

## Building the provisional Parliament House

The provisional Parliament House (now known as Old Parliament House) was opened by His Royal Highness the Duke of York on 9 May 1927. It was a modest building intended to provide facilities for the legislative work of the federal government until a permanent, monumental structure could be built. With extensions and alterations it remained in service until 9 May 1988.

### **Architectural competition for a federal parliament building**

In July 1914 an international design competition for a permanent Federal Parliament House was launched. It was suspended in September 1914 due to the outbreak of World War I. Attempts were made to revive the competition, but the huge war debt precluded the construction of any monumental buildings. In 1923 the competition was indefinitely suspended and work on a provisional building began. Official registrations had been received from more than 200 entrants, and in 1924, the Government paid compensation of £3000 in amounts ranging from £10 to £100 to 78 of the competitors.

### **Design and construction of a provisional building**

The construction of a provisional Parliament House was investigated by the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works in 1923. This committee recommended the erection of either the nucleus of a permanent building on Camp Hill or a provisional building on a site below Camp Hill. By August 1923 the second recommendation was accepted and finance approved by Parliament. The plans were prepared by the Department of Works and Railways and its chief architect, John Murdoch.

### **The opening ceremony, 9 May 1927**

The opening of the provisional Parliament House was a gala occasion. Invitations were issued to 500 national and international official guests and a further 5000 tickets were distributed throughout Australia for seats in outside stands. The ceremony included the review of a guard of honour by the Duke of York and a reading in the Senate chamber of a message from the King. After the official proceedings, a review of 2000 troops and a Royal Australian Air Force flypast were held in York Park.

## Records of the building of the provisional Parliament House

The Canberra office holds a range of records relating to the planning, construction and opening of the provisional Parliament House. The table below sets out select holdings of records relating to the architectural competition, the design and construction, and the 1927 opening ceremony.

### Architectural competition

| Title or description of record   | Date range | Series, item number |
|--|------------|---------------------|
| <u>Correspondence relating to establishment of Federal Capital Territory</u> | 1906–14    | A206                |
| <u>Correspondence files Federal Capital series</u>                           | 1910–17    | A110                |
| <u>Federal Capital Office correspondence files</u>                           | 1913–17    | A214                |
| <u>Correspondence files Federal Capital Territory</u>                        | 1913–39    | A430                |
| <u>File No. 1 Architectural Competition</u>                                  | 1916–25    | A430, G1277         |
| <u>File No. 2 Architectural Competition</u>                                  | 1912–32    | A430, G1276         |

### Design and construction

| Title or description of record                             | Date range | Series, item number |
|--|------------|---------------------|
| <u>Correspondence files Department of External Affairs</u> | 1903–38    | A1                  |
| <u>Correspondence files Federal Capital Works</u>          | 1913–26    | A199                |
| <u>Architectural plans of Canberra</u>                     | 1921–59    | A2617               |
| <u>Correspondence files Federal Capital Commission</u>     | 1925–30    | A6270               |
| <u>Architectural drawings (Parliament House)</u>           | 1925–27    | A2514               |
| <u>Correspondence files Department of Works</u>            | 1929–50    | A292                |
| <u>Provisional Parliament House erection, Canberra</u>     | 1921–32    | A292, C2737A        |
| <u>Provisional Parliament House erection, Canberra</u>     | 1921–32    | A292, C2737B        |
| <u>Provisional Parliament House erection, Canberra</u>     | 1921–32    | A292, C2737C        |

### Opening ceremony and Royal visit

| Title or description of record                               | Date range | Series, item number |
|--|------------|---------------------|
| <u>Correspondence files Department of External Affairs</u>   | 1903–38    | A1                  |
| <u>Opening of Parliament at Canberra File No. 2</u>          | 1927       | A1, 1927/199        |
| <u>Correspondence files Prime Minister's Department</u>      | 1923–34    | A458                |
| <u>Correspondence and administrative files 'DY' series</u>   | 1926–28    | A6680               |
| <u>Administrative and general correspondence Royal visit</u> | 1926–27    | A6976               |
| <u>Official Opening Parliament House Part 1</u>              | 1926       | A6976, 39 PART 1    |
| <u>Official Opening Parliament House Part 2</u>              | 1927       | A6976, 39 PART 2    |
| <u>Unregistered correspondence files Royal visit</u>         | 1926–27    | A6977               |
| <u>Federal Capital Commission records for Royal visit</u>    | 1927       | CP325/6             |

## Photographs and memorabilia

| Title or description of record                                      | Date range | Series, item number |
|---|------------|---------------------|
| <u>Publications, photographs relating to the work of PL Sheaffe</u> | 1902–63    | M4071               |
| <u>Invitation to the Opening Ceremony</u>                           | 1927       | M4071, 74           |
| <u>Synopsis of Program for Official Opening</u>                     | 1927       | M4071, 75           |
| <u>28 photographs of construction of Parliament House</u>           | 1927       | M4071, 63           |
| <u>Gold key with which the Duke of York opened Parliament House</u> | 1910–27    | A106, G1927/735     |
| <u>Mildenhall collection of glass plate negatives</u>               | 1921–35    | A3560               |
| <u>Illuminated manuscript of address read by the Duke of York</u>   | 1927       | A4867               |

## Parliamentary Papers

Reports presented to Parliament, and later printed as Parliamentary Papers, give summaries of the architectural competition and the construction and opening ceremony. Sets of Parliamentary Papers are available in all National Archives' research centres (some upon request). See *Fact sheet 21 – Parliamentary Papers* for further information.

| Title of report  | Parliamentary Papers reference  |
|--|---|
| <b>Erection of Provisional Parliament House Canberra</b> | Session 1923–1924, Vol IV, pp 645–70  |
| <b>Federal Capital Advisory Committee Reports</b>        | Session 1920–1921, Vol III, pp 2027–69<br>Session 1922, Vol II, pp 2791–2804<br>Session 1926–1928, Vol II, pp 1037–80 |
| <b>Annual Reports of the Federal Capital Commission</b>  | Session 1926–1928, Vol II, pp 1081–1116, 1117–84, and 1185–1305   |

## For more information

### Research guide

[Parliament House Canberra, 1927: Records relating to the Design, Construction and Opening of the Provisional Parliament House](#)

### Fact Sheets

*Fact Sheet 60 - Design and development of the National Capital*

*Fact sheet 95 - Walter Burley Griffin and the design of Canberra*