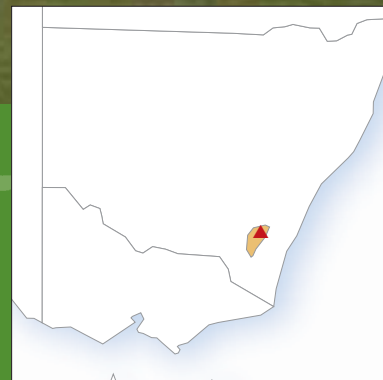


Old Parliament



Date of inscription: 20 June 2006

Old Parliament House and Curtilage, Australian Capital Territory

It is steeped in history, significance and drama – an iconic Australian landmark and the seat of political power for over six decades.

Old Parliament House is the symbol of the nation's political heritage, where the bedrock traditions of Australian democracy were formalised by the country's political founders.

Its impressive walls housed the debates that have shaped our nation, on reforms such as constitutional change, welfare and Aboriginal rights.

Australia was governed from this landmark through conflict and enormous social change – a building that stands for Australians' right to argue and dissent.

Its story began with the opening as the provisional parliament in Canberra, on 9 May 1927 by the Duke and Duchess of York.

Occupying just 2.5 hectares, Old Parliament House sits in the cultural landscape known as the Parliamentary Triangle, reflecting the design for Canberra by Walter Burley Griffin in which Kurrajong Hill (now Capital Hill) was the focal point.

The central positioning of Old Parliament House symbolises the primacy of the parliament over the executive and its architectural style of symmetry and simple grace – known as 'Inter War Stripped Classical' – lends the building a modest but dignified presence.

The King's Hall, Senate and House of Representatives chambers reflect the austerity of the time. The interior exudes a proud formality in details such as decorative skylights, elegant pendant lights, parquet flooring, high ceilings, raked galleries and timber wall panelling.

Yet the simple spaces and restrained aesthetics belie the building's many turbulent and momentous times – all rich in debate over the nation's future.

One of the defining events in Australian political history took place on the front steps with the address by former Prime Minister Gough Whitlam after his dismissal by the Governor-General Sir John Kerr on 11 November 1975.

Old Parliament House was the site of seven changes of government; where national legislation for the advancement of social processes was passed; and where the 1967 referendum to remove discriminatory measures against Australia's Indigenous population was developed.

The entrance portico and nearby lawns of Parkes Place have been the settings for countless gatherings, protests, celebrations and demonstrations, including the Aboriginal Tent Embassy established in January 1972.

It is the place where Sir Robert Menzies served his record term as Prime Minister and where Prime Ministers John Curtin and Ben Chifley lay in state.

But as the number of politicians, their staff and media increased so too did demand for space within Old Parliament House. Alterations and additions helped to improve the physical functioning of parliament but by 1988 it was vacated for the new House.

Pressure from various bodies persuaded the government to restore and return it to the public realm and it was reopened by former Prime Ministers, John Gorton and Gough Whitlam, on 15 December 1992.

Thousands of tourists explore the close confines of this important time capsule every year. Its rich collection of original furniture, art, signs and equipment help illustrate the story of Australia's political customs and functions.

Old Parliament House remains a proud vestige of yesteryear that lives on under the gaze of its modern successor, Parliament House. In this way, the past and the present stand together – forever linked – symbolising how far Australia has come.

