



Parliament House and the Australian people

Scott Bennett
Politics and Public Administration Section

Executive summary

This essay has been written to mark the twentieth anniversary of Australia's Parliament House, opened by Queen Elizabeth II on 9 May 1988:

- Parliament House occupies an important place in the nation, and an interesting aspect of its story is just how many people are affected by its presence and its importance
- this has tended to be overlooked in studies and analyses of our national legislature
- although it has had its detractors, the building has been generally well-received by the Australian community.

The essay has as its focus the relationship of Parliament House with the Australian people.

Aspects of this relationship that are discussed here include:

- the official aspects of the building, including the passage of legislation, the committee work, the official recognition that is given to many matters
- Parliament House as a showplace for a striking collection of art and craftwork
- the use of Parliament House as a location for remembrance and celebration
- the practice of 'coming to Canberra' to publicise issues of national and international importance
- Parliament House as a site for public protest, and
- the relationship between indigenous Australians and the building.

The paper concludes with a discussion of the threats to public access that have emerged over time, and the hope of many Australians that their relatively free access to the building is never lost.

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Introduction

On 9 May 1988, what was generally referred to as the ‘New Parliament House’ was opened by her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II. It replaced the ‘old’ or ‘provisional’ Parliament House, a temporary structure that had been opened by the Queen’s father exactly 61 years before, on 9 May 1927. There were just 101 Members of Parliament (75 House of Representatives, 36 Senate) when the older building had been first occupied, and in its last year of occupation this had increased to 224 (148 House of Representatives, 76 Senate). Although it had been altered at times, the provisional building had become extremely crowded, and many believed it to have outlasted its usefulness.

This essay has been written to mark the twentieth anniversary of the permanent Parliament House. It has as its focus the relationship of Parliament House with the Australian people. Parliament House occupies an important place in the nation, and an interesting aspect of its story is just how many people are affected by its presence and its importance. This has tended to be overlooked in studies and analyses of our national legislature. The major work on the activity of the Parliament contains no index reference to Parliament House, for example.¹ Although it has had its detractors, the building has been generally well-received by the Australian community.

Structure and siting

There were many factors that the designers of Parliament House felt obliged to deal with, including its size and its inevitable grandeur. Its relationship to the Burley Griffin plan of the city within which it was to occupy the symbolic centre—the Parliamentary Triangle—was also critical. The new building was seen as an intimate part of Canberra, but it was believed to be important that it not dominate the city.²

A building for the people

To the successful architects, a matter of crucial importance was the relationship of the structure to individual Australians, and whether people would feel comfortable approaching and entering the building. For the winning designers, this was basic to their plan, as explained later by architect, Romaldo Giurgola:

We felt if Australia’s new Parliament House was to speak honestly about its purpose, it could not be built on top of the hill as this would symbolise government imposed upon the people.

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1. G. S. Reid and Martyn Forrest, *Australia’s Commonwealth Parliament*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1989.
 2. Russell L Cope, ‘Housing a Legislature: When Architecture and Politics Meet’, *For Peace, Order and Good Government*, Papers on Parliament, no. 37, Department of the Senate, Canberra, 2001, p. 105.

The building should nest with the hill, symbolically rise out of the Australian landscape, as true democracy rises from the state of things.³

In addition, it was important that Parliament House be seen as extending an invitation to all citizens to visit the building to see the workings of the democracy that is Australia. The invitation was to be seen in the descending arms of the walls of the Forecourt, described as being ‘an open gesture of welcome’.⁴

In keeping with this, the building was made sufficiently open for the general public to have access to about one-fifth of it. By contrast, it has been estimated that 10 per cent of the Houses of Parliament in London is accessible to visitors, and 14 per cent of the Scottish Parliament.⁵ One Australian legislator has reported the amazement of visiting international parliamentarians, who are struck by the fact that ‘we allow the public to come in and roam around’. They are invariably impressed by the openness of the building.⁶

When the issue of paid parking in the Parliamentary Triangle was raised some years ago, the Parliament’s joint National Capital and External Territories Committee was certain of its views concerning the importance of Parliament House for the people:

The unanimous view of the committee is that the parliamentary zone is unique and should not be treated in the same way as the commercial centres in the ACT. The zone belongs to the people of Australia, and access to any of the culturally significant sites throughout the area should remain free of charge.⁷

Paid parking was seen as likely to be a deterrent to ordinary people seeking to visit the house.

This has an extra relevance, for Parliament House is a building that is not as easy to reach from elsewhere in Canberra as it could have been. Unlike Australian state parliaments, which all have a central city location, and which can therefore easily be walked to, the national parliament is isolated. As a former New South Wales Parliamentary Librarian wondered, did the planners give any thought to how one might approach the building other than by vehicle? One can feel some pity for visitors who come on official business, only to find they are at an inconvenient entrance. Many can be seen walking a least one quarter of the Parliament Drive

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3. Romaldo Giurgola, quoted in *houseatwork*, Parliamentary Education Office, Parliament of Australia, Parliament House, Canberra, 2001, p. 90.
 4. *Australia’s New Parliament House*, Parliament House Construction Authority, Canberra, 1986, pp. 19, 36.
 5. Andrew Metcalf, *Canberra Architecture*, Watermark Press, Sydney, 2003, p. 25. Information sent to author by Oonagh Gay of the House of Commons Library, and Bill Thomson of the Scottish Parliament administration.
 6. ‘Chatting with Madam President Senator Margaret Reid’, *houseatwork*, op. cit., p. 95.
 7. ‘Parking to remain free for visitors’, *About the House*, December 2003, p. 35.

circuit to gain entry—a distance of about 200 metres—but some have to go double that distance.⁸

The size

The one-fifth of the building open to the public is a substantial space. The Parliament House building area, 7.5 hectares of a 32 hectare site, was the largest construction site in the Southern Hemisphere in the 1980s. Ten thousand Australians were involved in its construction—many of whom return periodically to celebrate their work. Jenny Hutchison, a student of the national assembly, has described the building as ‘a potent symbol of monumentalism’.⁹

Not all Australians accepted the need for a building of the size or type that was finally erected, but the history of its first 20 years suggests that many of the design team’s hopes have been met. Five years after its opening, architect Richard Thorp claimed that ‘we built an example of democracy where the people who visit the place are as important as the politicians within’.¹⁰ The evidence of the first twenty years supports his words.

Not all have been in favour

However, this is to look at the parliament building 20 years after its opening. In the days after 9 May 1988, there may have been some uncertainty as to whether or not Australians would ever regard the new construction as their own, such was the outburst of opposition from many in the media and politics. For example the actor, Nancy Black, was one critic who saw the building as ‘very cold and disconcerting’, asserting that:

... a people’s Parliament should be the last place where you would feel irrelevant.¹¹

Such a view did not regard Parliament House as a place where ordinary Australians could ever feel comfortable, and others shared her concerns. The language of the time was strong: the ‘white elephant on the hill’ effectively ‘weakened democracy’, it was ‘oppressively clean and pompous’, and the public entrance through the lobby was ‘cold and unwelcoming’.¹²

8. Cope, op. cit., p. 112.

9. Jenny Hutchison, ‘Setting the Scene’, in Julian Disney and J. R. Nethercote (ed), *The House on Capital Hill. Parliament, Politics and Power in the National Capital*, Federation Press, Sydney, 1996, p. 6.

10. Richard Thorp quoted in Tracey Aubin, ‘House Party’, *Canberra Times*, 9 May 1993.

11. Nancy Black, *Ring the Bells*, ABC Radio National, 20 July 1990.

12. Wayne Crawford, ‘Reflections of a white elephant on the hill’, *Mercury*, 6 August 1988; John Nethercote, ‘More open design would set House in order’, *Australian*, 20 August 1996; Ian Warden, ‘Greenpeace: the plaster ducks of Parliament House’, *Canberra Times*, 31 May 1989; ‘Without a soul’, editorial, *Australian*, 19 August 1988.

Interestingly, despite the architects' belief that it was democratic in style, some critics labelled it a construction within which people are 'meant to be intimidated', with a security obsessiveness that reeked of 'modern Chile'. For Victorian MP, Barry Jones (Lalor Vic 1977–98), it was an example of 'late 20th century brutalism'.¹³

Jones and others also lamented the passing of the provisional building which had been small, much more intimate, and wherein visitors could often pass MPs in the Kings Hall. There was a great concern that three aspects of the 'old' house would be lost in the new. As noted by Laurie Oakes, writing in the *Bulletin*, members of the public were to be kept away from MPs, ministers were to be 'segregated' from fellow parliamentarians, and the access of journalists was to be greatly reduced, due to the location of the press gallery on the top floor of the Senate wing. Oakes predicted that the changes would result in the public's 'right to know' being 'downgraded'. Despite the fact that very little of the old house was accessible to the public, critics such as Oakes were sure that its replacement was not as 'democratic', for it 'weakened' democracy, symbolised by the fact that 'the public' had become 'visitors'.¹⁴ Another journalist was certain the new building undermined what was important in the Australian democracy:

... it exemplifies the pretensions and self-importance of the politicians who have built this temple essentially for themselves, like a priestly caste aloof from the people whose servants they are supposed to be ...¹⁵

Despite these fears that could not be gainsayed at the time, the evidence from the first 20 years of the building suggests that such fears have not been shared by most Australians, many of whom have visited Parliament House and expressed their pleasure for having done so. Up to the end of 2007, the number of visitors had exceeded 23 million, the great proportion of whom would have been Australian nationals. Interestingly though, the number has dropped in each of the years since 1996, when 1 229 679 entered the doors. The 2007 figure was 850 618.¹⁶

The relationship with the city

As mentioned above, Parliament House was seen as very much a part of the overall design of the national capital. In the 20 years since its opening, it is clear that the building has become integral to the Canberra landscape—to be admired, to be used, to be enjoyed. Every day Canberrans can be seen jogging, walking and riding around the building, using the slopes for

13. Laurie Oakes, 'The horrible House on the hill', *Bulletin*, 17 May 1988; Peter Costigan, 'An un-Australian Palace on Capital Hill', *Canberra Times*, 14 May 1988; Barry Jones, 'Sixty Minutes', Channel 9, 18 June 1989.

14. Oakes, *op. cit.*; Nethercote, *op. cit.*

15. Claude Forell, 'A grandiose temple, but a greater glory is missing', *Age*, 18 May 1988.

16. According to Jim Saunders of the Parliament's Visitors Services section, the figure was 23 202 966 persons between the opening of the building and the end of 2007.

running exercises, or playing on its tennis courts. Did the man wearing running gear, who fell to his death in late July 1999 from the grass roof to an internal courtyard, slip and tumble over the wall while on a training run? In 1993, children from Chapman Primary School joined the champion walker, Kerry Saxby-Junna, for the opening of the 3.8km walking trail through the parliamentary gardens. Canberrans come to Parliament House to sell poppies for Legacy, for occasions such as public changeovers of the central flag, or graduation ceremonies for students of the University of Canberra, the Australian Catholic University and Canberra Girls Grammar School. Many more are regular attendees at the periodic Senate lectures, while tours of the gardens during the annual Floriade flower festival are popular. The Australia Day Live concert, which is held in Federation Mall between the old and new parliamentary buildings, is the city's biggest concert, and is broadcast to the rest of Australia. The Mall is also the location each year of Canberra's official Christmas tree.

An indication of the relationship between city and structure could be seen after the Canberra bushfires of 18 January 2003. Orana School in the southern suburb of Weston had been badly burned, with the loss of many of its facilities. Australian Capital Territory Senator, Margaret Reid (ACT 1981–2003), helped arrange for the Parliament's Great Hall to be used for the school's first assembly of the 2003 school year.

Parliament House is certainly treated by Canberrans as part of their city—as evidenced by the popularity of Open Days when they have a chance to view parts of the building not usually available for casual entry. A practical illustration of the relationship with the city and, specifically the desire not to offend its residents, has been the removal of water from the many water features in the grounds of the Parliament. Prominent notices announce that the parliamentary gardens are using significantly less water, an issue so critical in a city which now has difficulty in providing enough water for its residents.

The national parliament

In the chambers

For a few Australians, what may be their first visit to Parliament House is likely to be an occasion of much pride and happiness. When new Members and Senators give their first formal address in the chamber of which they are a member—what was once called their 'Maiden Speech'—often they will have family and close friends observing from the gallery.¹⁷ Most visitors, however, simply hope to see one of the chambers in action—the parliamentary guides report an increased level of expectation if people have chosen to visit when MPs are 'in town'.¹⁸ This can be at any time in a parliamentary sitting day, but of greatest interest is the opportunity to see Question Time in the House of Representatives. This is the part of the regular parliamentary schedule when it can be difficult to procure a ticket for the visitor's gallery. It is the occasion when it is possible to see virtually all members, including the Prime

17. The Maiden Speech is now known as 'First Speech'.

18. Gina Hall, 'A day in the life of a parliamentary guide', *houseatwork*, op. cit., p. 7.

Minister and Leader of the Opposition supported by their front benches. The novelist, Marion Halligan, has noted that although Question Time is familiar from television, to be in the gallery enables one to see the ‘panorama of the whole house’:

You see the power plays going on while the minister is answering the question. You see politicians strutting round the room, habitués of privilege. Behaving like bovver boys. Or passing secret notes via attendants. You see the whispering and pointing and sneering. You observe the strange guffaws that shake a whole party as one. The rowdiness that gets honourable members sent out of the room. The whingeing on points of order.¹⁹

For many Australians this *is* the Parliament, no doubt helped by Australian Broadcasting Corporation coverage of it each day.

Fewer people attend the Parliament to witness the law-making process. Occasionally, though, legislative activity can attract many observers. In the *Mabo* judgement of 3 June 1992 the High Court of Australia concluded that native title had survived the settlement of the British in Australia. As a consequence, legislation was brought before the Parliament to clarify the relationship between indigenous land ownership and ownership of land by other Australians. To pass this legislation the Labor Government needed the support of the Australian Democrat and the Green senators. Great was the excitement as these senators were pressured by many interests, the Opposition attempted to delay the proceedings, and Prime Minister Keating (Blaxland NSW, 1969–96) threatened to keep the Parliament sitting until Christmas. On 21 December 1993 the longest debate in the Senate’s history ended, to applause from a packed gallery, when the bill became law at 11.58 pm. For some people it is obviously of great importance to be in Parliament House at such historic moments.²⁰

But it is not just about the usual daily business of the chambers. There are other chamber events that can be witnessed, and appreciated, by visitors. For example, occasionally there will be condolence motions in one or the other chamber, when the members have a public opportunity to remember an earlier member or senator. In the first months of 2008, for instance, condolences were expressed for the passing of Kim Beazley sen. (Fremantle WA 1945–77), Len Keogh (Bowman Qld 1969–75, 1983–7), Ken Fry (Fraser ACT 1974–84), Helen Mayer (Chisholm Vic 1983–7), Senator Bob Collins (NT 1987–98), Senator Sid Spindler (Vic 1990–6) and Peter Andren (Calare NSW 1996–2007). There are other events as well. Stephen Harper was the first Canadian Prime Minister to speak in the Parliament when he addressed a joint sitting of the houses on 11 September 2007, reciprocating a visit by the Australian Prime Minister to the Canadian Parliament in the previous year. Mr Harper complemented his hosts for their democratic Senate, a body unlike Canada’s nominated upper house: ‘it is a rare pleasure for me to be among senators who are elected by the people

19. Marion Halligan, ‘House where honourable members once roamed’, *Canberra Times*, 8 March 2008.

20. Richard Broome, *Aboriginal Australians*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 3rd ed. 2001, p. 240.

they represent'.²¹ On 13 February 2008, another day of great national significance, the House of Representatives galleries were fully occupied by indigenous Australians on when the House expressed its sorrow over the harsh experiences suffered by them and their forebears:

... today we honour the Indigenous peoples of this land, the oldest continuing cultures in human history...We reflect in particular on the mistreatment of those who were Stolen Generations...We apologise for the laws and policies of successive Parliaments and governments that have inflicted profound grief, suffering and loss on these our fellow Australians. We apologise especially for the removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families, their communities and their country...

We the Parliament of Australia respectfully request that this apology be received in the spirit in which it is offered as part of the healing of the nation ...²²

On this occasion the Great Hall of the Parliament gave many other people the opportunity to observe the events on a large screen. Hundreds more, gathered on Federation Mall, witnessed the events in the same way.

In committee

Parliament is also in session when its committees are meeting, and public hearings of the many committees are occasions when visitors are to be found in the building. The best-known of these are the Senate Budget Estimates hearings held at various times through the year. These are the occasions when Parliament House is flooded with public servants, called to give evidence before a relevant committee. Passers-by can observe many of them outside the committee rooms, either with a mobile phone to their ear, or else deep in tactical discussions with colleagues, while their crowding of the parliamentary staff dining room makes it imperative for staff to buy their lunch early.

Other committee investigations, conducted by one of the houses, or as a joint operation, are commissioned from time to time to look into particular aspects of government and society. A proportion of their sessions are held within Parliament House, and therefore draw many more people to the building. Such was the Senate Select Committee on a New Tax System that was commissioned 25 November 1998 to conduct an inquiry into proposed changes to the Australian taxation system. The chair of the committee, Senator Peter Cook (WA 1983–2005), concluded his opening statement by inviting members of the public to attend the committee's hearings because:

... this is a public hearing and as such all members of the public are welcome to attend.

He also reassured those who sought to give evidence of their freedom to speak openly:

21. House of Representatives, *Debates*, 11 September 2007.

22. House of Representatives, *Debates*, 13 February 2008.

... Parliamentary privilege means special rights and immunities attached to the parliament, or its members and others, necessary for the discharge of the functions of the parliament without obstruction and without fear of prosecution.²³

The range of parliamentary visitors giving direct evidence to this committee was diverse, ranging from representatives of the Australian Medical Association, to others from the Australian Catholic Social Welfare Commission. The committee's work played a role in the introduction of the Goods and Services Tax during 1999.

Parliamentary committees allow members of the Australian community to approach the Parliament in a way that is not possible in the more formal parliamentary procedures. Former Senator Rosemary Crowley (SA 1983–2002), has spoken of the inquiry into British and Maltese child migration to Australia that she chaired, which, she said, 'emerged out of the pain and suffering of those people'. She noted that committee inquiries of this sort can give a great opportunity for the community to be heard, and after a committee concludes its work, its report can be used to lobby government. In this particular case, a number of public apologies were made as a result of the inquiry.²⁴

Foreign affairs

Parliament House is sometimes the venue for events of importance to the nation's external relations. It was at a service in the Great Hall following the events in China's Tiananmen Square that Prime Minister Hawke (Wills Vic 1980–92) broke down in tears when speaking of the deaths that occurred on 3–4 June 1989. Other such events can be more celebratory, such as the large gathering in 1988 to mark the anniversary of the creation of the Israeli state 40 years before. Twenty years later the nation's 60th anniversary was similarly remembered.

Much more obviously political are the visits, from time to time, of migrant groups determined to support an issue of great importance to their homeland. Often this will be in opposition to political events in that country. Examples from the early 1990s included the release of blue and yellow balloons to symbolise Ukrainian desire for freedom from Russian control, the gathering of a large number of Tamils protesting against the civil war in Sri Lanka, and protests over the Yugoslav army being used to fight the push for Croatian independence. In 1994 a group of Chinese-Australians expressed their opposition to the Australian visit by the head of the Chinese secret services. The great majority of such demonstrations are peaceful, though in 1991 a group of Croatians attacked the front doors of Parliament House. This occurred during a demonstration in support of Croatian independence efforts. On

23. Commonwealth of Australia, Proof Committee Hansard, Senate, *Select Committee on a New Tax System*, 17 December 1998, p. 1.

24. Senator Rosemary Crowley, 'On the Pulse', *houseatwork*, op. cit., p. 129; Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, Senate Community Affairs References Committee, *Lost Innocents: Righting the Record*, Report on Child Migration, August 2001, report, including appendix 7.

10 September 1999 four men hung a banner on the coat of arms at the front of the building's Great Verandah as a sign of support for East Timor. One of them spray-painted 'Shame Australia shame' on the building. All were later fined for trespass, and the spray painter was placed on a good behaviour bond and ordered to pay \$16 335 in damages for the cleaning away of the paint.²⁵

Official recognition

From time to time Parliament House will be the place used for occasions when Australia gives official recognition to the work and sacrifice done on the country's behalf. On 7 March 2000, the Chief of the Defence Force, Admiral Chris Barrie, accompanied by the Vice-Chief of the Defence Force, Air-Vice-Marshal Doug Riding, and Major General Peter Cosgrove, were honoured in the House of Representatives as part of a welcome home for the INTERFET forces from service in East Timor. INTERFET troops observed events from the public galleries.²⁶ Such gratitude for work on behalf of the nation can take many forms. Prior to Christmas 1990, Rear-Admiral Ian McDougall, Deputy Chief of the Naval Staff, went to Parliament House to receive from the singer, Jimmy Barnes, 3000 music tapes made by Australian music artists. They were a gift for the crews of the Navy's ships serving in the Persian Gulf.²⁷ The year 2001 was the 'International Year of Volunteers', and Members of the House of Representatives recognised local volunteers for their work for their communities and the nation. The Member for Fraser, Bob McMullan (Fraser ACT, from 1996), did so in Parliament House with the presentation of certificates to seven volunteers.²⁸

Forums

Parliament House sometimes is used as a location for a forum, or roundtable, on matters of current public concern. Few are as massive as the 'Australia 2020 Summit' of 19 and 20 April 2008, which brought 1000 leading Australians to the national Parliament 'to debate and develop long-term options for the nation across 10 critical areas'. Much smaller than this event was the 2002 roundtable discussion on substance abuse. Another tightly-focussed event was the conference entitled 'Recognition for Women in Australia', which discussed the fact that fewer than seven per cent of Australian awards had been granted to women. Should there be a quota? Perhaps some publicity about the low number of nominations? Dame Beryl Beaurepaire AC, called for a media campaign to make people—and particularly women—more aware of the awards.²⁹

25. David McLennan, 'Activists fined for Parliament graffiti protest', *Canberra Times*, 13 April 2000.

26. *About the House*, May/June 2000, p. 13.

27. *Canberra Times*, 21 December 1990.

28. *About the House*, September/October 2001, p. 18.

29. Kylie Davis, 'Whitlam sees insult in honours quotas', *Australian*, 26 July 1991.

Occasionally a forum held in Parliament House can be a highly charged, emotional occasion. Such was the National Marriage Forum held on 4 August 2004. Addressed by both the Prime Minister and the relevant shadow minister, this was an occasion designed to bring attention to the fact that many Australians opposed same-sex marriage. It was attended by more than 600 people from all parts of Australia, who represented many small churches as well as the Catholic, Presbyterian and Anglican congregations.³⁰

A different type of political forum was the roundtable convened by the House of Representatives Economics Committee in August 2007. Committee members, consumers, and regulators travelled to Canberra to discuss such matters as home lending practices, and how people might be assisted when they are undergoing financial problems and difficulties. Among the participants were the Mortgage and Finance Association of Australia, the Bendigo Bank and the Mortgage & Finance Association. The meeting was believed to be useful, not least because the representatives of many finance bodies who attended were in general agreement that there needed to be more regulation home of loan lending practices to limit so-called ‘predatory’ behaviour by ‘mortgage sharks’.³¹

More than just a legislature

The design of Parliament House has meant that visitors have much more to witness, or be a part of, than just visiting the chambers or committee rooms.

A showplace

The Parliament House collection of beautiful, historic and striking art and craftwork, which adds to the attractiveness of a visit to the people’s house, has been described as ‘one of its great successes’. Parliament House workers see this as a bonus of working in the building— as a House of Representatives attendant has said, ‘It’s such a privilege to work in such a beautiful building like this’.³² It can also act as an inspiration for artists.

The art collection

Part of the architect’s vision was that art of many kinds should be an integral part of Parliament House, though not just for decoration:

30. Nicola Roxon, ‘Call for balance on same-sex debate’, *Canberra Times*, 18 August 2004.

31. ‘Mortgage predators stalked’, *About the House*, September 2007, p. 11.

32. Cope, *op. cit.*, p. 113; Lupko ‘Luch’ Jonceski quoted in Carolyn Webb, ‘Keepers of the House’, *Sunday Age*, 6 April 2008.

... works of art and craft were to be understood as ‘voices’ within the building capable of expressing the diverse character and identity of Australia ... the presence of the works was a critical aspect of creating a sense of resonance in the building with past cultural traditions.³³

Accordingly, the new building opened with an established art collection, the Rotational Collection, for use throughout the building, including parliamentarians’ offices, semi-public and public spaces. Much older is the Historic Memorials Collection, which consists of historic portraits and paintings of significant events, many of which are on permanent display for visitors to enjoy.

A scornful critic described much of the art and craft as ‘either infantile or meaninglessly abstract’, proclaiming that the building was ‘a Parliament not an Art Gallery’, but his view seems not to be widely shared.³⁴ The visitor does have many paintings to admire, a large proportion of which are of parliament, or prominent members of it. There are paintings of the opening of the first parliament (by Tom Roberts), the commemorative sitting one hundred years later (Robert Hannaford), the opening of Parliament by the Queen in 1954 (Ivor Hele), the opening of the new Parliament House by the Queen (Marcus Beilby), and the first sitting of the House of Representatives in the new building (June Mendoza). In addition, there are many portraits: of Prime Ministers, presiding officers, and other notables. These include the first indigenous Member of Parliament, Senator Neville Bonner (Qld 1971–83), Sir Isaac Isaacs, member of the first House of Representatives (Indi Vic 1901–6) and the first Australian-born Governor-General (1931–6), and the so-called ‘Father of Federation’, Sir Henry Parkes.

Despite the fact that some of the Parliament House art collection is maintained for public enjoyment, much of the Rotational Collection is hidden from public view. A great amount, for example, is in MP’s offices. To overcome this, exhibitions of some of the Parliament’s holdings were organised from time to time—in 1996, for example, ‘Call of the Wild’ was an exhibition of art from the collection that featured ‘beasts and birds’. In the same year, ‘Imagining the Real’ was of recent acquisitions for the collection. The latter was praised by ANU art academic, Sasha Grishin, as enhancing ‘the reputation of Parliament House in Canberra as a contemporary building which houses a significant collection of contemporary art’.³⁵

Unfortunately, perhaps, this aspect of the relationship between the House and its visitors came to be greatly reduced for a time, after a review of the collection by the former head of the Australian National Gallery, Betty Churcher. She was concerned that there was no clear indication as to the art collection’s ‘core function’, or of ‘its role and responsibilities as a Parliament House Art Collection as opposed to a public art collection’. Churcher stated that

33. Parliament House Construction Authority, *Project Parliament: the Management Experience*, AGPS, Canberra, 1990, p. 138.

34. John Carroll, ‘The New Parliament House’, *Quadrant*, vol. 34, no. 3, March 1989, p. 32.

35. Sasha Grishin, ‘The peoples’ house of art’, *Canberra Times*, 26 June 1996.

temporary exhibitions should be the exception rather than the rule, noting that they were labour-intensive. She recommended that:

Where possible the permanent display of the major works of art in the open-access areas of Parliament House should not be disturbed, and only in exceptional circumstances should these spaces be given over to short-term temporary exhibitions.³⁶

For a time this policy has prevailed, but may well change. This would be to the pleasure of former Queensland and Australian Capital Territory MLA, Bill Wood. He has complained that the large and valuable collection ‘belongs to all Australians—we paid for it’, asserting his right to see ‘the art my taxes have helped acquire’.³⁷

It must be noted that some privately-sponsored art occasionally appears for public view. In mid-July 1996, for example, the Munupi Arts and Crafts Association of Melville Island mounted an exhibition in memory of Australia’s first major Aboriginal potter, Eddie Puruntatameri, who had died the previous year. This was part of the Eighth National Ceramics Conference. Rather less formal were the more than 400 galvanised iron cutouts of dogs, placed on the lawn in front of Parliament House in March 1995. The work of Canberra sculptor, Ingo Kleinert, these were the ‘heralds’ of the Canberra National Sculpture Forum 95. Every four days they were moved to enable the grass to be cut, though a Joint House Department staffer suggested that this was because ‘we didn’t want them leaving little messes behind’.³⁸ One of these dogs is now in the Rotational Collection, and at the time of writing was on display on the Ground Floor.

Craftwork

The visitor to Parliament House has more than beautiful paintings to admire, because there is much attractive craftwork and many attractive gifts on display.

The most spectacular piece of craft is the huge tapestry depicting an Australian coastal landscape, created from commissioned paintings by Arthur Boyd. It hangs at one end of the Great Hall. This was the result of collaboration between the artist, the architects, and the Victorian Tapestry Workshop. The Great Hall gallery contains a 16 metre embroidery, the result of the work of over 1000 members of the embroiderers guilds of Australia. Reminiscent of the style of the Bayeux Tapestry, it contains ‘images of Australia’s ancient, rural and urban landscape [that] invoke the country’s development during the period of early European exploration and settlement’. Elsewhere on the first floor of the building, there hang four large Odyssey Australia Tapestries, fabricated by Australian school children with

36. Betty Churcher, *Review of the Parliament House art collection*, Canberra, 2003, pp. 9, 15, 24, 27.

37. Bill Wood, ‘Parliament’s gallery of work is meant for all’, *Canberra Times*, 30 March 2007.

38. Helen Musa, ‘Artist honoured for his art, acumen’, *Canberra Times*, 7 July 1996; Robert Macklin, ‘All is not what it seems at Parliament’, *Canberra Times*, 1 April 1995.

learning difficulties. Hanging in two locations, they give a striking addition of colour to the building—‘like a flood of colour and light’.

Craft of a quite different nature includes the King Table sitting in front of the Boyd tapestry, made in Queensland out of blackwood, jarrah, beech myrtle and walnut timbers. The jarrah floor in the Great Hall typically draws many expressions of admiration from visitors, such as the group of Inverell residents on a tour on the morning of 3 April 2008. In the Foyer the columns and stairs are beautifully carved from marble, and striking marquetry panels surround the Foyer area.

Gifts

The visitor’s experience is further enhanced by the wide range of official gifts on display, both inside and outside the building. Some pieces are beautiful, such as the Puchong ware vase given by the Republic of Korea, and the piece of porcelain from the Parliament of Czechoslovakia. Others such as the Canadian Parliament’s ‘Dancing Walrus’, made out of soap stone and caribou bone, are intriguing, as is the incense burner of carved soapstone and varnished pearwood given by the People’s Republic of China. Relics from the London Blitz of the night of 10–11 May 1941 are simply confronting. If the visitor chooses to explore the parliamentary grounds, an amillary sphere sundial, a gift of the Country Women’s Association of Australia, can be checked for the current time on a sunny day. A short distance away, a drink of water can be taken at the Returned and Services League fountain, a gift ‘in memory of the fallen’. Appropriately enough, considering its proximity to the building, other engraved words on its black granite structure invite the passer-by to, ‘Look around you—these are the things they believed in’.

A symbolic gift is the glass coolamon in a display case on the mezzanine above the Foyer. Coolamons were the traditional Aboriginal means of carrying children, and this beautiful creation was given to the Parliament and to the nation by survivors of the Stolen Generations in 2008—‘On behalf of our people, thank you for saying sorry’:

We have a new covenant between our peoples—that we will do all we can to make sure our children are carried forward, loved and nurtured and able to live a full life.

The coolamon was later presented by the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition to the Speaker of the House of Representatives.³⁹

Political and other exhibitions

Over the years there have been displays of a more political nature than could be possible in the formal art collection. One of the earliest celebrated the 300th anniversary of the English Bill of Rights of 1689. Australian topics have included the 1891 Federation Convention, so important in the decade-long development of the national constitution, while another looked

39. James Massola, ‘Coolamon message carries on’, *Canberra Times*, 30 March 2008.

back at the first Parliament of the Commonwealth, which first met on 9 May 1901. In 1943, Enid Lyons (Darwin Tas 1943–51) and Senator Dorothy Tangney (WA, 1943–68) were the first women elected to the Commonwealth Parliament. In February 1992, an exhibition opened in honour of the work of these pioneers—and the 47 female MPs who had followed them. On display were paintings, photographs, artefacts, letters and other documents. Items relating to the activities of suffragettes, and other supporters of political activity by women, were also featured. There was a gallery of all 49 female Commonwealth MPs, as well as recordings of Lyons' and Tangney's first speeches in the Parliament. The gallery remained in place after the exhibition closed, and in February 2008 was expanded to bring the exhibition up to date. The photographs now numbered 143.

For those who regularly walk on the first floor of the building, it is clear that other types of exhibitions attract visitors. In recent years there has been an exhibition on the centenary of the Finnish Parliament, photographs of the Mawson Base in the Antarctic, and artworks by young Australians dealing with global poverty issues, as part of the Make Poverty History campaign. Shortly before the publication of this paper, a graphic display of the lives of South African people suffering from tuberculosis was on view.⁴⁰ Such exhibitions are part of the interest of a visit to the Parliament.

Music and drama

Music can sometimes be heard in Parliament House. On 12 September 1991, the South Burnett Youth Band gave a lunch-time concert in Parliament's Great Hall where they played some jazz, traditional, and classical selections. The participants were from grades 8–12 in schools in Nanango, Kingaroy, Wondai and Murgon. Each year, similar school groups play for whomever chooses to come to listen. As these are often in the middle of the morning, few parliamentary workers can attend, and few tourists linger, but the important thing for their teachers, and the proud parents who accompany them, is that they are performing in the nation's parliament. A more political musical event was Australia's first Internet rock concert in 2004, held in front of the Parliament by artists including John Farnham, Wendy Matthews, Jenny Morris, Midnight Oil, Crowded House and INXS. Apart from its entertainment function, the concert's political aim was to demonstrate the lack of music copyright protection on the Internet.⁴¹

Many other artists have performed in the building, in youth theatre, musical groups, choirs, concerts, and recitals. Among the performers have been the Press Gallery choir (the 'House Howlers'), Australian Girls Choir, the Rowland Gregory Orpheus Singers from Orange, the Belconnen Musicians from the ACT, and performing arts students from the University of Western Sydney in the play, 'Marat'. Aboriginal dancers have performed a corroboree, while

40. David Currey, 'Pictures on shack walls tell grim tale of disease', *Canberra Times*, 17 March 2008.

41. David Higgins, 'And now, live from Parliament, it's the Internet rock show', *Australian*, 25 April 1995.

Canberrans have enjoyed Christmas concerts staged in the building. Sometimes the event taking place is a celebration, rather than a performance, as when Joel Edgerton, star of the television series, 'The Secret Life of Us', attended a reception organised by the Australian Film and Television Commission. Edgerton acknowledged that he was 'no match' on the night for the Oscar award statuette that had been brought along by Adam Elliott and Melanie Coombs, who had won the award for their animated film, 'Harvey Crumpet'.⁴²

Historic documents

A small collection of documents of great importance to the nation is on permanent display for Australians to admire. Australia's governmental system can be traced back to the Magna Carta of 1215. A national treasure for visitors to marvel over is the confirmation of the Magna Carta issued by King Edward I on 12 October 1297, one of only four surviving originals of that sovereign's confirmation of the Charter. A facsimile of the Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Act 1900 (UK) is displayed, together with a facsimile of the Commission of Assent signed by Queen Victoria in the same year. Rather oddly, the Queen's inkstand, quill and desk used by her to sign the Commission can also be viewed. Much more recent are the *Australia Act 1986* (Cwlth) and *Australia Act 1986* (UK), and Queen Elizabeth II's Proclamation which fixed the date of commencement of this legislation. Land rights petitions of 1963 and 1986, plus a commemorative plaque celebrating the 30th anniversary of the Aborigines referendum of 1967, form a separate display. Relatively few historical documents are on display in this nation that traces its modern history only to 1788. Parliament House gives Australians the chance to see some of the most important.

A place for worship

On 18 February 2008 the Archbishop of Sydney, Cardinal George Pell, joined hundreds of children and many MPs in welcoming a 3.8m cross and an icon into the Parliament: 'It is a moment to pray for justice, peace and equality in our country'. These objects had reached Canberra via Ground Zero in New York City, East Timor, and a genocide memorial in Rwanda. Both were gifts from Pope John Paul II to the young people of the world, and, accompanied by an indigenous Australian message stick, represented an invitation to young people from Pope Benedict XVI, to attend World Youth Day in Sydney in July of the same year. Prime Minister Rudd (Griffith Qld from 1998) welcomed the cross and icon to Parliament House.⁴³

This is a reminder that Parliament House is often the scene of religious observances: the lighting of a huge candelabra to celebrate the Jewish festival of Hanuka in 1988, the national prayer breakfasts organised by the Australian Parliamentary Christian Fellowship, or the visit by the Tibetan Dalai Lama in 2001, are examples. In February 1995, three Buddhist monks

42. Emma Macdonald, 'House rolls out red carpet for nation's film, TV stars', *Canberra Times*, 24 March 2004.

43. Nyssa Skilton, 'Surviving ice, sea, war, the cross arrives', *Canberra Times*, 19 February 2008.

created a two-metre Kalachakra Mandala circle, an intricate work depicting 722 Buddhist deities, that was created by the painstaking process of placing coloured grains of sand one at a time on a table. The construction took a month, after which, ‘in a lesson of life’s impermanence’, the work was destroyed. It was claimed that some tourists were heard to hope that the monk’s quiet concentration would rub off on the resident politicians in the building.⁴⁴

A time for sorrow ...

Parliament House has been the scene of a number of demonstrations of compassion and sorrow for tragedies that have affected the nation and its people. That such events are held here illustrates the importance of this location in the nation’s psyche.

On 28 April 1996, at Port Arthur in Tasmania, 35 people were killed and 21 injured in a mass shooting. Twelve days later, a group of people stood in front of the nation’s legislature to express their sorrow for that event, and to call for changes to the law. Thirty-five of the group held placards, each of which referred to a particular victim—for example, ‘woman 70 shot’. It was an eloquent moment of remembrance for victims of the worst such crime to have occurred in Australia. Three years later, on 23 November 1999, white wreaths covered the lawn in front of Parliament House in remembrance of the victims of suicide. Many wreaths contained a photograph of a particular victim, and the display was designed to remind Australians of the tragedy of such loss to the community.

On 17 September 2001 over 2000 people filled the Great Hall to overflowing for an inter-denominational service to remember the people killed and injured in New York, Washington DC, and Pennsylvania on 11 September 2001. In attendance were most members of the Parliament, senior bureaucrats, diplomats, members of the armed services and members of the public. Anglican Bishop to the Defence Force, Tom Frame, spoke of ‘a day that has diminished our world’. Within thirteen months Frame was speaking again at another national memorial service, this time for those killed and injured as result of the terrorist attacks in Bali twelve days before. On this occasion the Great Hall was ‘washed with golden light’, from the ‘forest of candles’ lit by over 100 relatives and friend of the victims.⁴⁵

We may suppose that the more such events are held at Parliament House, the greater the expectation that the nation’s parliament should be used on such occasions.

44. Bronwen Gavin, ‘Quiet blessing in the furnace of politics’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 February 1995.

45. *Images of the House. The first hundred years House of Representatives 1901–2001*, Department of the House of Representatives, Canberra, 2002, pp. 78–79; Emma Macdonald, ‘Heart of the nation mourns victims’, *Canberra Times*, 18 September 2001; Ross Peake, ‘A heartbroken nation mourns its loss’, *Canberra Times*, 25 October 2002.

... and for celebration

By contrast, many celebratory events are held in Parliament House, a location that helps give a sense of occasion to such events.

On 9 May 2006, after 14 days entombment, miners Brant Webb and Tod Russell emerged from the Beaconsfield mine in which a colleague, Larry Knight, had lost his life. On the same day Prime Minister Howard (Bennelong NSW 1974–2007) announced that, ‘Given the scale of what has been achieved against such incredible odds’, the Parliament would celebrate the heroism of the townspeople by inviting them to a public reception in Parliament’s Great Hall. Three weeks later a large contingent of Tasmanians, including the miners, their rescuers, their families, doctors, church and community leaders, arrived in Canberra. The Great Hall resounded with whistles, cheers, laughter and applause as Webb and Russell reminded them that:

All the people in this room today, they’re the true heroes, they’re the ones that risked their lives ... They’re the ones who left loved ones at home knowing the dangers were there.

The celebration was also the occasion of the announcement of a \$1m education scholarship to honour Larry Knight. This award is now available to ‘an Australian citizen or permanent humanitarian refugee who can demonstrate financial need and is undertaking a course related to the mining industry’.⁴⁶

A number of Australians were killed or injured in the crash of a Garuda Airlines plane in March 2007. A member of the Federal Press Gallery, Cynthia Banham, was badly injured. In June of the same year, fellow journalist, Matt Price, read a message from Banham to the Press Gallery’s Mid-Winter Ball in Parliament House, in which she said that she and her partner were keen to see their colleagues again: ‘The Midwinter Ball is always such a wonderful occasion ...’ The ball reportedly raised \$160 000 for charity, of which \$100 000 went to the Burn Foundation of Australia, chosen as a special recipient in response to the Garuda crash.⁴⁷

A different type of celebration was *Peoplescape*. In November 2001, a massive display of 4028 life-size plastic figures was created as an artistic tribute to Australians who had left an important, though largely unrecognised, imprint upon their country. The display ran along Federation Mall, as well as on the lawns on top of the newer building. The Mall was awash with floodlights to light the figures on the night of a celebratory concert in the Great Hall. On such occasions, the grand building provides a spectacular setting for celebration.⁴⁸ It also provides a splendid location for celebratory events such as dinners and balls, like the Press

46. Todd Russell quoted, ‘Rescue party rocks Great Hall’, *Mercury*, 30 May 2006.

47. Malcolm Farr, ‘Air crash survivor’s brave bid for her life’, *Daily Telegraph*, 21 June 2007.

48. Mario Xuereb, ‘Phalanx of figures invades Capital Hill’, *Canberra Times*, 24 November 2001.

Gallery's annual Mid-Winter Ball, or the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Dinner Debate held in April 2008.

Marriage is another occasion for celebration. It was said that Peter Staples MP (Diamond Valley Vic 1983–84, Jagajaga Vic 1984–96), met his second wife, Jeanette Bourke, in the Parliamentary Library in the provisional Parliament House. Several years later, on 31 March 1989, Staples and Bourke were married in the 'new' Parliament House's Mural Hall, thus celebrating the first wedding in either house.⁴⁹ On 24 February 2008, 'Canberra seemed a nice, central place' to hold the first Jewish wedding in Parliament House. The groom was another Victorian MP, Michael Danby (Melbourne Ports Vic from 1998) and his partner was Amanda Mendes Da Costa. The veiling ceremony was conducted in the Marble Hall, the wedding canopy was erected on the Queens Terrace, and the wedding dinner was held in the Mural Hall. One of the guests proclaimed the event as a celebration of the inclusiveness of Australia's diverse culture.⁵⁰ Few wedding ceremonies have been held in Parliament House, but many are the Canberra bridal parties that come to the foyer to have photographs taken, particularly on the marble stairs.

Commemoration

Parliament House can offer a place to celebrate the marriage of two people, but it can also be used to praise those who have passed on. On 13 December 2007, the Great Hall was the venue for a memorial service for Matt Price, a highly-regarded journalist and 'one of the world's happiest men', who had died the day after the recent Commonwealth election. In adjacent seats in the front row were Acting Prime Minister Julia Gillard (Lalor Vic from 1998), former minister Joe Hockey (North Sydney NSW from 1996), and a tattooed man, stranger to both. When Hockey asked the newcomer if he was a friend of Price, he was told that the two had never met, but that he had flown from South Australia to pay his respects, 'because I really wanted to be here'.⁵¹ Similar occasions saw the Great Hall used on 22 November 1994 for a service in memory of prominent public servant and academic, Peter Wilenski, and the Mural Hall as the location for a service in remembrance of Ian Henderson, journalist and Labor Party official, on 8 September 2003. Flags at both Parliament House buildings, the old and the new, were lowered to half-mast out of respect for Wilenski. It was said of Henderson that he would have been embarrassed at the outpouring of accolades and

49. Lenore Taylor, 'Minister weds in new House', *Canberra Times*, 31 March 1989.

50. Jehane Sharah, 'Jewish wedding in the House', *Sunday Age*, 24 February 2008; Siobhain Ryan, 'MP marries the Jewish way', *Australian*, 25 February 2008.

51. Emma Macdonald, 'Colleagues and MPs farewell journalist', *Canberra Times*, 14 December 2007; Virginia Haussegger, "'Hug the ones you love": the life-affirming message of death', *Canberra Times*, 15 December 2007.

affection for him, but all three memorial services enabled the families, friends and admirers of these men to use Parliament House as a respected venue for them to be remembered.⁵²

A place of inspiration

The author of this paper came across professional artist, Stephen Mallick, formerly of Hobart, now of Canberra, in Parliament House on the Canberra Day holiday, 2008. He was seated on the Senate side of the first floor of the Parliament building, facing the House of Representatives upper-level entrance, making a charcoal sketch of the scene. Describing himself as an artist who gained much inspiration from public spaces, Mallick saw his work as a way of celebrating Parliament House. Earlier in the day he had brought his son into the building to show him how well it combined ‘beauty and openness’. To the author he described Parliament House as ‘never in the way’, for it was a ‘place where people are relevant’.⁵³

Getting them young

School trips to Canberra often feature a visit to Parliament House, and include participation in a parliamentary role-play run by the Parliamentary Education Office (PEO). In 2006–07 a total of 87 113 students from 2494 school groups took part in the one-hour session. This is run in a modified committee room that includes chamber benches with reversible red (Senate) and green (House of Representatives) cushions to give an air of authenticity to the proceedings. Parliamentary workers can often hear the laughter and generally enthusiastic noise that accompanies such sessions. The children take part in simulated House and Senate chamber proceedings, as well as committee hearings. Older students also visit, some taking part in the Rotary-sponsored ‘Adventure in Citizenship’ program, while the PEO and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation combine in *Heywire*, a program that brings rural youth to Parliament House.⁵⁴

The PEO staff also work with adults. ‘Little Lunch Sittings’ are held for older people in groups of 15 to 30 people. Participants have the opportunity to observe Question Time in action, participate in a parliamentary experience, meet their federal member (if available) and enjoy lunch in the Members and Guests Dining Room.⁵⁵

Parliamentary fellowships are provided for teachers and community workers to witness actual parliamentary business, with the aim of giving the visitors an appreciation of ‘how the place

52. ‘Canberra’s elite remembers one of its finest sons’, *Australian*, 23 November 1994; Ross Peake, ‘Colleagues farewell a fair-minded man’, *Canberra Times*, 9 September 2003.

53. Interview with Stephen Mallick, Parliament House, Canberra, 10 March 2008.

54. Department of the Senate, *Annual Report 2006–07*, Canberra, 2007, p. 43–5.

55. Parliamentary Education Office, ‘Adult Workshops’, <http://www.peo.gov.au/programs/workshops.html>, accessed on 18 March 2008.

really works'. In 2004, for example, seven legal studies and society and environment teachers from the electorate of Port Adelaide sat in on committee hearings, spoke with the Speaker and the Senate government whip, and discussed with their local member, Rod Sawford (Port Adelaide SA 1988–2007), his work as an MP. Such visits have been conducted since 1995, and they generally are much appreciated by the participants:

I still tell everyone about the program and remember it as one of the most interesting and eye-opening experiences, as well as being great fun.⁵⁶

A sporting nation

In a nation where sport occupies such an important place, it is not surprising that Parliament House is often the venue for the acknowledgment of sporting prowess, as well as for events of a sporting nature. The international tennis players, John Newcombe and Tony Roche, came to Canberra to open the Parliament's tennis courts, an Aboriginal tribal ceremony created the flame for lighting the torch for the journey to the 2000 Sydney Paralympic Games, and the Australian Wallabies rugby union team was welcomed home after the 2003 World Cup. Members of the public who happened to be sitting in either chamber on 26 February 2001, could hear many members speaking in condolence motions for the cricketer, Sir Donald Bradman, considered by many as Australia's greatest sportsman.⁵⁷ In 1997 Parliament House security staff ran the 100 km from Goulburn to Canberra to raise money for charity, an event that has continued to this day, though in 2003 the event was altered to a 12 hour run around Parliament House. It is known as the Phil Botha Memorial Charity Run in memory of one of the original group who died of cancer in 1998.

A place of work

For some Australians, Parliament House is a workplace, where they are engaged in a multitude of tasks which help the functioning of the nation's legislature. Some hold positions that we would expect to see in such a building—the Hansard reporters who provide a record of the debates, the officials who run the chambers, the officers in each house's administration, the security guards, the gardeners. But there is also a single-person hairdressing salon, a coffee and fast food outlet, a gymnasium, a staff cafeteria, a group of staff responsible for the maintenance of, and additions to, the art collection, a library that is almost as old as the Parliament itself staffed with officers who do research for MPs, a travel agency, a branch of the Westpac Bank, the personal staff of MPs, and the parliamentary guides who walk about five kilometres per shift as they usher visitors around the building. The number of occupants varies, with a maximum workforce of about 5000 people on a parliamentary sitting day—a larger population than the New South Wales town of

56. 'Perfect timing for parliamentary fellows', *About the House*, June 2004, p. 36.

57. See for example, Senator Faulkner, Senate, *Debates*, 26 February 2001, p. 21878.

Merimbula. The number falls to about 2500 when the Parliament is in recess, which is about the size of the Victorian town of Beechworth.⁵⁸

For many parliamentary staff, working in Parliament House is an experience they treasure. It may be the guide, noting the ‘awe on the faces of most of our visitors’,⁵⁹ the Parliament Shop assistant thrilled to see Dame Joan Sutherland ‘stopping by with her grandchild’,⁶⁰ or the managers, cleaners, caterers, maintenance staff and others, who ensure that:

... the building is at its best, is lovingly maintained, and serves as a showcase of Australia to the rest of the world.⁶¹

Some, no doubt, are not overly excited by where they work, but for others it is a very special place that ‘feels like home’:

Lots of friendly, helpful people—a community supporting the democratic process by providing the services our elected representatives need to enable them to do the best they can for all Australians. The people we serve, the senators and members of the Commonwealth Parliament come and go, while many of us who work in Parliament House are more permanent and enduring than our masters.⁶²

It is also the fact of ‘being there’ when important events occur, such as the opening of the building, visits from national leaders, or deeply moving occasions such as ‘Sorry Day’. A verse from a Parliamentary Library staffer sums up the response to such an occasion:

Waiting for the
Queen
All on marble
Stairs
We guard our
Places

The man from WA
Asked
‘Are you people
Busy?’

58. Calculations from David Elder, Sergeant-at-Arms, and Jim Saunders, Visitor Services, Parliament House.

59. Hall, *op. cit.*

60. Lynne Craft, ‘Shopping is a Great Leveller’, in *houseatwork*, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

61. Rob Meller, ‘Beneath the quiet façade’, *houseatwork*, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

62. Viv Wilson, ‘It Feels Like Home’, *houseatwork*, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

‘Yes,’ I said. He
Laughed.⁶³

Media work

Despite the early uncertainty of journalists about the new parliament building, the media (and MPs) soon grew accustomed to the new building and its obvious benefits for them. It was, in fact, very superior to its old, crowded predecessor. Former journalist and academic, Clem Lloyd, has noted, for example, just how difficult it was to get good-quality television transmissions from the old house. He believed the new building has been responsible ‘for a blossoming of political and parliamentary television news’. He also believed that newspaper coverage of the proceedings of the Parliament increased, a view shared by the author of this paper.⁶⁴ In addition, Australians must have a much clearer picture of the parliamentary building. Many pictures of chamber activity are seen, particularly in the House of Representatives. Reporters, with or without interviewees, are often seen in front of the building or in a courtyard, and coverage is occasionally given of parliamentary committee business. Protests outside its walls are usually newsworthy, often with the building as the backdrop. Without wanting to exaggerate what it all means, it can be claimed that the new building has visually opened up of some of the Parliament’s activities for ordinary Australians.

Not all media activity is commercial in nature. Apart from providing an area within the parliamentary building for the commercial media to be located, the Parliament itself has also produced material to help the Australian community understand its activities. An example is the regular newspaper advertising by the two houses that details current and forthcoming activity. The work of the Parliamentary Education Office has been referred to already. The House of Representatives has published the magazine, *About the House* since 1999, the Parliament’s Internet site is used to inform the public about future and past activities of a parliamentary nature, and a monthly television program on the work of the House and its committees has been produced and screened internally since February 2005. The commercial media is assisted by an e-mail alert system, which gives details of forthcoming committee hearings and the publication of committee reports. This all helps open up the mysteries of Parliament House for outsiders and can help them understand the building when they visit.

The parties and the building

The major political parties have a very close relationship with Parliament House due to the importance of the governmental and legislative function of the building. It is not so well-known, perhaps, that many party members have other less official occasions when they come

63. Leanne Manthorpe, ‘...a memory came to me’, *houseatwork*, op. cit., p. 159.

64. Clem Lloyd, ‘The Influence of Parliamentary Location and Space on Australia’s Political News Media’, *The Senate and Good Government*, Papers on Parliament No. 33, Department of the Senate, Canberra, 1999, pp. 10–11.

to the building. There are occasions for celebration like the night when the band Yothu Yindi played at the 'True Believers' Victory Dinner to mark the re-election of the Keating Government in 1993. Of a different nature are the 'budget night fund-raisers' that are now a regular part of the Parliament House year:

... with various nooks and crannies being fitted out for dinner for the party faithful and corporate spenders to hear speeches from the prime minister down to humble MPs.⁶⁵

On these occasions Opposition party members will also be active, giving their guests the chance to hear how the Opposition of the day is responding to the new Budget.⁶⁶ Different again, is the way in which MPs can sometimes be observed shepherding a group of constituents—often school groups—around the grand building.

A place for hire

Before Parliament House was opened, the Senate President and the Speaker of the House together made an unusual decision. They decreed that certain parts of the building would be available as locations within which private functions could be held. This was described as an attempt to recoup some of the huge running costs of the building. Despite some concern among MPs that this could limit their access to facilities during non-sitting periods, and warnings that the dignity of the Parliament might be jeopardised, the plan went ahead. Before a month had passed after the Parliament House opening, bookings had been taken for the fifth Irish-Australian Conference, a Returned and Services League reception, the Australian Society of Accountants annual dinner, and the Law Council of Australia Bicentennial Conference.⁶⁷

Australians have continued to enjoy using Parliament House in this way. Sometimes the function will be actively supported by an MP. In September 1990, John Sharp (Gilmore NSW 1984–93, Hume NSW 1993–8) and the Cowra Shire Council and its President, Cr Cyril Treasure, co-hosted a cocktail party to celebrate 25 years of the Lachlan Valley Festival. Wilson Tuckey (O'Connor WA from 1980) was involved with National Wool Day in December 1991 and 1992. In 1991 a flock of about 100 merinos grazed on the Parliament House roof, despite parliamentary gardeners expressing their concern for the damage they might do. In the following year \$10 million worth of wool was auctioned in the Great Hall. As Tuckey explained, in putting this focus on wool, he hoped that 'Australians go back to their local product and use it wherever possible'. A very different spectacle was the Qantas celebration of the airline's 75th birthday. A team of technical staff and mechanical apprentices worked to put together a replica of the first Qantas airplane. The model of the 8.6m long, 11m

65. Dennis Shanahan, 'Elites to party on as budget cuts deep', *Australian*, 18 April 2008.

66. *ibid.*

67. Tim Dodd, 'Parlt House to open for business', *Australian Financial Review*, 25 May 1988.

wingspan, 1921 Avro 504K biplane was the centrepiece for the dinner held in the Great Hall.⁶⁸

Indigenous Australians and Parliament House

At the inception of the new Parliament House some indigenous Australians expressed their doubts about its being constructed. While the Queen was involved in the opening ceremony, on the other side of the Forecourt indigenous voices were to be heard expressing anger at the proceedings—‘Always was, always will be Aboriginal land’. Some views were extreme. Tiga Bales likened the opening to the celebration of the birth of the German Third Reich, and claimed that the building failed, because ‘democracy does not work for Aboriginal people’. Michael Mansell talked of travelling to Libya to ask Colonel Gaddafi to consider trade sanctions against Australia. There were also attempts to present a petition to the Queen complaining of Aboriginal living conditions, and seeking the Queen’s intervention. Some white critics were upset that the sound of indigenous chanting could be heard while the national anthem was being played.⁶⁹ Aboriginal poet and activist, Kevin Gilbert, warned that the Aboriginal mosaic in the forecourt held the power of retribution—a ‘pay-back energy’—akin to the pointing of the bone, that would ‘remain upon white Australia’s neck until such time there is justice’. Michael Nelson Tjakamarra, the mosaic’s artist, denied Gilbert’s claim, stating that his design was intended to help all Australians understand each other.⁷⁰

Since its opening indigenous people have visited Parliament House for many reasons. In June 2004, for example, a group of protesters marched on the building in a protest against the abolition of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC), the peak Aboriginal administrative body that had been the target of much criticism from the Coalition Government. It was, according to indigenous Australian Democrat Senator, Aden Ridgeway (NSW 1999–2005), an illustration of the government’s ‘absolute disregard for the rights and concerns of Aboriginal people’.⁷¹ On many other occasions Parliament House has been used as the backdrop to expressions of concern over the place of indigenous people in Australian society. An example was the symbolic removal of a piece of the forecourt mosaic by Tjakamarra, in a protest against the ‘Mabo’ legislation that was criticised by many indigenous Australians. He threatened to do more if his people continued to be ignored:

68. John Sharp MP, News Release, 12 September 1990; Katrina Iffland, ‘New day to mark our greatest export’, *Canberra Times*, 2 April 1992; Andrew Kazar, *Canberra Times*, 16 November 1995.

69. Stephen Romei, ‘Blacks vent their spleen’, *Daily Telegraph*, 10 May 1988; Mike Seccombe, ‘Blacks angered by royal “slight”’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 May 1988.

70. Hugo Kelly and Mark Metherell, ‘Blacks jeer Queen over land rights’, *Age*, 10 May 1988; ‘Parliament mosaic “puts a curse on whites”’, *Australian*, 10 May 1988; Pilita Clark, ‘Artist denies “curse”’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 11 May 1988.

71. Peter Brewer, ‘Emotions high at protest march for indigenous rights’, *Canberra Times*, 16 June 2004.

If this Government does not listen to Aboriginal people then we take all the painting back home.⁷²

Despite this history, much indigenous interaction with the Parliament building has focussed more on hope than frustration. On 12 October 1997 Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation organised the placing of over 60 000 individually named multi-cultural plastic hands over much of the grass in front of Parliament House as a gesture in support of black and white co-existence. This ‘Sea of Hands’, as it came to be known, remains one of the most spectacular visual demonstrations in the first two decades of the permanent building. In August 1999, ‘Sister of the Moon—Kakadu’, a combination of music, graphic and literary arts was opened with the aim of bringing non-indigenous Australians into contact with 40 000 years of indigenous cultural heritage.

At the opening of the 42nd Parliament on 12 February 2008, Aborigines in traditional dress greeted MPs at Parliament House in the first ‘welcome to country’ ceremony of indigenous music and dance held in Parliament House. Matilda House-Williams, an elder of the Ngambri people of the Canberra and Yass region, led the ceremony in the Members’ Hall. One of House’s granddaughters presented Prime Minister Rudd with a message stick, and the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition, Brendan Nelson (Bradfield NSW from 1996), promised that such ceremonies would become a standard feature of this parliamentary event.⁷³

Raising issues

The people’s elected representatives are expected to use Parliament House to raise issues of importance to some or all Australians. Less well-appreciated is the fact that the building is a symbolically significant location for members of the general public to publicise their views on matters of importance. As a parliamentary committee has put it:

By protesting in the national capital in front of the national Parliament, people symbolically are delivering the message directly to their elected representatives.⁷⁴

Many people do so.

Seeking support

For many people and organisations, to visit Parliament House is seen as an important part of publicising an issue, bringing it to the attention of the elected representatives, while also

72. Rachel Hawes, ‘Artist digs up his parliamentary mosaic in Mabo protest’, *Australian*, 28 September 1993.

73. Clinton Porteous, ‘Start on righting the wrongs’, *Courier-Mail*, 13 February 2008.

74. The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories, *A right to protest*, AGPS, Canberra, 1997, pp. xx, 13.

informing the wider community. Those who work in Parliament House see a constant stream of such people: AIDS workers, an anti-suicide group, the Australian Science Festival, the Fred Hollows Foundation and its fight against eye disease, senior students visiting Parliament House for 'Celebrate Democracy Week'. In November 2006 more than 100 children and young adults arrived in a campaign to raise awareness of type-one diabetes. All suffered from the disease, and members of the group talked about how it affected their lives. To draw attention to their efforts, a field of 15 000 syringes was laid on the lawn in front of the Parliament House forecourt.⁷⁵

Occasionally a publicity campaign launch will involve one or more prominent individuals in an effort to catch public attention. As part of a 1989 campaign by the Mature Media Group, a lobby organisation for adult videos, the star of six erotic movies, 'voluptuous, blue-eyed blond', Jamie Summers, posed for pictures in the Members' gym—and was duly photographed for the *Sunday Sun*. Rather more mainstream was the presence of Test cricketer Merv Hughes, with Tania Lacey of 'Countdown Revolution', also in 1989, helping to publicise a programme which encouraged young people to stay longer at school and gain as many qualifications as possible. In 1991, Olympic swimmer, Linley Frame, and Australian netball champion, Ann Sargent, launched the Australian Sports Commission's 'Action Girls' campaign, with its slogan of 'Sport—Everyone's Game', which was designed to attract more young women to play sport.⁷⁶ MPs are often involved in such publicity efforts.

A symbolic journey

There are thus many important issues that people believe will be better publicised if the issue is proclaimed from, or near, the parliament building. With some examples, it is clearly believed that the symbolism of the journey to Canberra is part of the exercise—such as the 2001 visit by an estimated 30 000 bikers, many of whom rode to Canberra, to campaign for motorcycle safety.⁷⁷ In February and September 1990 a large number of timber trucks drove in convoy from Gippsland and southern New South Wales to Parliament House. They were protesting against government delays in declaring what areas of National Estate forests could be logged in the south-east. As they saw it, coming to Canberra was important for their effort to gain justice: 'We have come here today to make people listen to our side of the story'. Their blockade of the building produced much publicity for their cause.⁷⁸

A much smaller example than the timber truck blockades, was the endurance shown by four anti-Iraq war protesters who walked from Melbourne to Canberra in early March 2003. This

75. 'Up front on diabetes', *About the House*, December 2006, p. 5.

76. Peter Collins, 'Probe on porn star in House', *Sunday Sun*, 1 January 1989; Tony Wright, 'Getting "The Guide" from Merv', *Canberra Times*, 4 October 1989; Fiona Higgins, 'Sportswomen of all shapes and sizes', *Canberra Times*, 21 May 1991.

77. *About the House*, March-April 2001, p. 16.

78. South East Timber Association Incorporated, Eden NSW, Press statement, 13 February 1990.

was a two-week effort by a Gulf War veteran and three members of the Mornington Peninsula Peace Network. The group believed they had ‘empowered people along the way’, isolated as many country residents were from peace rallies in the cities.⁷⁹ One of the most publicised efforts ‘to take a message to Canberra’, was undertaken by former Australian Rules football champion, Michael Long, in November 2004. Concerned about the need for immediate action to combat Aboriginal social problems, he was seeking a meeting with the Prime Minister, and began his walk in an effort to secure that meeting. Long reached Albury, sore and blistered after nine days walking, at which point he called off the journey due to his having secured a meeting with Prime Minister Howard. Symbolically, however, he continued his journey to Canberra, to a meeting within Parliament House.⁸⁰

Lobbying

Many of those who travel to Canberra to publicise their issue do more than this, of course. It is probably a rare day in which there are not representatives of lobby groups entering Parliament House in regard to issues they are pursuing. They might have meetings with ministers and government backbenchers, Opposition members and minor party senators—particularly when the government of the day does not control the Senate. Meetings with, and evidence given to, parliamentary committees, are also an important part of the lobbyists’ work effort. Much of this is little heard about, unless it is deemed politically necessary to put out material to the media.

Occasionally, however, one can see a case where the accessibility of Parliament has played a part in a particular outcome. As the result of a car accident on 27 November 1993, three pre-school age children were orphaned. Three-month-old Jackson was left brain-injured, blind and paralysed, and in the care of his maternal grandmother, Judie Stephens, who soon realised the enormous task in ensuring a secure financial future for the little boy. After doing much research, Stephens began to lobby for legislation to establish structured settlements. These are designed to give tax-free, indexed, pensions to people such as Jackson, to enable them to fund care and medical needs for the rest of their lives. Stephens’ lobbying included many trips to Canberra to speak with government and non-government MPs, but it bore fruit in the long run. On 5 December 2002, the Taxation Laws Amendment (Structured Settlements and Structured Orders) Bill 2002 received its third reading in the Senate. As she recalled:

On the passage of the bill I was ecstatic ... As soon as it happened I cheered, then I ran out around the parliament looking to hug the people who helped us achieve this.⁸¹

79. Georgia Curry, ‘Long walk to bring anti-war message to Parliament’, *Canberra Times*, 6 March 2003.

80. Lincoln Wright, ‘Long walk sets PM a challenge’ *Herald Sun Sunday*, 21 November 2004; David McLennan, ‘Walk ends but longer trek begins’, *Canberra Times*, 4 December 2004.

81. Helen Beringen, ‘Power of One’, *About the House*, March–April 2003, pp. 25–6.

A place for protest

As the Queen participated in the opening ceremony on 9 May 1988, a noisy protest by indigenous people and their supporters could be seen and heard across the Parliament's Forecourt. Since that day the Parliament has been the target and venue for a great many protests, and the right to protest has been spoken of as an important part of the Australian political culture. For former Liberal Minister and later leader of the Australian Democrats in the Senate, Don Chipp (Higinbotham Vic 1960–9, Hotham Vic 1969–77; Victoria 1978–86), the tolerance of such behaviour by authorities was something remarkable, to be nurtured and protected:

I began to realise that a rather wonderful thing was taking place. In how many other countries on this planet would such a hostile open exhibition of dissent be allowed to proceed in full view of the reigning monarch?

In a rather strange way, this outside phenomenon seemed to give real meaning to the many references being made to democracy in the speeches being delivered inside.⁸²

Such a view has been heard on many occasions since.

Lament

As Australian activity in the war in Iraq became more likely, Canberra resident Glenda Cloughley, 'kept imagining the sound of women's lament filling the Australian Parliament'. Encouraged by a friend to 'do something about that', she wrote some lyrics, to which her composer friend, Judy Clingan, added a 'beautiful melody'—and so 'Lament' was created. Events moved quickly:

We emailed the music [to friends], taught it over the phone, encouraged women who wanted to practise at home with their neighbours ... there was a current of strength in the voices that was unmistakeably linked to the idea that had possessed me...

On 18 March 2003, the day after the Prime Minister had declared that 'military participation in war against Iraq' to be certain, the composers and 150 women, aged between 18 and 81, scattered themselves around the Parliament's Foyer, endeavouring 'not to look like a choir'. At 1pm, Clingan and Cloughly sang: 'Open the doors of the chambers (of your hearts)', and the 150 other voices 'began to soar through the high, resonant marble space'. Many of the Parliament's visitors wept as they listened:

82. Don Chipp, 'Protests at House a source of pride', *Sunday Telegraph*, 15 May 1988.

‘Lament’

Open the doors of the chambers (of your hearts)
Open your minds to our song
We sing for peace through the power of love
Hear the wisdom of women, hear our song

Weep for our sisters in danger
Weep for our brothers and children
Sound the cries of grief and despair
Sound the lament for the dead.

And so A Chorus of Women came into being. It continues to ‘give voice to matters at the heart of our communities’.⁸³

Blocking access

The timber truck drivers mentioned previously not only travelled to make a spectacular statement with the presence of so many large vehicles surrounding Parliament House, but their efforts in blocking all loading bays and parking lots certainly attracted attention to their journey and their presence. Another case was very much more local.

In August 1991 the ACT Trades and Labour Council established picket lines at each access road to Parliament House in support of catering staff who had been dismissed as part of a privatisation of the House catering service. The pickets were designed to stop all food and drink from being taken into the building. In sympathy with this, Commonwealth car drivers decided not to cross the picket line as they collected or delivered parliamentarians. Despite the cold weather at the time, most MPs were prepared to walk to or from their cars, including Prime Minister Hawke, who ‘trudged by’ wrapped in an overcoat. By contrast, Senator Jocelyn Newman (Tasmania 1986–2002) would not leave her car when her driver refused to cross the picket line. Newman sat in her car for 75 minutes as a ‘matter of principle’, before accepting a ride from a Senate transport officer who drove down to collect her.⁸⁴

Violence

On 19 August 1996 a crowd estimated at about 30 000 persons moved in at least four separate streams towards the lawn fronting Parliament House. This was an Australian Council of Trade Unions-sponsored demonstration against the Howard Government’s proposed industrial relations legislation, as well as the expected spending cuts in the Budget

83. Glenda Cloughley, ‘Perspective’, ABC Radio National, 14 May 2003; A Chorus of Women, <http://www.chorusofwomen.org/>, accessed on 6 March 2008.

84. ‘As wind (and unions) roar, Hawke takes a walk’, *Canberra Times*, 16 August 1991; ‘Some matters of principle hard to digest’, editorial, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 August 1991.

due to be brought down the following day. Despite a union-police agreement that people at the protest would keep off the Parliament House Forecourt, members of one group, apparently largely unaware of the union-police 'deal', chose not to join the main rally on the lawns, and sprinted across the Forecourt to be met by a police barrier. In the affray that followed, the protestors pushed up to the Parliament House doors where, using sledge hammers, metal pipes and other instruments, they forced their way inside. As well as damage to the doors, the foyer was smeared with blood and paint, and the Parliament House shop vandalised. Forty-one protestors were arrested, and approximately 90 police injured. Many visitors were unable for a time to get out of the building. Ironically, most in the great body of protestors on the lawns between the two parliament houses were unaware of these events.⁸⁵

Catching the eye

Some protests are designed to be spectacular, in the hope that this helps the protestors gain publicity for the issue. Just such a case was the effort by three Greenpeace members in 2002 who sought to climb the 101-metre high flagpole. Unfortunately they chose a windy day, and after two-and-a-half hours climbing had only managed to reach the top of the south-eastern leg, 21 metres short of the peak. One of the protesters then abseiled down the front with a banner protesting against Australia's refusal to ratify the Kyoto protocol on global warming. The banner was unfurled to applause from a crowd below. After five minutes it was rolled up, the protesters prepared themselves for arrest, and they returned to the ground.⁸⁶

In 1995 Shahraz Kayani, a Pakistani visiting his brother in Australia, applied for asylum on the grounds of persecution in his homeland; he was granted a resident's visa. When later applying for permission to bring his family to join him, his application failed, primarily because one of his daughters suffered from cerebral palsy. For some years he was engaged in what appeared to be a fruitless correspondence with the relevant government agencies. Outside Parliament House on 2 April 2001, Kayani doused himself in petrol and set himself alight. With burns to 50 per cent of his body, he died some days later.⁸⁷

The larrikin element

The common thread in what has been written here, is that Australians overwhelmingly regard Parliament House as a central part of their nation's fabric, and treat it accordingly. It must be said, though, that not all visitors treat the building as the authorities would prefer. From time to time one catches a glimpse of behaviour that displays no particular regard for 'the heart of Australian democracy'.

85. Innes Willox and Joanne Painter, 'A birthday bash descends into a day of union regrets', *Age*, 24 August 1996.

86. Lincoln Wright, 'Greenpeace protest hits great heights', *Canberra Times*, 21 August 2002.

87. Christopher Kremmer, 'Welcome, but please leave your family behind', *Age*, 3 April 2001.

Part of the first floor of Parliament House can be accessed by visitors, and in the centre of the building they can look over a beautiful Members Hall water feature on the ground floor, a huge block of black stone covered by a film of water. In the first days of the new building, signs warned visitors not to throw money into the water, a distance of approximately 15 metres. Perhaps not surprisingly, people ignored the signs, and the custom of tossing coins on to the water feature was born. This is a custom that even Prime Minister Hawke is said to have practised on one occasion, when giving a visiting foreign VIP a guided tour. According to a former Parliament House bureaucrat, about \$10–\$15—much of it in foreign currency—is cleared from the stone every month, with the Australian money given to charity.⁸⁸ In its first year, the statue of Queen Elizabeth II on the Queens Terrace was the target of a man said to have been ‘imbibing’. Apart from expectorating upon the statue of Her Majesty, the man placed a daffodil ‘jauntily’ in her crown, placed a beer can on the royal head, and when asked by a security guard as to whether there was anything else in the royal crown, replied ‘only a bald patch’.⁸⁹

Rather more serious were the events at the August 1990 post-Budget party in Parliament House for Treasury staff. Fred Williams’ 1977 oil painting ‘Lerderderg Gorge’, valued at \$150 000, was smeared with beer, food and cream. Senate President Kerry Sibraa (NSW 1975–8, 1978–1994) said that he and the Speaker were ‘appalled by the wanton act to deliberately deface’ the painting. In addition, several scuffles flared between party-goers, and party guests had to intervene in a fight between an MP and the son of a senator. A spokesman for Treasurer Paul Keating announced later that Parliament House was not to be used for future Treasury parties.⁹⁰

On 12 August 1992 a 4WD vehicle was driven across the forecourt, through the Marble Foyer, and into the Great Hall, where it stalled. The driver, Clifford Moss, a part-time arts teacher from Broken Hill, later told the ACT Magistrates Court of his frustration concerning a grievance he had with the South Australian Government, which had allegedly conspired to destroy his business. He claimed he was ‘not a nutcase’, for his grievance was genuine: ‘I’d like to think I am a responsible citizen. I pay my taxes, I am a hard-working man ... I am entitled to justice’. Moss was given a two-year suspended gaol sentence, ordered to pay \$55 000 in compensation, fined and disqualified from driving for 12 months.⁹¹ Moss’s words

88. *Canberra Times*, 26 May 1988; ‘Change of government’, *Sunday Telegraph*, 28 August 1988; Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee, Estimates, 31 October 2005, p. 24.

89. ‘Right royal indignity’, *Canberra Times*, 17 September 1988.

90. Anne Connolly, ‘Painting damaged during party’, *Australian*, 23 August 1990; Stephen Bevis, ‘Scuffle mars post-Budget get-together’, *West Australian*, 23 August 1990. ‘Lerderderg Gorge’ currently hangs in the suite of the Deputy Prime Minister, Julia Gillard.

91. Bernard Lagan, ‘Confusion surrounds terror drive into Parliament House’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 August 1992; Nicholas Johnston, ‘Grievance with Government behind crash, court hears’, *Age*, 15 August 1992.

had been similar to those uttered on 31 August 1989, when a man rose in the House of Representatives public gallery, stating he wished to speak: ‘I believe it is my right under the Constitution. As an Army officer I am permitted to speak in the people’s House’. The man then stepped to the front of the gallery, stood momentarily on the edge, and dropped to the floor of the chamber—in the traditional words, he was a ‘stranger in the House’. When the man was escorted to the door before he could speak, applause broke out from the galleries above. Speaker McLeay’s (Grayndler NSW 1979–93, Watson NSW 1993–2004) response to the applause indicated his displeasure with those who might have sympathised with the jumper:

Those people in the gallery who think this is funny have really made a big mistake about the way they think the Government and the Parliament of their country should be run. They should be ashamed of themselves for complimenting someone who has indulged in such action.⁹²

Such unusual and unexpected behaviour can be difficult for authorities to deal with.

Threats to access

The response from one editorial writer to the Budget protest of 1996 was to note that the rights enjoyed by the protesters were threatened by such behaviour:

Parliament House is the highest symbol of Australian democracy. When demonstrators attack it they strike at the core of our beliefs ... the rioters have ... jeopardised one of the mainstays of Australian democracy—access by the people to the politicians elected to represent them.⁹³

The warning implicit in such a comment, that attacks on Parliament House might limit access to it, is not without justification. Over the years, the response by Parliament House authorities to such events has often been to place greater limitations on public access, producing dismay from those who treasure the democratic symbolism of the building.

Security

Security officers play an important part in the running of Parliament House—particularly as security measures have been strengthened over recent years. Understandably, given the environment, the relative freedom that one could once enjoy when visiting both this building and its predecessor, has been limited. This is due largely to the increasing concern about international terrorism, but is also due to the accumulated concerns brought about by the actions of some of the public over the 20 years since its opening. Everyone entering the building must undergo compulsory screening—even Members and Senators. While the

92. Speaker McLeay, House of Representatives, *Debates*, 31 August 1989, p. 744; Andrew Fraser, ‘Big step for man, small leap for Constitution’, *Canberra Times*, 1 September 1989.

93. ‘Ideals betrayed in Canberra siege’, editorial, *West Australian*, 21 August 1996.

security requirements for visitors and Parliament House staff gradually increased, MPs remained free for a long time from any form of checking by the security system. This changed in 2003 when MPs were required, for the first time, to participate in the screening procedure whenever they entered the building. Once through these security measures visitors can continue to enjoy access to the public areas of the building.

Changes to the plan

Apart from the security, there are various ways in which the building is not as accessible as it once was. As early as 2 March 1989, the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the President of the Senate approved Australian Federal Police and Australian Protective Service guidelines for public demonstrations. Among the various guidelines were restrictions that would forbid demonstrations on the parliamentary Forecourt. In addition sound equipment had to be directed away from the building, no signs or banners were to be attached to, or hung from, the building, tents were not to be erected, and people were not to mark the road, pathway or building surfaces with paint or any other substance. Although these guidelines have not always succeeded in their aim, the restrictions have had the overall impact of pushing demonstrations well away from Parliament House.⁹⁴

Other restrictions and alterations have gradually been added in the years since. Some are minor, such as the removal of the small number of short-term parking spaces near the House of Representatives and Senate entries, or the erection of a steel and chain barrier in the front of the house. This was described by Senator Bob Brown (Tasmania from 1996) as ‘a statement of people being cut off from the Parliament’.⁹⁵ Other changes have been much more significant, such as the \$11.7 million spent on a wall around the House to ensure that people can not drive vehicles on to the roof of the Parliament, the bomb-proofing of ministers’ office windows, and the retractable steel bollards placed at the road entry to each house. The stretch of road directly in front of Parliament House has been closed to traffic, and Parliament Drive made one-way. One of the major features of the House’s accessibility, the opportunity to walk up and over the building, has been restricted. Visitors may still stand on the roof, but must go through security and then take a lift to the top. Speaker Andrew (Wakefield SA 1983–2004) warned that bulletproof glass could be put in the two chambers between visitors and MPs, but so far, fortunately, no move has been made in that direction.⁹⁶ Outside Parliament House any protest that involves a long-term structure, (especially, it seems, if it uses the name ‘embassy’) is invariably moved on. One such structure was the 1994 ‘Forest Embassy’ in Federation Mall protesting against wood-chipping, another was the ‘Australian Family Tent Embassy’ calling for an office of the status of the family, and a third was the ‘Education Embassy’ placed on the lawns by 15 Charles Sturt University students in December 2002.

94. House of Representatives, *Debates*, 2 March 1989, pp. 328–9.

95. Emma Macdonald, ‘Chain barrier for House forecourt’, *Canberra Times*, 2 March 2001.

96. Gerard McManus, ‘It’s still our House’, *Herald Sun*, 13 November 2004.

All of which has been a disappointment to Romaldo Giurgola, the architect:

I am not a fan of making it a fortress, it shouldn't have any barricades, but I can't control the time we live in.

I always thought it should be open to the people and a place of joy for everyone. Every time you put fences up you take some of the joy away.⁹⁷

A journalist's words were rather stronger. After being taken into Parliament House for some uncomfortable, and probably unnecessary, questioning when three Special Broadcasting Service staff were filming for the series 'Front Up', one of them observed:

This obsession with social control is hardly the spirit of Australia. And at the very heart of our country's democracy we find the seeds of fascism, we all have cause to be concerned.⁹⁸

Censorship

Although Parliament House is often referred to as a symbol of the freedoms that Australians enjoy, there are occasions when these freedoms can be challenged, not least by attempts to censor what might be seen or heard in the building. In 1988 two employees of the catering service were removed from the casual employee list, 'because they were non-union members'.⁹⁹ In 1995 the Family Federation for Unification and World Peace gained approval to hold its inaugural meeting in Parliament House. However, when the group's links to the Reverend Dr Sun Myung Moon and the Moonies became clear, Speaker Martin (Macarthur NSW 1984–93, Cunningham NSW 1993–2002) withdrew his approval. As the *Australian* noted, scathingly, 'Not just anyone can hire the Great Hall of Parliament House'.¹⁰⁰

A number of other occasions can be pointed to. Mention has already been made of Michael Mansell's words uttered on the day of the opening of Parliament House, when he spoke of a proposed trip to Libya. Mansell's niece, Denise Everett, president of the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre, was invited to the reception in the evening of opening day, but when Mansell attempted to enter as her partner, he was denied entry. Prime Minister Hawke reportedly had personally withdrawn his invitation. When Mansell persisted with his intention to enter, he was arrested and taken away by police.¹⁰¹ In 2004, at the time of threats to ATSIIC, a protest march to Parliament House had been planned. Air tickets for several of its commissioners, who were to travel to Canberra for the protest, were cancelled by the

97. Scott Hannaford, 'Parliament House is a fortress: architect', *Canberra Times*, 20 July 2003.

98. Andrew Urban, 'The House is out of order', *Australian*, 23 October 1995.

99. House of Representatives, *Debates*, 1 September 1988, p. 826.

100. *Australian*, 21 November 1995.

101. Andree Coelli, 'Mansell arrested at the door', *Canberra Times*, 10 May 1988; *Australian*, 10 May 1988.

Commonwealth Government, apparently in an effort ‘to reduce the size and effectiveness of the protest march’.¹⁰²

In the following year, Senator Bob Brown attempted to overcome the banning of photographs in an East Timor exhibition. This exhibition had been shown in other locations, including the Parramatta Council library, but after some MPs objected to its being shown in Parliament House, Senate President Reid and Speaker Halverson (Casey Vic 1984–98) decided to exclude photographs which dealt with ‘atrocities’ relating to the Dili massacre of 12 November 1991. A spokesperson explained that the decision reflected guidelines which said that exhibitions must be ‘broadly acceptable’ to MPs, and ‘not likely to cause offense [sic] to a significant part of the Australian community’.¹⁰³

In late 2003 A Chorus of Women applied for permission to sing in the Foyer once again, as part of 2004 Multicultural Week. The Joint House Department responded with an order that the choir could not perform two particular songs, one of which spoke of ‘Iraqi woman wailing, in the back of a battered old ute/Your husband is dead at your feet/Your mouth is an open wound’. Nor could the choir sing any other material deemed to be ‘relating to personal and political freedom’. When the singers began to perform, they pulled purple silk gags over their mouths to ‘display our feelings towards this shocking intrusion on the freedom of speech’. Speaker Andrew commented later that the letter was ‘written and issued in error’, and the restrictions should not have been placed on the choir.¹⁰⁴

Occasionally, small battles can be won by the protestors. For many years, Canberra’s ‘Women in Black’, a small group of women in black clothing, have stood on the bridge linking State Circle with Parliament Drive on the ministerial side of the building. Invariably they will appear on the first day of a new Parliament, or the first day of a new sitting period. Typically, they will be in place as people are arriving at the start of the day. They usually hold small signs expressing their views on a current matter—or matters—of public controversy. In 2003 they were threatened by Australian Federal Police with arrest if they did not ‘move on’ and take up a post in the designated demonstration area in front of Parliament House. Spokeswoman Judith Bailey said this was not an option for the group:

We’re not harming anyone and we’ve never been, or never will be, loud and disruptive. We just want to send our peaceful message to the politicians and where we’ve been standing is the best place to do that.

102. Peter Brewer, ‘Emotions high at protest march for indigenous rights’, *Canberra Times*, 16 June 2004.

103. Paul Cleary, ‘Canberra bans “offensive” Dili photographs’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 November 1996; Paul Cleary, ‘Senator seeks to overturn ban on massacre photos’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 November 1996.

104. Emma Macdonald, ‘Censored choir makes its political point’, *Canberra Times*, 7 February 2004.

From time to time the Women in Black are still to be seen, in the same place, silently expressing their views. While they continue to do so, an important right is being protected.¹⁰⁵

The right to protest

For some observers, the danger of an event such as the 1996 Budget protest is that it gives strength to those who would prefer to tighten the relative freedom to attend Parliament House. Even before the 1996 affair, pressures were being placed on the Parliament to limit such events. Some spoke of introducing a permit system, or else a broad legislative scheme such as Queensland's *Peaceful Assembly Act 1992*, to oversee the conduct and control of protests.

In December 1994 the Deputy Prime Minister, Brian Howe (Batman Vic 1977–96), asked the Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories to investigate, 'The right to legitimately protest or demonstrate on national land and in the parliamentary zone in particular'. During this committee's inquiry, several significant protests raised the question of how much freedom for public protest should be allowed in the vicinity of the Parliament. These included the logging trucks blockade of the early 1995, demonstrations against visiting representatives of overseas governments, the Budget protest of 19 August 1996, as well as a protest at old Parliament House the following day.

The Committee recommended there be a cooperative approach to protest management between the protesters and the authorities, that there not be any legislative scheme, and that permits not be required to protest on national land. However, it did recommend a permit system for the management of protest structures. In short, the Committee was concerned to maintain the rights that Australians had long enjoyed.¹⁰⁶

We must hope that this right remains inviolable.

Conclusion

At the time of its opening, Parliament House received mixed reviews. In particular, there was concern among many MPs and journalists that a great deal of freedom had been lost in the way that the new house separated the parliamentarians from the public and from the media. As memories of the old days have faded, so have the criticisms lessened. Undoubtedly, the general public, which has flocked to the 'new' building in such numbers as to make it one of Canberra's major tourist attractions, have responded very well to it. An informal measure of this is the large number of family and friends taken through the building by Parliament House staff in the course of a year. Twenty years after the Sovereign ceremonially opened its doors, we can see that the Australian Parliament House has become an object of pride for a great

105. Renee Cutrupri, 'Peace vigil threatened', *Canberra Times*, 18 May 2003.

106. The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories, *A right to protest*, AGPS, Canberra, 1997, pp. xx, 13.

many Australians. In 2008 a former member of the Parliamentary Library noted at his retirement that he had ‘never got tired of the building’, while Geelong AFL footballer, Matt Egan, gazed at one of the huge curved walls and expressed himself ‘overawed’ and proud to be in the building. Former MP (Oxley Qld 1961–88) and Governor-General (1989–96), Bill Hayden, liked the building, expressing a view that has often been heard:

Philosophically, this is the sort of building people can come into and feel at home, they’re not overawed by it.¹⁰⁷

We can leave the final observation to a British visitor who said he felt like ‘an invited guest’ when entering the building, and who contrasted the ‘airy architectural optimism’ of the Australian building, with the ‘pompous and grudging’ Palace of Westminster:

... ‘unlocked’ is surely the mood of the [Australian] place as ‘closed’ is the mood at Westminster.¹⁰⁸

Supporters of Australian democracy will hope that Parliament House forever remains ‘unlocked’.

107. Pilita Clark, ‘Intimidating, magnificent or overdone?’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 May 1988.

108. Matthew Parris, ‘Light and hope in Canberra; grudging pomp in Westminster’, *The Spectator*, 20 August 2005, p. 24.

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