



Parliament opening 1927, crowd outside Parliament House. Photo: courtesy of the National Library of Australia

OLD PARLIAMENT HOUSE 75TH ANNIVERSARY

STILL MAKING HISTORY

It was the centre of national political life for more than six decades. Celebrations planned for the 75th anniversary of Old Parliament House will showcase its ongoing role as a key cultural institution in our national capital.

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The Duke and Duchess of York at the opening of the provisional Parliament House (now Old Parliament House) in 1927. Mildenhall Album #271305. Photos: courtesy of the National Library of Australia

On 9 May this year, 75 years after it first opened, Australia's provisional Parliament House will again reverberate to the sounds of marching bands as the nation's capital re-enacts the building's spectacular opening ceremony.

"One feels the stirring of a new birth of quickened national activity," the Duke of York said on that memorable day in 1927 when he and the Duchess of York officially opened the provisional Parliament House.

It was a ceremony befitting the new national parliament. On the steps of the building Dame Nellie Melba sang 'God Save the King' as air force planes flew in formation overhead and contingents of soldiers and naval personnel marched in a grand parade, watched by a crowd of 30,000 people.

The parliamentary building in the new national capital was designed by John Smith Murdoch in 'stripped classical' style. His layout of the building reflected the democratic traditions of this nascent country—the two chambers were of equal standing, and Kings Hall was a place where members of both houses, journalists and the general public could cross paths.

Now known as Old Parliament House, this heritage-listed building was for 61 years the backdrop to the political and social events that made Australia what it is today. This

included landmark events such as the Depression, World War II; Menzies' attempt to outlaw the Communist Party; the Labor Party split of the 1950s; Australia's commitment of troops to the Vietnam war; and the 1967 referendum which gave the Commonwealth power to move into Aboriginal affairs.

Few will forget the dramatic scenes and the high emotion on the steps of Parliament House in 1975 when Prime Minister Gough Whitlam and his government were dismissed by the Governor-General.

By the 1980s, the building had exceeded its capacity—in 1927 there were 76 members of the House of Representatives and by 1988 it had nearly doubled to 148 members. The Senate had grown from 36 to 76 senators. The chambers were often overflowing and office spaces were tiny and crowded despite additions to the building in the 1940s, 1960s and 1970s. Even toilets were converted to office space to help meet demand.

In May 1988, with the new and permanent Parliament House ready on Capital Hill, Old Parliament House held its last sitting and prepared for its life after parliament.

Today, Old Parliament House is still making history in its new role as a national cultural institution concerned with exploring and explaining Australia's rich political history and democratic traditions.

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Photo: Marketing, Old Parliament House

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Old Parliament House attracts more than 180,000 Australian and international visitors each year. On offer are guided tours of key areas such as the chambers and the Prime Minister's suite, a sound and light show in the House of Representatives Chamber highlighting key events that took place there, as well as an extensive exhibition program.

Old Parliament House is also home to Australia's National Portrait Gallery, which celebrates the achievements of significant Australians by providing an exciting blend of historical and contemporary portrait art.

This year's 75th birthday celebrations will feature an exciting program of exhibitions, room openings, talks and debates, and special events that highlight the contributions that the House has made to Australian life, politics and history. Everyone is invited to join the celebrations—the general public, people who worked in the building, including MPs and parliamentary staff, and their families. There is something for everyone, commencing with the spectacular re-enactment of the 9 May opening ceremony.

Offices in the Prime Minister's suite will be opened in full for the first time to the public. Visitors will see all our Prime Ministers, memorabilia of their terms of office and examples of the many ways Australians have parodied and praised our leaders.

Two new exhibitions will also open on 9 May. *Our House—Stories of Old Parliament House* traces the life of the House, from original design and construction to the last days. Meet the people who worked in the

building—politicians, journalists, Hansard reporters and chefs—and see images and personal memorabilia never seen in public before.

Icons—Images of 20th Century Architecture explores the reasons why some buildings become icons, through the use of photographs by leading photographers such as Max Dupain.

On the weekend of Saturday 11 May and Sunday 12 May, everyone is invited to join the birthday celebrations at Old Parliament House. Entry to the House will be free and there will be a range of special activities including behind-the-scenes tours, the popular horse and carriage rides around the precinct, music, talks and much more.

Throughout the year, *Night Sitzings in the House* will consist of a series of debates and talks open to members of the public on topics ranging from heritage architecture to the 100th anniversary of votes for women. During spring, the celebrations will go outdoors with a garden festival.

In the picture—the search for personal images taken at the House—will add to the community spirit of the celebrations. People from all over Australia are asked to submit their pictures and recollections of Old Parliament House, culminating in an exhibition later in the year.

As a museum and a heritage site, Old Parliament House has for many years been a fascinating place to visit. But in 2002, the birthday program will make a first-time visit or revisit a must. For a detailed program of 75th anniversary events contact: Marketing, Old Parliament House (02) 6270 8118. ■