian born representatives and 29 born overseas, including 11 from the United Kingdom, four from New Zealand and two from Italy).

The 'grand old man' of the House was Billy Hughes (Nat, Bendigo, Vic.) who had been a Member of the House since 1901.

Hughes (1862–1952) served a record 50 years (1901 to 1952) in the Federal Parliament as well as being a Member of the New South Wales Legislative Assembly from 1894 to 1901. He was originally a Member of the Labor Party and he served principally as Attorney-General in Labor ministries up to 1915. In 1915 he succeeded Andrew Fisher (Labor) as Prime Minister, a position he held until 1923. In 1917, quitting the Labor Party, he formed the new Nationalist Party whilst still managing to stay on as Prime Minister. In 1923 he was forced to resign and his position was taken over by Stanley Bruce. He proved to be a continual thorn in the side of the Bruce-Page Government and was instrumental in bringing about its downfall in 1929. Hughes had sided with the Labor Party on the handling of conciliation and arbitration matters and ... 'In August (1929), when the Government sought to abandon industrial arbitration to the States, Hughes with a small

group of Nationalist malcontents, organised its defeat by one vote. The result in doubt till the last, Hughes is said to have mounted guard over one waverer in the billiard room to prevent him being "got at" during the dinner break'.<sup>33</sup> For his role in bringing down the Government, Hughes was expelled from the Nationalist Party in 1929.

Hughes, never one to give up, was returned to the Ministry in the Lyons United Australia Party Government in the 1930s. In 1939 he was narrowly defeated for the leadership of the UAP by Robert Menzies following the death of Lyons. He was expelled from this third political party in 1944 when he cooperated, against his Party's instructions, with the Labor Party on the War Advisory Council. In 1945 he joined the new Liberal Party and remained in that Party until his death in 1952. Over his Federal parliamentary career he held four different House of Representatives seats, West Sydney, 1901–17; Bendigo, 1917–31; North Sydney, 1931–49 and Bradfield, 1949–52.

In 1927 there were only three other Members, apart from Hughes, who had served continuously since Federation (although 43 Members had served the parliament for at least 10 years). They were Sir Littleton Groom, Speaker of the House (Nat, Darling Downs, Qld); David Watkins (ALP, Newcastle, NSW) and Senator Sir George Pearce (Nat, WA) who was, in 1927, Vice President of the Executive Council.

Littleton Groom was elected to the seat of Darling Downs (Qld) just after Federation. Groom's father (W. H. Groom) delivered the first speech in the House of Representatives when it met in Melbourne in 1901 and had the dubious honour of being the first Member of the House to die in office. He died in August 1901 and was replaced at a by-election by his son Littleton, who held the seat of Darling Downs until 1929, only to be returned again at the 1931 election. He was a Minister in the Deakin, Cook, Hughes and Bruce-Page Ministries, mainly in the role as Attorney-General. He was Speaker from January 1926 until the downfall (in which he played a prominent part, see section on the Ministry) of the Bruce-Page Government in October 1929. He died in 1936.

David Watkins, like Hughes, Groom and Pearce, served a large proportion of his life in the service of the Federal Parliament. However, he did not reach the heights of the other three. He was a member of the Labor Party and was elected to the seat of Newcastle (NSW) in 1901 and held that seat until his death in April 1935. Throughout that whole period he remained a backbencher.

One of the most distinguished Members of the tenth Parliament was Senator Sir George Pearce. Pearce represented Western Australia from 1901 to 1938, began as a Labor Senator, switched to the Nationalists in 1917 and then to the United Australia Party in 1931. He was Minister for Defence in the three Fisher (Labor) Ministries between 1908–09, 1910–13 and 1914–15, and in the four Hughes Governments to December 1921. Following this he was the Minister for Home and Territories from 1921 to 1926, Vice President of the Executive Council from 1926 to 1929, Leader of the Opposition in the Senate from 1930 to 1931, and Minister for External Affairs/Territories from 1934 to 1937. He resigned from Cabinet in 1937 following his defeat at the general elections of

that year. During the years of the Bruce-Page Ministry he was a close confidant of the Prime Minister. According to Bruce, 'Much of my courage as Prime Minister was due to Pearce's pricking me on'.<sup>34</sup>

The only backbencher in the Parliament at this time to become Prime Minister (with the exception of Francis Forde who was Prime Minister for one week in 1945) was James Scullin (ALP). Scullin was first elected to the House of Representatives in 1910. In that year he won the seat of Corangamite (Vic.) but was defeated at the next general election in 1913. He was a journalist by profession and it was a further nine years before he was again elected to Federal Parliament. In 1922 he won the seat of Yarra (Vic.) and in 1928 he became the leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party. The downfall of the Bruce-Page Government in 1929 saw Scullin become the first Australian-born Labor Prime Minister. In 1931 as the effects of the Great Depression began to wreak economic havoc the Scullin Government fell and was replaced by the Lyons United Australia Party Government. Scullin stayed on as ALP leader until 1935 and it was not until 1949 that he left the House of Representatives at the age of 73. He died four years later.

The Leader of the Opposition during the first year of operation of the Parliament in Canberra was Matthew Charlton. He was elected the Member for Hunter (NSW) in 1910 and held the seat until 1928. Prior to entering the Federal Parliament he was a Member of the NSW Legislative Assembly from 1903 to 1909. In 1922 Charlton became leader of the ALP following the death of Frank Tudor and he remained leader until he resigned in March 1928. Throughout his term as Leader of the Opposition he failed to make any real impression on the Parliament and the Bruce-Page Government. 'It was being said privately that Matt (Charlton) was too stodgy, that the party could never win under his leadership'.<sup>35</sup>

Some of the newer Members in the Parliament at this time were Sir John Gellibrand (Nat, Denison, Tas.); Henry Gullett (Nat, Henty, Vic.) and Dr Lewis Nott (Nat, Herbert, Qld). All three were elected in 1925. Gellibrand was one of Australia's most distinguished generals in the First World War and the founder of Legacy, the organisation which cares for the dependants of deceased servicemen. Gellibrand was to serve only one term, he was defeated in his seat of Denison at the 1928 election.

Henry Gullett, (later Sir Henry), was one of the authors responsible for the official history of the First World War, during which he was a war correspondent. He was later to serve in the Lyons and Menzies Ministries until his tragic death in a plane crash near Canberra Airport in August 1940.

Lewis Nott, like Gellibrand, was defeated at the 1928 election and later became the Superintendent of the Canberra Hospital. However, he returned to the Federal Parliament in 1949 as the first member for the ACT. He served in that capacity from 1949 to 1951.

In 1927 the Parliament was a very different place to what it is today and the politicians (and staff) had to suffer a variety of hardships. During the first year after the opening of the new building, no alcohol was permitted to be sold on the premises. This was a legacy

of King O'Malley who was the Minister for Home Affairs when NSW ceded the Territory to the Commonwealth in 1911. It was not until mid-1928 that a referendum was taken in Canberra on the prohibition issue and a majority (2218 to 2161) voted to repeal the 'dry' ordinance. According to Green, Parliament House was a 'dreary place' during the prohibition period:

... in spite of the display of 'soft' drinks on the shelves. At one stage some ginger wine was added to the stock and there were rumours that it contained a low alcoholic content, but to whisky and beer connoisseurs it was such a revolting beverage that nobody was strong enough to give it a complete test. There was no ban on Members bringing a private supply with them, and so there was considerable amount of exchange of hospitality in the building. This caused one Member to remark in the House when the question of a liquor referendum was voiced, 'It is evident that some zealous reformers want to substitute the buying and selling of liquor in Canberra for the present hospitable practice under which we give it away to each other'.<sup>36</sup>

## The Ministry

The Cabinet System ... is of all forms of constitution the most delicate in its adjustments and, therefore, the most easily thrown out of gear. Depending for the most part upon conventions, perpetually adapting itself to new conditions, social and political, subject to continuous modifications in details, it demands from those responsible for its working unceasing vigilance, a clear apprehension alike of practical conditions and philosophical implications: above all it demands a reverence, almost religious in character, for the inner spirit which has inspired and still inspires it. (J. A. R. Marriott, 1927, as quoted in L. F. Crisp, *Australian National Government*, Longman Cheshire, Melbourne, 1983, p. 350).

The Bruce-Page Ministry (at 28 September 1927) only had 13 Members and of those, there were three Honorary Ministers without portfolio and a Vice President of the Executive Council, (see Appendix 1 for a list of the full Ministry). Thus, the main portfolios and workload were in the hands of only nine men (Bruce himself held three portfolios: Prime Minister, External Affairs and Health).

Stanley Bruce was first elected in 1917 when he won the seat of Flinders (Vic.). His background in business led him continually to stress the need for business methods in government. One of his greatest achievements was the engineering of one of the most powerful and durable alliances in Australian politics—the coalition between the Nationalists and the Country Parties. This later was transformed into coalitions between the UAP and the Country Party, and the Liberal Party and the Country Party. He was Prime Minister from 1923 to 1929 and was brought down by disaffection within his own Party (see section on The Politicians). At the 1929 election he even lost his own seat and although returned again as Member for Flinders in 1931 he never again was a force in domestic politics. He resigned from Parliament in 1933 and held various overseas posts in the late 1930s and early to mid-1940s. He became the first Chancellor of the Australian

National University in 1951. He died in London in 1967 and his ashes were returned to Australia and scattered over Lake Burley Griffin in Canberra.

Bruce's deputy, Earle Page, was elected for the seat of Cowper (NSW) in 1919—a seat he held until 1961. He was leader of the Country Party from 1921 until 1939. He in fact became Prime Minister for 12 days from 7 April to 26 April 1938 in the interim period between the fall of the Lyons Government and the coming to power of the first Menzies Ministry.

He became Treasurer and Deputy Prime Minister in the Nationalist-Country Party Coalition in 1923 and held both these positions until 1929. In his role as Treasurer he oversaw two very important economic developments that were to alter radically the balance of power between the Federal and State governments—the establishment of the Loans Council in 1924 and the Commonwealth State Financial Agreement of 1928. Page's political career did not finish in 1929. He was Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Commerce from 1934 to 1939. He lost his leadership of the Country Party in the latter year following a strong personal attack on Prime Minister Menzies. He was Minister for Health from 1949 to 1956 and then saw out his years as a backbencher. He died in 1961 just after losing his seat at the general elections of that year.

Probably the third most prominent Member of the Ministry was John Latham, the Attorney-General from 1926 to 1929. He was elected as an Independent in 1922 to the seat of Kooyong (Vic.). In 1925 he joined the Nationalists and replaced Littleton Groom as Attorney-General in 1926. When the Government was defeated in 1929 he became Leader of the Opposition. In 1931 he stood down from this position in favour of J. A. Lyons, the leader of the new United Australia Party. Latham held several portfolios in the Lyons Government before retiring from politics in 1934. In 1935 he was made Chief Justice of the High Court, a position he held until 1952. He died in Melbourne in 1964.

Charles Marr was the Minister for Home and Territories and played a key role in facilitating the shift of Parliament from Melbourne to Canberra. He started his working life as a junior assistant in the Postmaster General's Department and, in 1912, he supervised the erection of the first of Australia's chain of wireless telegraph stations at Pennant Hills, NSW. He served with distinction in the First World War and in 1919 won the seat of Parkes (NSW) as a Nationalist. He was Government Whip in 1921–22 and an Honorary Minister (1925–27) before becoming Minister for Home and Territories. He lost his seat in 1929 only to be returned again in 1931. In the Lyons Government he held the portfolios of Health, Repatriation and Territories. He was defeated in 1943 and died in October 1960.

William Gibson served as Postmaster General in the Bruce-Page Government from February 1923 to October 1929. He was born at Gisborne (Vic.) in 1869 and had a farming background before entering politics. In 1928 he defeated J. H. Scullin in the seat of Corangamite (Vic.) and became the first member of the Farmers' Union Party (later Country Party) to be elected to the Federal Parliament. Just before becoming Postmaster

General he was elevated to Deputy Leader of the Country Party. He was a very active Minister and he used his position to further the interests of people in rural areas. 'It was a role in which he could combine his interest in technology with his commercial and political skills. Viewing his post as a mission to decrease the isolation of country dwellers, he pursued four different approaches: construction of more telephone lines; extension of the network of roadside mail deliveries; building of post offices in country districts; and encouragement and regulation of the infant radio broadcasting services'.<sup>37</sup> He lost his seat in 1929 but, like Marr, was returned again in 1931. In 1934 he won a Senate seat in Victoria as a combined United Australia Party-Country Party candidate. He retired from Parliament in 1947 and died in 1955.

Senator Herbert Pratten was Minister for Trade and customs from mid-1924 to mid-1928. He was born in Britain in 1865 and was actively engaged in industry after he came to Australia in the early 1880s. He was three times the Mayor of Ashfield, Sydney, and three times the President of the NSW Chamber of Manufactures. He was elected as a Nationalist Senator for NSW in 1917 but transferred to the House of Representatives seat of Parramatta (NSW) in December 1921. In June 1924 he became Minister for Trade and Customs and died whilst still serving in that position in May 1928.

William Hill, Minister for Works and Railways from August 1924 to November 1928, was born in Victoria and, among other things, worked for the Victorian Railways before entering Federal Parliament. Between 1916 and 1919 Hill was the Founding President of the Victorian Farmers' Union, a body which pledged to send farmers to both State and Federal Parliaments. He won the seat of Echuca (Vic.) in 1919 as a Victorian Farmers' Union candidate and helped form the Country Party in 1920. In his role as Minister for Works and Railways his 'major achievements' were: 'the standardization of the railway gauges by construction of the line from Kyogle, NSW, to South Brisbane; the construction of the rail line from Oodnadatta, SA to Alice Springs in pursuit of the dream of a north-south transcontinental line; the introduction of a Federal aid road scheme to subsidise States for highway construction; and the building of the Hume Weir'.<sup>38</sup> He retired from politics in 1934 and the new Member for Echuca was John McEwen, future leader of the Federal Country Party. Hill died in Victoria in 1939.

Senator Sir Thomas Glasglow was Minister for Defence from April 1927 to October 1929. He was born in Queensland in 1876 and saw service in the Boer War and the First World War. In the latter conflict he rose to the rank of Major General and was mentioned nine times in despatches. In 1919 he was elected to the Senate as a Nationalist (Qld) and served in the Bruce-Page Ministry as Minister for Home and Territories before becoming Defence Minister. During his stewardship the Government completed its five year defence program which increased the citizen army to 5000 and expanded and modernised the Air Force. From 1929 to 1931 he was Deputy Opposition Leader in the Senate. He lost his seat in 1931 and in 1939 was appointed Australia's first High Commissioner in Canada. He returned to Australia in 1945 and died in Brisbane in 1955.

Thomas Paterson was Minister for Markets and Migration from June 1926 to January 1928. He was elected as the Country Party Member for Gippsland in 1922 and held the seat until he retired in 1943. In January 1928 his portfolio was changed to Minister for Markets and in December of that year it was again changed to Minister for Markets and Transport.

Although in office from 1923 to 1929, the Bruce-Page Ministry was not as united and cohesive as it could have been. 'The resulting composite (Bruce-Page) Ministry—in whose selection both Nationalist and Country party leaders had a hand—was far from being in all respects a happy ship. It was finally shipwrecked as a direct result of a Backbench mutiny led by Hughes in 1929'.<sup>39</sup> It was not only Hughes who played a pivotal role in bringing down the Government. The Speaker, Sir Littleton Groom also was a key player. On 10 September 1929, during the committee stage of the Maritime Industries Bill (certain sections of which repealed the Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Acts and Industrial Peace Acts and which essentially gave the field of industrial legislation to the States) an amendment was moved that the Act would not come into effect until either a referendum was held on the matter or there was a general election. Prime Minister Bruce made it clear that if the amendment was passed he would call an early election (the last election had been held in November 1928). The amendment was agreed to 35 to 34 with Speaker Groom following his usual practice of not voting in Committee. Bruce duly called a general election and was defeated.

## **The Building and Support Facilities**

The fact that the parliament has been sitting for years in one place and will for the future sit in another leaves every person in Australia much the same as he was before. The old men will assemble in the new house: they will be 'National' or 'provincial' as they were before, and will continue to believe that the last opinion which they expressed was wiser than an earlier one ... Parliamentary warfare is not likely to undergo a change in the new surroundings. There will be misrepresentation, conscious or unconscious; satire, ponderous and pointed; argument, close to and wide of the mark; facts which look like fiction, and fiction dressed to look like facts. (The Melbourne *Argus*, 10 May 1927).

As outlined briefly in the first section of this paper, the Cabinet approved the construction of a provisional Parliament House in July 1923. At about that time a Report was issued by the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works which outlined the plans and accommodation details for the proposed building (see Appendix 1) showing plans and specifications of the proposed building. In the Report the Committee described the building as having '... foundations of concrete, walls of Commonwealth bricks externally rough casted or white plastered above the floor line. Internally, the walls would be cement plastered and tinted in water paint above the dadoes; the roof would be of Commonwealth tiles; the floor of the legislative chambers and of the library and reception halls of thin hardwood blocks over a layer of concrete. In the ordinary rooms, the proposal is for hardwood flooring boards on joists. The lavatories would be tiled, and the terraces and

garden paths would have bricks or brick tiles; the outside steps would be of concrete, with granolithic or similar finish. The joinery is proposed to be of timbers which have been seasoning at Canberra for years, such as maple, blackwood, cedar and black bean ...<sup>40</sup>

The plan of the building and environs provided for accommodation on two floors: the main floor housing the two legislative Chambers; a library; party rooms and offices; a reception hall; room for Press representatives; recreation space and space for public galleries and other functions related to the Parliament.

On 28 August 1923 the first sod on the site was turned by the Hon. P. G. Stewart, Minister for Works and Railways. The preparation of the site 'consisted of equalizing the ground levels on either flank of the proposed building and the preparation of the ground area ... About 50 000 cubic yards (of soil) were removed and deposited'.<sup>41</sup>

By late 1925 there were 250 tradesmen working on the site and by mid-1926 all the brickwork had been completed. The plasterers then moved in using the scaffolding left by the bricklayers.

One prominent visitor to the site in late 1925, A. P. Herbert (editor of Punch magazine), described his experience thus: 'I crawled under a ladder, put my foot in some cement, and entered the great Parliament House. We heard a noise like a battle. Our guide peered through a forest of beams into a space floored with corrugated iron, in the middle of which a concrete mixer was noisily at work. "That is the Senate", he shouted. He took us to look at a crowd of men hard at work in a cloud of dust, "the Lower House", he said with a proud gesture. Finally, they took us out to a grand terrace. Our friend pointed to an empty field and said "That is the National Library". "Remarkable", we said; and so it was, for at that moment there was passing through the National Library a real Australian cow'.<sup>42</sup>

When the structural work was completed, tenders were called for tradesmen to do the finishing work. The firm that had built the Hotel Canberra was awarded the contract for laying the bitumen roof and carpenters, using, amongst other materials, oregon from the forests near Bungendore, were fixing the ceiling rafters and joists. And in the best Federation spirit the metal window frames were manufactured by an engineering firm in Sydney; a Melbourne firm installed the various kitchen equipment; a South Australian firm manufactured the furniture and Grace Brothers (Sydney) and Myer (Melbourne) put in the floor coverings and carpets. 'By Anzac Day 1927, all the tradesmen had moved out of the building and Parliament House was being tidied and dressed for the opening day'.<sup>43</sup>



According to Butler there were a total of 63 offices in the building in 1927 and they were used as follows:<sup>44</sup>

	<b>Number of Offices (Approximately)</b>	<b>Number of People (Approximately)</b>
Cabinet Ministers	12	12
Chairmen of Committees	2	2
Leaders of Opposition	2	2
Party Whips	5	5
Ex President	1	1
Ex Prime Minister	1	1
Ministers' Secretaries	6	12
Senate Staff	9	15
House Representative Staff	8	21
Library Staff	6	14
Hansard Staff	5	15
Joint House Staff	1	1
Parliamentary Committees Staff	3	5
Parliamentary Draftsman	1	1
Secretary PM's Department	1	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>108</b>

The accommodation allowed two rooms per Minister, one for the Minister and one for his secretary. Cabinet meetings were generally held at West Block when Parliament was not sitting. However, in 1933 the cabinet room was transferred to Parliament House, where it still adjoins the Prime Minister's office.

The table above shows that, at this time, approximately 85 official staff were employed at Parliament House (excluded are kitchen staff, waiters etc.) servicing the needs of the politicians. The largest contingent was in the Department of the House of Representatives with 21 staff; followed by the Senate with 15; Hansard, 15; Library staff, 14; and Ministers' secretaries, 12.

Overcrowding was a problem from the beginning. 'The transfer of the Cabinet room from West Block to Parliament house and subsequent increases in the Ministry over the years ... and the need for Ministers to employ additional staff in the House itself, presented problems of office accommodation. At first the problem was overcome by subdividing some of the larger rooms, by converting four small corridors, two strangers' rooms and a toilet into offices, and enclosing verandahs adjoining the courtyards. As a result of these alterations the number of individual offices available had increased to 83 by 1939'.<sup>45</sup>

(By way of contrast, the new Parliament House has over 3500 people working in it on sitting days. There are 4500 rooms in the building covering a total area 240 000 square metres. There are approximately 28 kilometres of corridors and all Senators and Members have their own ensembles and kitchenettes in their offices).

Compared with today, the politicians of 1927 had little support to help them prepare speeches and answer correspondence. They did not have their own office and therefore they had to work in the party rooms. There were few secretaries, no assistants to help them and a total library staff of only 14 meant that members were largely left to their own devices. It was to be many years before even minimum support was provided. In 1944 cabinet decided 'that secretary/typists should be provided for all Senators and Members of the House of Representatives who desired such assistance'.<sup>46</sup>

(Today, backbenchers are entitled to three full-time staff, typically an electorate secretary and two researchers. Ministers, as well as the three staff they are entitled to as backbenchers, can have between eight to 10 staff, depending on the size/importance of the portfolio carried and the Prime Minister has a private staff of approximately 30 people.)

The feat of moving the Parliamentary (and National) Library was a great achievement in itself. A total of 108 800 volumes was moved from Melbourne to Canberra between November 1926 and March 1927 and 'not a single book was lost or even damaged'.<sup>47</sup> The space provided for the Library was not overly generous and led the then Assistant Parliamentary Librarian, Kenneth Binns, to comment on the proposed arrangements thus: 'I do not think the suggested assignments are ideal, but the plans were prepared before we were consulted, and it was a case of accepting the least inconvenient arrangement'.<sup>48</sup> Only three rooms were to be provided for Library staff, one for the Librarian, one for the Assistant Librarian and one for the Accountant. As well there was to be space for a reading room and bookshelves of volumes, an area for newspapers and periodicals, and rooms for storage of books, catalogues and newspapers. The annual salary of the Parliamentary Librarian in 1927, Mr Wadsworth, was £1000. (The Act of Parliament of 1960 which created the National Library and, eventually a great building, was visionary in that it allowed the Parliamentary Library to further develop [and from 1966 the Research Service] the provision of information and research to Senators and Members across the political spectrum. As a result the Parliament has been helped in its task of keeping the Executive accountable).

The Press were to be housed on the Upper Floor of the new building with offices on both the House of Representatives and the Senate side of the Parliament. Press Galleries were included to look down into both chambers with seating for 80 journalists in each chamber. This space was obviously reduced in the final plan as the galleries have never had sufficient space for that number.

The access and privileges of the Press Gallery in relation to the new building were restricted compared with the situation today. In a letter written to the Prime Minister on 26 September 1927, Speaker Groom said that 'we are endeavouring to arrange with the Press to enter the House by the lower floor and to their rooms directly by the lift. During the sittings of the House should members of the Press desire to see a Minister, it is suggested that the Press can go to the King's Hall and send in a card to the Minister. If the Minister is willing to see him, he may then see him either in the King's Hall or in his own private room'. By way of reply on 5 October, Bruce said, 'I entirely concur with the

arrangements which have been made in regard to the admission of the Press to Parliament House'.<sup>49</sup> To formalise the arrangements, Prime Minister Bruce wrote to all his Ministers informing them of the decision.

## **Sixty one years on—Moving House**

It was envisaged that the Provisional Parliament House would serve as the seat of the Commonwealth Government for 50 years. Sixty one years later the building was still functioning as the national legislature—the last sitting was held in June 1988.

Apart from close physical proximity, there was a degree of continuity when the seat of the National Parliament changed geographical location. As well as the politicians and staff directly transferring from the old to the new Parliament House, there was symbolic continuity. Many of the important symbols of Parliament that have been very much associated with the history of the provisional building were transferred up the hill.

With respect to the two chambers, the most important symbols that were transferred were the Mace and the two Despatch Boxes from the House, and the Black Rod from the Senate. Importantly, it was decided that both the Speaker's Chair and the President's Chair would not be transferred. Neither were the main Tables and the Sandglasses from both Chambers.

Other items that were transferred to the new building include certain works of art and other memorabilia that used to be sited in Kings Hall or other areas of the provisional building.

Just as Senators and Members bemoaned the move from Melbourne's Parliament House to Canberra, so too, were they to bemoan the much shorter move from the inadequate old Parliament House to the grander new Parliament House. Old Parliament House had, over time, developed some very well established and much loved traditions and cultures. Nostalgia about these can occasionally still be heard (or remains) among the 25 per cent of Senators and Members who once worked within its walls.

## **Endnotes**

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## **Appendix 1: Various Information and Data on Parliament House 1927**

**Government:** Bruce-Page Coalition (from 9 February 1923 to 22 October 1929).

**Tenth Parliament First Session.** General election: 14 November 1925. Opened: 13 January 1926. House's last sitting day: 21–22 September 1928. Dissolution: 9 October 1928.

### **Bruce-Page Minister as at 28 September 1927.**

Prime Minister: Stanley Bruce (Nat)

Minister for External Affairs: Stanley Bruce (Nat)

Treasurer: Earle Page (CP)

Minister for Home and Territories: Charles Marr (Nat)

Attorney-General: John Latham (Nat)

Postmaster General: William Gibson (CP)

Minister for Trade and Customs: Herbert Pratten (Nat)

Minister for Works and Railways: William Hill (CP)

Minister for Defence: Senator Sir William Glasglow (Nat)

Minister for Health: Stanley Bruce: (Nat)

Minister for Markets and Migration: Thomas Patterson (CP)

Vice President of the Executive Council: Senator George Pearce (Nat)

Honorary Minister: Sir Neville Howse (Nat)

Honorary Minister: Senator Thomas Crawford (Nat)

Honorary Minister: Senator Alexander McLachlan (Nat)

**Members of the Senate: Tenth Parliament** (From 1 July 1926)

<b>Senators</b>	<b>State</b>
Percy Abbott (CP)	NSW
David Andrew (CP)	Vic.
John Barnes (ALP)	Vic.
Hon. Sir Henry Barwell (Nat)	SA
William Carroll (CP)	WA
John Chapman (CP)	SA
Charles Cox (Nat)	NSW
Hon. Thomas Crawford (Nat)	Qld
Walter Duncan (Nat)	Vic.
Harold Elliott (Nat)	Vic.
Hon. Edward Findley (ALP)	Vic.
Hattil Foll (Nat)	Qld
Thomas Givens (Nat)	Qld
Hon. Sir Thomas Glasglow (Nat)	Qld
Charles Graham (ALP)	NSW
John Grant (ALP)	NSW
Hon. Walter Greene (Nat)	NSW
James Guthrie (Nat)	Vic.
John Hayes (Nat)	Tas.
Hon. Herbert Hays (Nat)	Tas.
Albert Hoare (ALP)	SA
Walter Kingsmill (Nat)	WA
Hon. Patrick Lynch (Nat)	WA
Charles McHugh (ALP)	SA
Hon. Alexander McLachlan (Nat)	SA
John Millen (Nat)	Tas.
Edward Needham (ALP)	WA
Hon. Sir John Newlands (Nat)	SA
James Ogden (Nat)	Tas.
Hon. Herbert Payne (Nat)	Tas.
Rt Hon. Sir George Pearce (Nat)	WA
William Plain (Nat)	Vic.
Matthew Reid (Nat)	Qld
Burford Sampson (Nat)	Tas.
Hon. Josiah Thomas (Nat)	NSW
William Thompson (Nat)	Qld

**Members of the House: Tenth Parliament—From May 1927.**

<b>Member</b>	<b>Electorate</b>
Charles Abbott (CP)	Gwydir (NSW)
Frank Anstey (ALP)	Bourke (Vic.)
Hon. Llewelyn Atkinson (Nat)	Wilmot (Tas.)
James Bayley (Nat)	Oxley (Qld)



<b>Member</b>	<b>Electorate</b>
George Bell (Nat)	Darwin (Tas.)
Arthur Blakeley (ALP)	Darling (NSW)
Hon. Eric Bowden (Nat)	Parramatta (NSW)
Frank Brennan (ALP)	Batman (Vic.)
Rt Hon. Stanley Bruce (Nat)	Flinders (Vic.)
Donald Cameron (Nat)	Brisbane (Qld)
Malcolm Cameron (Nat)	Barker (SA)
Matthew Charlton (ALP)	Hunter (NSW)
Percy Coleman (ALP)	Reid (NSW)
Robert Cook (CP)	Indi (Vic.)
Edward Corser (Nat)	Wide Bay (Qld)
John Duncan-Hughes (Nat)	Boothby (SA)
James Fenton (ALP)	Maribyrnong (Vic.)
Francis Forde (ALP)	Capricornia (Qld)
Hon. Richard Foster (Nat)	Wakefield (SA)
Grosvenor Francis (Nat)	Kennedy (Qld)
Josiah Francis (Nat)	Moreton (QLd)
Sydney Gardner (Nat)	Robertson (NSW)
Sir John Gellibrand (Nat)	Denison (Tas.)
Hon. William Gibson (CP)	Corangamite (Vic.)
Albert Green (ALP)	Kalgoorlie (WA)
Roland Green (CP)	Richmond (NSW)
Hon. Henry Gregory (CP)	Swan (WA)
Hon. Sir Littleton Groom (Nat)	Darling Downs (Qld)
Henry Gullett (Nat)	Henty (Vic.)
Hon. William Hill (CP)	Echuca (Vic.)
Hon. Sir Neville Howse (Nat)	Calare (NSW)
Rt Hon. William Hughes (Nat)	North Sydney (NSW)
James Hunter (CP)	Maranoa (Qld)
Geoffry Hurry (Nat)	Bendigo (Vic.)
David Jackson (Nat)	Bass (Tas.)
Hon. Sir Elliot Johnson (Nat)	Lang (NSW)
William Killen (CP)	Riverina (NSW)
Andrew Lacey (ALP)	Grey (SA)
William Lambert (ALP)	West Sydney (NSW)
Hon. John Latham (Nat)	Kooyong (Vic.)
Hubert Lazzarini (ALP)	Werriwa (NSW)
Hon. Thomas Ley (Nat)	Corio (Vic.)
George Mackay (Nat)	Lilley (Qld)
Norman Makin (ALP)	Hindmarsh (SA)
William Maloney (ALP)	Melbourne (Vic.)
Edward Mann (Nat)	Perth (WA)
Arthur Manning (Nat)	Macquarie (NSW)
Walter Marks (Nat)	Wentworth (NSW)
Hon. Charles Marr (Nat)	Parke (NSW)
James Mathews (ALP)	Melbourne Ports (Vic.)
George Maxwell (Nat)	Fawkner (Vic.)

<b>Member</b>	<b>Electorate</b>
David McGrath (aLP)	Ballarat (Vic.)
Parker Moloney (ALP)	Hume (NSW)
Harold Nelson (ALP)	Northern Territory
Lewis Nott (Nat)	Herbert (Qld)
Hon. Earle page (CP)	Cowper (NSW)
Robert Parkhill (Nat)	Warringah (NSW)
Walter Parsons (Nat)	Angas (SA)
Hon. Thomas Paterson (CP)	Gippsland (Vic.)
John Perkins (Nat)	Eden Monaro (NSW)
Hon. Hebert Pratten (Nat)	Forrest (WA)
Edward Riley (ALP)	South Sydney (NSW)
Edward Charles Riley (ALP)	Cook (NSW)
Hon. Arthur Rodgers (Nat)	Wannon (Vic.)
James Scullin (ALP)	Yarra (Vic.)
Alfred Seabrook (Nat)	Franklin (Tas.)
Hon. Percy Stewart (Ind.)	Wimmera (Vic.)
Hon. Edward Theodore (ALP)	Dalley (NSW)
Victor Thompson (CP)	New England (NSW)
Hon. David Watkins (ALP)	Newcastle (NSW)
William Watson (Ind.)	Fremantle (WA)
Rt Hon. William Watt (Nat)	Balaclava (Vic.)
John West (ALP)	East Sydney (NSW)
George Yates (ALP)	Adelaide (SA)

**Governor General:** Rt Hon. J. L. B. Stonehaven (8 October 1925 to 22 January 1931).

**Leader of the Opposition:** Matthew Charlton (ALP) (16 June 1922 to 29 March 1928).

**President of the Senate:** Hon. John Newlands (Nat) (1 July 1926 to 13 August 1929).

**Speaker:** Hon Sir Littleton Groom (Nat) (13 January 1926 to 11 October 1929).

**Clerk of the Senate:** George Monahan (28 August 1920 to 31 October 1938).

**Clerks of the House:** Walter Gale (1 February 1917 to 27 July 1927); John McGregor (1 September 1927 to 28 September 1927); Ernest Parkes (27 October 1927 to 22 March 1937).

**Parliamentary Librarian:** Arthur Wadsworth: (1 July 1901 to 31 December 1927).

**Party Affiliation in the House** (after 1925 General Election)

National	Labour	Country	Independent	Total
37	24	14	1	76

**Party Affiliation in Senate** (From 1 July 1926)

National	Labour	Country	Independent	Total
24	8	4	0	36

**Sittings of the House (1927)**

Total time: 59 days (523 hours)

Average hours per sitting: 8 hours 51 minutes

Number sittings after midnight: 4

Average Time of Rising: 9.48 p.m.

**Consideration of Legislation by the House (1927)**

Total acts for year: 38

Bills introduced and read a first time: 50

Bills brought from Senate: 6

Bills considered by committee of the whole: 40

**Other House of Representatives information (1927)**

Matters of Public Importance: 6

Adjournment Debates: 25

Number of petitions: 1

Number of divisions: 48

**General Senate Information (1927–28 period)**

Petitions: There were no petitions presented in the 1927–28 period

Number of days sitting: 1927 (44); 1928 (43)

Number of bills initiated in Senate: 1927 (3); 1928 (9). Note the comparable House figures were 35 and 39 respectively.

### **Committees as at September 1927**

#### **Joint:**

- House
- Library
- Printing
- Public Accounts
- Public Works
- Moving Picture Industry (Select).

#### **Senate:**

- Disputed Returns and Qualifications
- Standing Orders.

#### **House:**

- Standing Orders.

(Today, the Parliament has in excess of 50 parliamentary committees covering all portfolio areas as well as domestic/housekeeping matters. For a full list of the committees see the Parliament House web site at: <http://www.aph.gov.au/index.htm>).

## Schedule of Proposed provisional Parliament House, 1923

Extract from:

Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works *Report together with Minutes of Evidence, Appendices and Plans relating to the proposed Erection of Provisional Parliament House, Canberra*, pages vi–ix, Melbourne, 1923, Government Printer, Melbourne.

Paragraph 13.

The proposal, as expressed in the sketch drawings submitted to the Committee, is for the erection of grouped buildings of light brick and concrete construction in accordance with views elicited from the President, the Speaker, and Officers of Parliament, in which the functions of legislation may be conducted until such time as it may become policy to proceed with the erection of the permanent monumental Parliamentary Building which was at one time contemplated. The buildings are designed on simple lines, but to meet the varied requirements of parliament, are somewhat extensive, the accommodation proposed to be provided comprising:

<b>Reception Accommodation</b>	<b>Sup.* feet</b>
Reception hall	2 304
Reception corridors surrounding hall	5 760
<b>Total</b>	<b>8 064</b>

<b>Legislative Accommodation (Senate)</b>	<b>Sup.* feet</b>
Senate Chamber (80 members)}	
Public Gallery (86 persons)}	2 688
Press Galleries (80 persons)	560
Press Rooms	801
Members' Lobbies (2)	552
Spare Room	84
<b>Total</b>	<b>4 685</b>

<b>Representatives Accommodation</b>	<b>Sup.* feet</b>
Representatives Chamber (112 members)}	
Public Gallery (60 persons)}	2 688
Public Gallery (45 persons)	372
Press Galleries (2) (80 persons)	672
Press Room	372
Members' Lobbies (2)	552
Spare Room	84
<b>Total</b>	<b>4 740</b>

<b>Legislators' Official Accommodation—Senate</b>	<b>Sup.* feet</b>
President (4 rooms and bathroom)	842
Chairman of Committees	252
Leader of Senate (3 rooms and bathroom)	705
Party Rooms (2)	966
Minister' Rooms (2)	504
Senate Club	1 728
Committee Rooms (2)	396
Ante-rooms (2)	408
Strangers' Rooms (2)	362
<b>Total</b>	<b>6 163</b>

<b>Legislators' Official Accommodation—Representatives</b>	<b>Sup.* feet</b>
Speaker (4 rooms and bathroom)	864
Chairman of Committees	234
Prime Minister (3 rooms and bathroom)	782
Ministers' Rooms (7)	1 524
Ante and Strangers' Rooms (2)	308
<b>Total</b>	<b>3 712</b>

<b>Party Accommodation</b>	<b>Sup.* feet</b>
Ministerial Party Rooms (4)	1 109
Opposition Rooms (3)	1 350
Country Party Rooms (3)	1 010
<b>Total</b>	<b>3 469</b>

<b>Committee Accommodation</b>	<b>Sup.* feet</b>
Committee Rooms (7)	4 155
<b>Total</b>	<b>4 155</b>

<b>Library Accommodation</b>	<b>Sup.* feet</b>
Library and Reading Room	2 576
Newspaper and Periodicals	1 568
Cataloguing, Receiving, Binding and Store Rooms (5)	1 606
Newspaper Storage (6 rooms)	3 658
Book Storage (3 rooms)	8 652
Library Administrative Staff (3 rooms)	686
<b>Total</b>	<b>18 746</b>

<b>Official Staff Accommodation—</b>	<b>Sup.* feet</b>
<b>Senate</b>	
Clerk, Assistant Clerk, Clerk of Papers, Usher, Records, Typists (9 rooms)	4 145
<b>Representatives</b>	
Clerk of House (2), Assistant Clerk, 2 <sup>nd</sup> Assistant Clerk, Clerk of Papers Sergeant at Arms, Accountant, Records (5), Typists (3), (15 rooms)	4 796
<b>Hansard</b>	
Chief of Staff and Reporters (5 rooms) }	
Transcribing (6 rooms) }	1 420
<b>Post Office</b>	
Post Office, Telegraph Office, and Telephone Exchange (3 rooms)	533
<b>Total</b>	10 894

<b>Refection and Recreation Accommodation—Members</b>	<b>Sup.* feet</b>
Dining Room	2 400
Private Dining Rooms (5)	1 170
Smoking Room and Lounge	1 280
Billiard Room	1 550
Bar and Cellarage	1 180
<b>Total</b>	7 580

<b>Refection and Recreation Accommodation—Officers</b>	<b>Sup.* feet</b>
Officers' Sitting and Dining Room	1 600
Typists Sitting and Dining Rooms (2)	527
Messengers' Sitting and Changing Room	434
Kitchen and Waiting Staff (2 rooms)	322
Spare Rooms (3)	780
Service Room	180
<b>Total</b>	3 843

<b>Refection and Recreation Accommodation—Kitchen and Offices</b>	<b>Sup.* feet</b>
Kitchen and Servery	1 664
Offices (13 rooms)	1 006
General Store	532
Heating and Mechanical Appliances	1 560
<b>Total</b>	4 762
Two Cottages	2 360
<b>Total</b>	83 173

<b>This Schedule does not include:</b>	<b>Total Area</b>
(a) Messengers' Accommodation, which is disposed in positions considered suitable in relation to the several Departments of the Houses	726
(b) Lavatory Accommodation disposed generally throughout the Houses	2 764
(c) Corridors, including Entrance Vestibule	11 780
(d) Terraces, Verandahs, and Loggias	8 850

N. B. Total areas of land covered by buildings and enclosed gardens, 342 feet x 455 feet, equal to 155 610 feet, equal to about 3 acres.

<b>Convenient further extension of plan may be obtained by:</b>	<b>Sup.* Feet</b>
(a) Two one-storey wings flanking Kitchen	4 550
(b) Lower floors under Hansard and Ministerial Party Rooms flanking Library	4 275
(c) Upper stories on right and left outer centre pavilions	10 600
<b>Total</b>	<b>19 425</b>

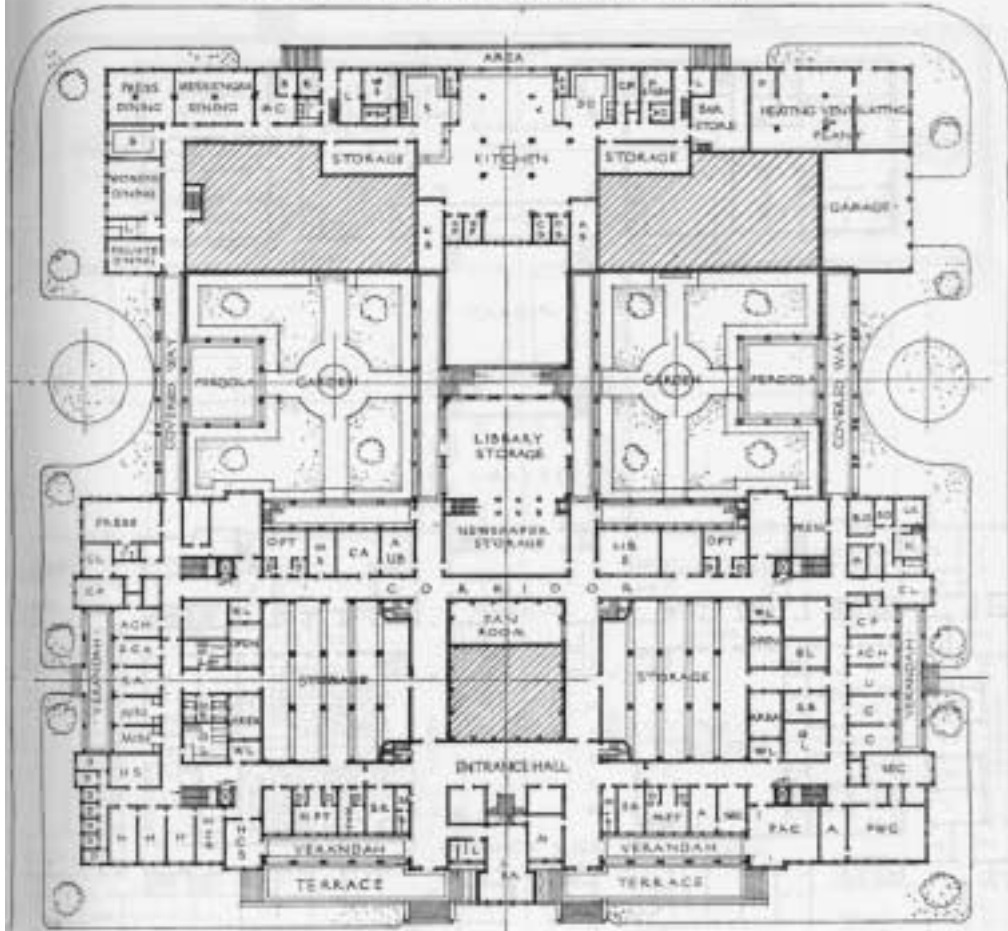
\* Note: Sup. feet = super feet or square feet.



**Plan No. 2.**

**REVISED PLANS OF PROVISIONAL PARLIAMENT HOUSE, CANBERRA.**

Prepared at the request of the Commonwealth Public Works Committee to show re-arrangement and additional accommodation recommended.



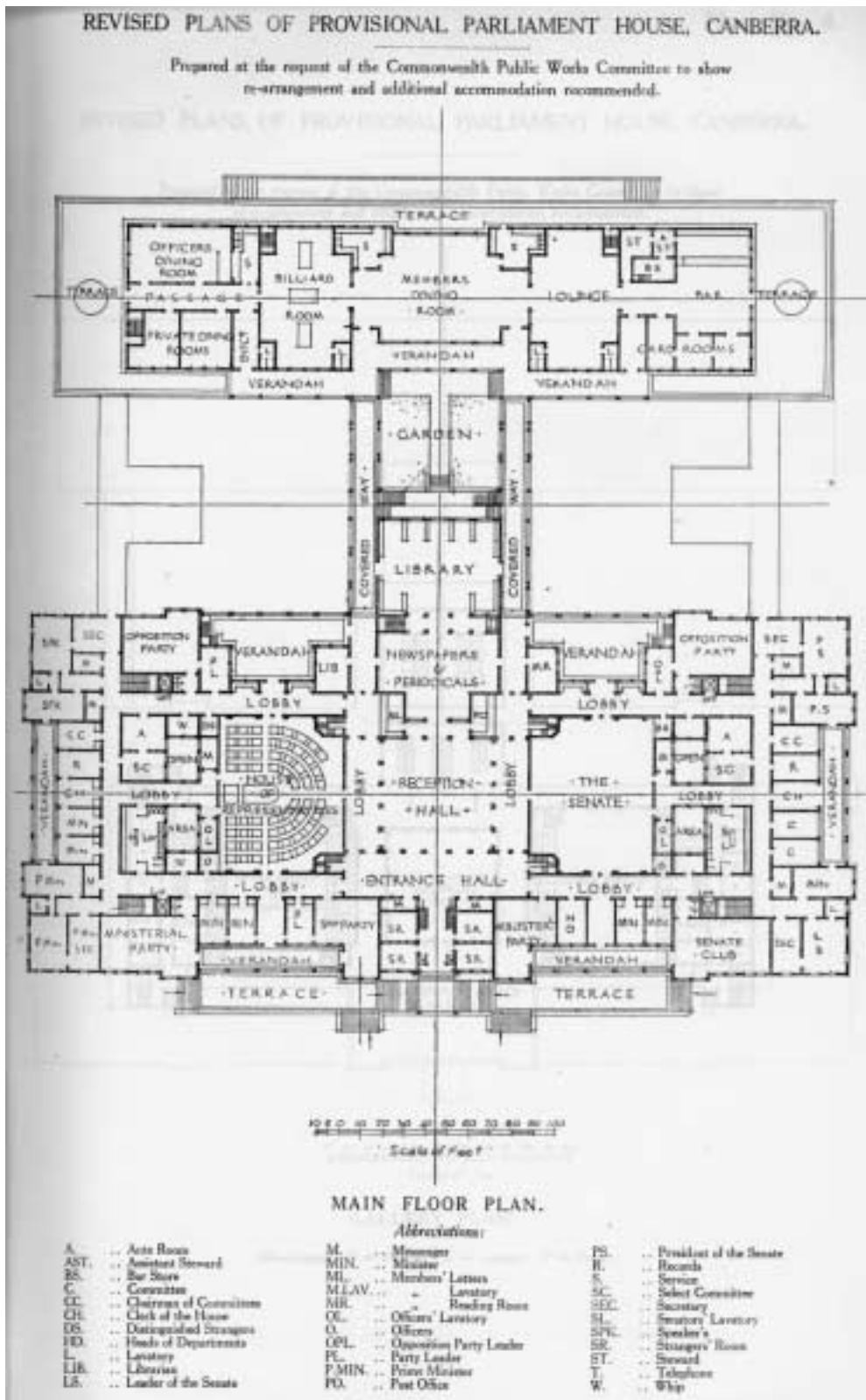
0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100  
Scale of Feet.

**LOWER FLOOR PLAN.**

*Abbreviations:*

- |  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. .. Ante Room</li> <li>ACH. .. Assistant Clerk of the House</li> <li>ALLB. .. Assistant Librarian</li> <li>B. .. Bath and Showers</li> <li>BD. .. Bedrooms</li> <li>C. .. Corridor</li> <li>CA. .. Catalogue Room</li> <li>CF. .. Chef</li> <li>CL. .. Clerical</li> <li>CS. .. Coal Store</li> <li>CP. .. Clerk of the Papers</li> <li>D. .. Dictation</li> <li>F. .. Fuel</li> <li>H. .. Herald Reporters</li> <li>HCS. .. Chief of Staff</li> <li>HR. .. 2nd Reporter</li> <li>HS. .. Store</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>K. .. Kitchen</li> <li>KC. .. Kitchen Staff Changing Room</li> <li>KP. .. Kitchen</li> <li>K-STAFF. .. Staff Dining Room</li> <li>KS. .. Store</li> <li>L. .. Lavatory</li> <li>LR. .. Living Room</li> <li>LIBS. .. Library Staff</li> <li>LBR. .. Ladies' Reception Room</li> <li>M. .. Messenger</li> <li>MB. .. Members' Bathrooms</li> <li>MC. .. Messengers' Changing Room</li> <li>MIN. .. Minister</li> <li>M.LAV. .. Members' Lavatory</li> <li>MPT. .. Ministerial Party Typing</li> <li>MS. .. Ministers' Secretaries</li> <li>OL. .. Officers' Lavatory</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>OPT. .. Opposition Party Typing</li> <li>PAC. .. Public Accounts Committee</li> <li>PWC. .. Public Works Committee</li> <li>S. .. Service</li> <li>SA. .. Stages at Area</li> <li>SB. .. Senators' Bathrooms</li> <li>SC. .. Scullery</li> <li>SEC. .. Secretary</li> <li>SL. .. Senators' Lavatory</li> <li>SR. .. Strangers' Rooms</li> <li>U. .. Usher</li> <li>WL. .. Women's Lavatory</li> <li>WS. .. Waiting Staff Dining Room</li> <li>WSC. .. Waiting Staff Changing Room</li> <li>ZCA. .. 2nd Clerk Assistant</li> <li>ZPT. .. 3rd Party Typing</li> </ul> |
|--|---|--|

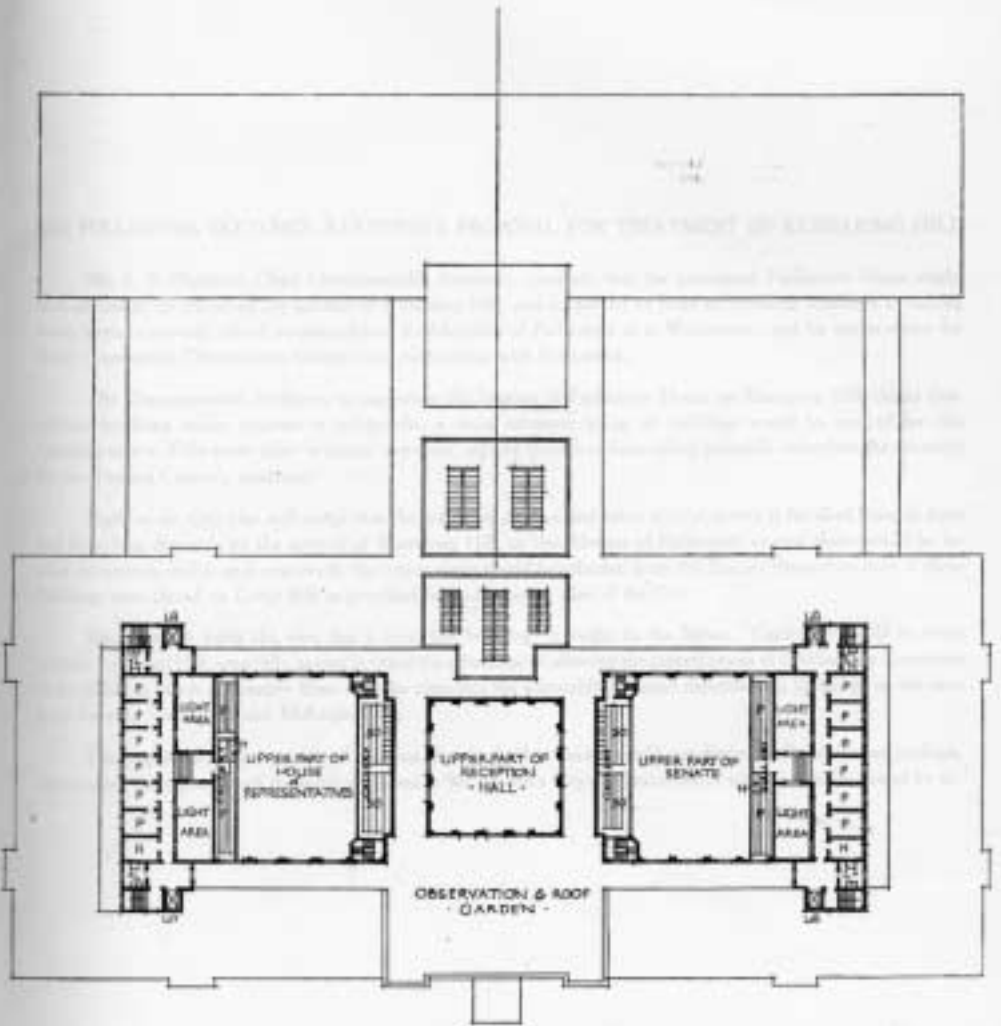
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Plan No. 4.

REVISED PLANS OF PROVISIONAL PARLIAMENT HOUSE, CANBERRA.

Prepared at the request of the Commonwealth Public Works Committee to show re-arrangement and additional accommodation recommended.



0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100  
Scale of Feet.

GALLERY PLAN.

Abbreviations:—H = Hazard, L = Lobby, P = Pass.

**Appendix 2: Photographs of Parliament House 1925-27**



The Opening of Parliament by H.R.H. The Duke of York  
Ceremony in Senate Chamber



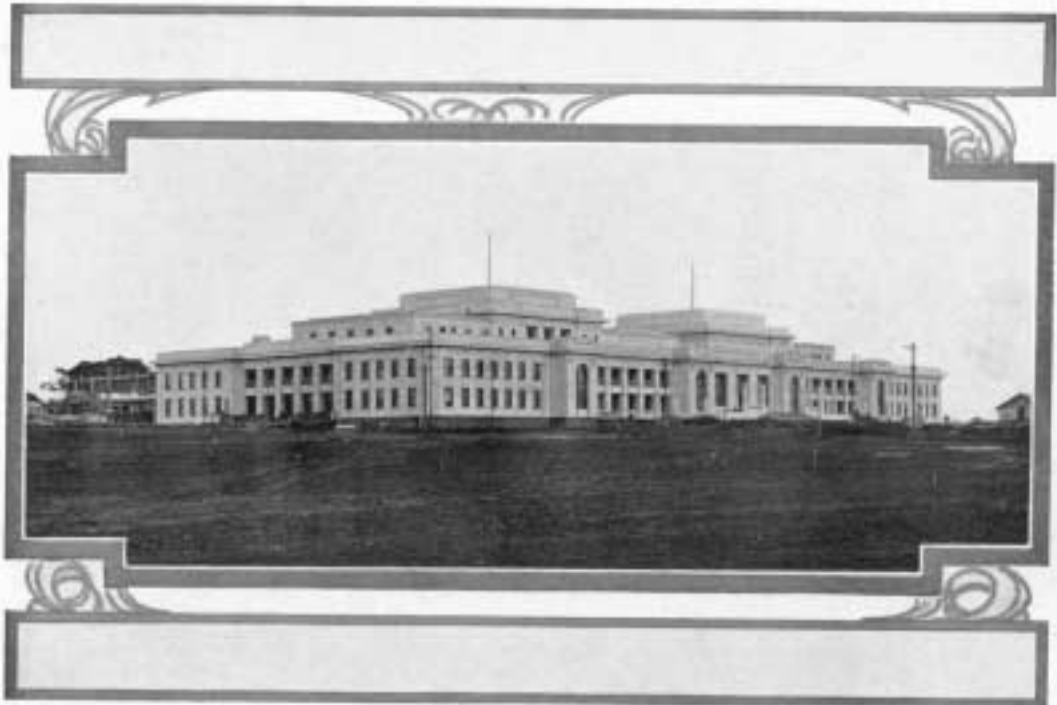
Public Reception of Parliament House  
on 10<sup>th</sup> May 1927



PARLIAMENT HOUSE FROM SOUTH-EAST, 30th JUNE, 1927.



PARLIAMENT HOUSE FROM NORTH, 30th JUNE, 1926.



PARLIAMENT HOUSE FROM SOUTH-EAST, 30th JUNE, 1926.



PARLIAMENT HOUSE FROM NORTH, 30th JUNE, 1926.



PARLIAMENT HOUSE FROM CAMP HILL, 30th JUNE, 1926.



PARLIAMENT HOUSE FROM SOUTH, 30th JUNE, 1926.



PARLIAMENT HOUSE FROM WEST, 30th JUNE, 1927.



PARLIAMENT HOUSE FROM SOUTH, 30th JUNE, 1927.





PARLIAMENT HOUSE FROM WEST, 30th JUNE, 1926.



PARLIAMENT HOUSE FROM WEST, 30th JUNE, 1927.



Parliament House - 20<sup>th</sup> June 1927

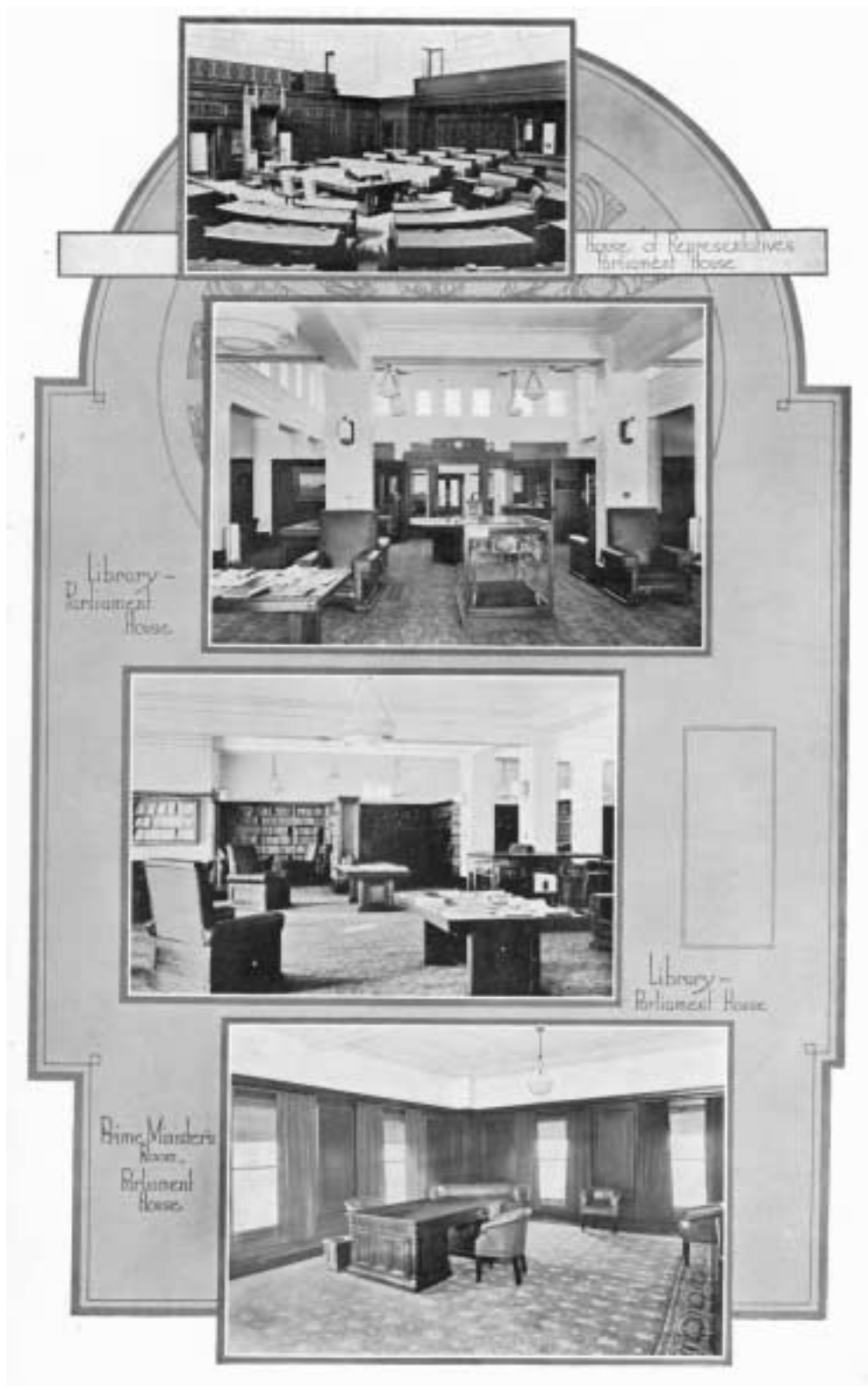
Kings Hall  
Parliament  
House



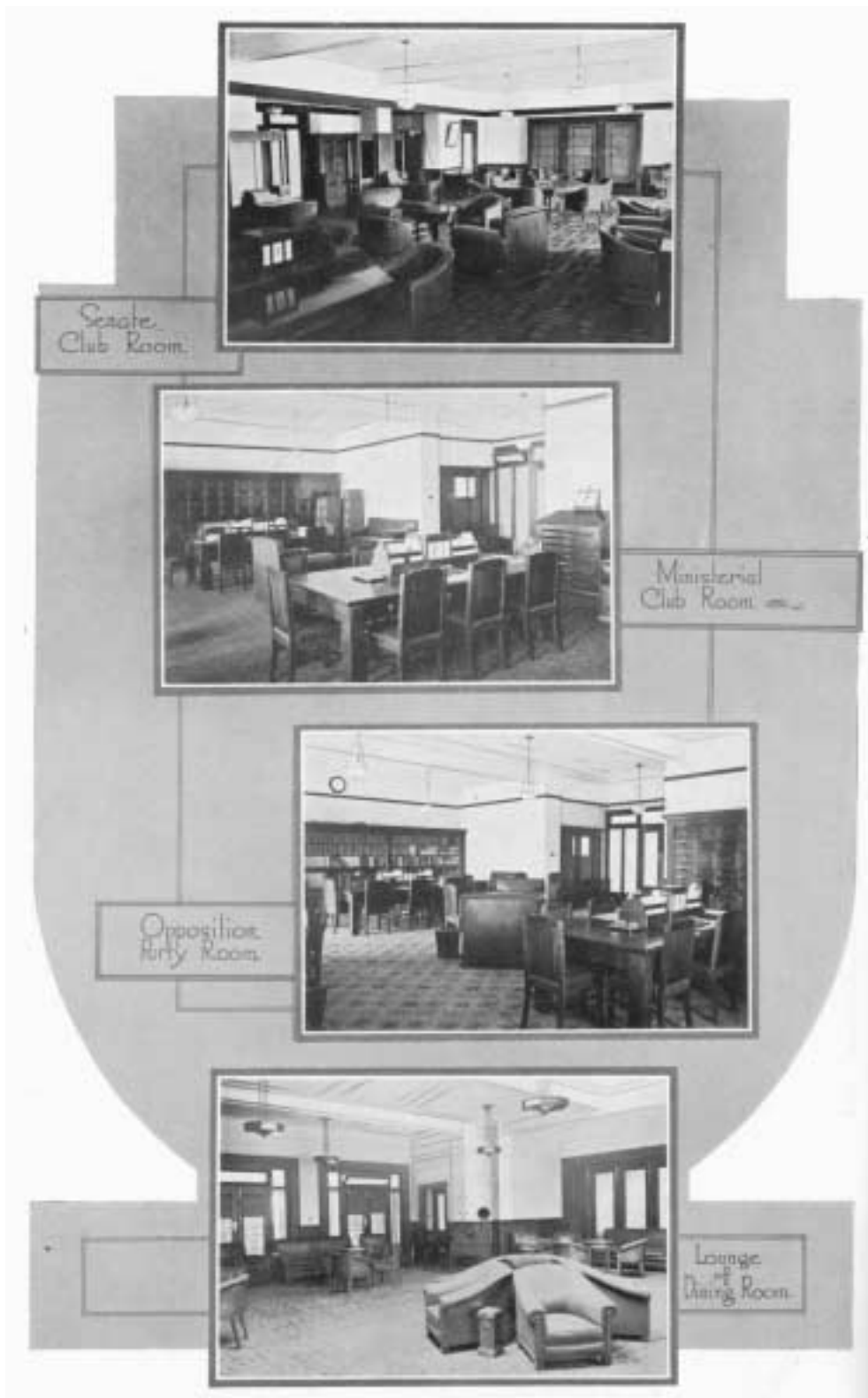
Statue of King George V, Kings Hall, Parliament House

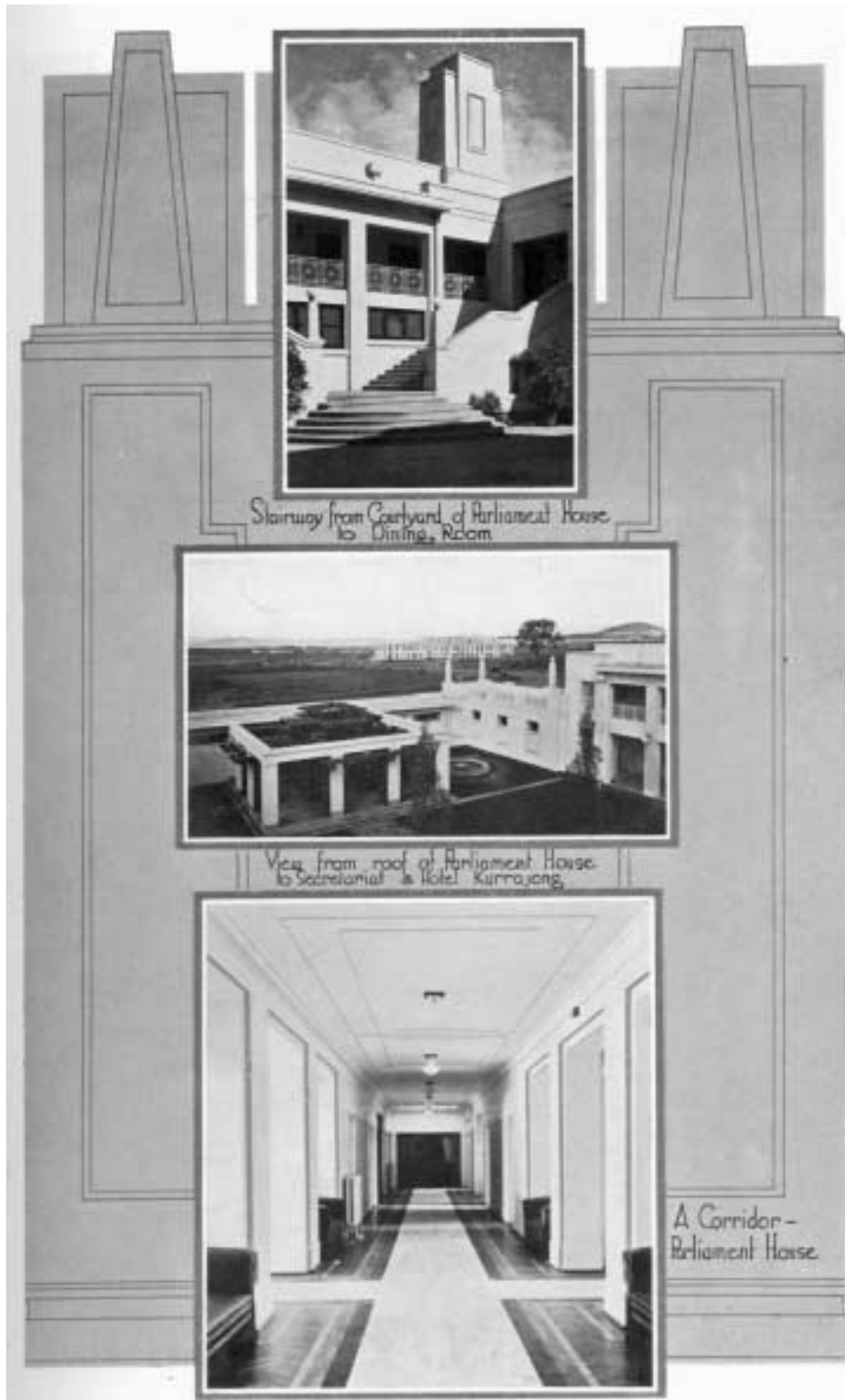


Senate Chamber  
Parliament House



*As It Was In the Beginning*







Dining Room - Parliament House.



Portion of Kitchen - Parliament House.



Roof - Parliament House.



Courtyard - Parliament House.



Prime  
Ministers  
Lodge

