

Self Guided Walking Tour

OLD PARLIAMENT HOUSE GARDENS Walk

Your self guided walking tour exploring the Old Parliament House Gardens, Canberra's most significant public garden.

When the Australian Parliament opened in the provisional (now Old) Parliament House on 9 May 1927, Members and Senators were greeted with bare ground and a hedge, just half a metre high, planted by the Superintendent of Parks and Gardens, Charles Weston. There were no lawns, gardens or roses. The scene was very different in Melbourne, where the Commonwealth Parliament had sat in the Victorian Parliament House for 26 years. The Treasury Gardens had provided the parliamentarians with delightful surroundings in which to stroll and escape from the business of the House.

Sporting facilities—a bowling green, tennis courts and a cricket pitch—were quickly established in Canberra's parliamentary gardens for the exclusive use of parliamentarians. Work on the gardens themselves did not commence for several years. It took the perseverance of Robert Broinowski, Secretary of the Joint House Department, with the support of Sir Walter Kingsmill, President of the Senate, to get the idea of a garden started. With the assistance of the National Rose Society of New South Wales, Broinowski initiated the design and planting of an open garden based on patterned rose and annuals display beds, set in lawns and with a minimum of trees. Many of the roses were donated by rose societies, companies and individuals, including Parliament House staff. Despite the difficulties of the Depression era, Broinowski managed to complete the planting of the parliamentary gardens between 1932 and 1938.

Until 1989, the parliamentary gardens were not open to the public. They were used by Members, Senators and their staff as a place for relaxation and retreat. After their reconstruction and reopening to the public in 2004, the Old Parliament House Gardens are now open for all Australians to enjoy their beautiful surrounds and unique history.

OLD PARLIAMENT HOUSE THROUGH THE SENATE GARDEN AND HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES GARDEN

TIME: 1 hour

DISTANCE: 1.1 kilometres

DEGREE OF DIFFICULTY: Easy (suitable for wheelchairs)

Time does not include visiting Old Parliament House

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BEGIN YOUR WALK ON THE STEPS OF OLD PARLIAMENT HOUSE

1 OLD PARLIAMENT HOUSE The architect of Old Parliament House, John Smith Murdoch, envisaged the adjacent gardens as a continuation of the House's courtyards. The Senate and House of Representative Gardens were once accessible through the (then) colonnaded east and west sides of the House.

Murdoch's vision was to echo, in the gardens, the architectural simplicity and formality of the building.

Descend the stairs and walk to your left to the corner of the Senate Garden. Enter through the Broinowski Gate. Turn left, and walk to the Broinowski Rose Garden – on your right.

2 BROINOWSKI ROSE GARDEN As Secretary of the Joint House Department, Broinowski was instrumental in developing the parliamentary gardens. One of the first public servants to be transferred to Canberra, Broinowski was committed to the development of a great Australian national capital.

The roses planted in the Broinowski Rose Garden are shrub roses, including those bred by English rose breeder David Austin. Austin's roses, also referred to as English Roses, are hybrids of Old Roses (Gallica, Damask, Portland or Bourbon roses) with either modern Hybrid Teas or Floribundas. Companion plantings, including English lavender, and mixed Delphinium, Digitalis (Fox Glove) and Pentstemon, evoke a strong sense of an English garden.

Continue through the Broinowski Rose Garden to the Broinowski interpretive panel. Turn left at the panel. Continue to the centre of the Senate Garden, near the small plaque commemorating the re-opening of the Old Parliament House Gardens in December 2004.

3 The layout of both the Senate and House of Representatives Gardens is based on a simple quadrant design. The main path of the gardens aligns with the east/west axis of the House, and is emphasised by timber pergola structures, planted with wisteria. These main paths once led to the courtyards within the House. Within each garden are sporting facilities: tennis courts and a bowling green in the House of Representatives Garden, and tennis courts and a cricket pitch in the Senate Garden.

The large grassed area to your left originally had a well used cricket pitch. This pitch was used for social games and net practice. Prime Ministers Robert Menzies and Bob Hawke were keen recreational players.

In the 1930s Jack Pettifer was the House housekeeper and lived with his family on the Senate side of the House. The Senate Garden comprised the family's backyard, where they had a vegetable garden and kept bees by the tennis court, until the players complained and they were moved to Camp Hill (an area behind Old Parliament House).

Follow the path south between the tennis courts and the Rex Hazlewood Rose Garden towards the gate (at the foot of the large blue gum) and stop at the arbour. Turn right and walk beneath the arbour through the Rex Hazlewood Rose Garden.

4 REX HAZLEWOOD ROSE GARDEN In 1931, Broinowski met with members of the National Rose Society. Through the Society he was introduced to Rex Hazlewood. A professional photographer and World War I veteran, Hazlewood worked at his brothers' nursery in Sydney. He became passionately interested in landscape design and this is the first of many notable Australian gardens he designed.

The present planting of the Rex Hazlewood Rose Garden portrays the international history of rose cultivation. Asiatic roses are planted in this half of the garden (the eastern side). The earliest roses are located at the open ends of each U-shaped bed, and their hybrids, including Tea, Noisette, Bourbon and Rugosa roses, are located on the sides. The western half of the Garden is planted with European roses, moving from the ancient Gallica, Damask and Alba roses to the later Moss and Portland roses. Towards the centre of the Rex Hazlewood Rose Garden, East meets West with the culmination of cross-breeding resulting in Hybrid Tea and Floribunda roses. The mixed companion plantings, including Dianthus, Violets, Iris, Peonies and Geraniums, reflect the mixed Asian and European heritage of the roses.

Move to the centre of the Rex Hazlewood Rose Garden – the circular bed.

5 ALISTER CLARK ROSE GARDEN This central bed, with its four semi-circular beds, is planted with roses bred by Alister Clark, Australia's first internationally renowned rose breeder. The roses surrounding the tennis courts, in both the Senate and House of Representatives Gardens, are all varieties of Alister Clark roses.

As there are no roses native to the southern hemisphere, Clark set out to breed roses particularly suited to Australian conditions which would bloom most of the year – for example, his Lorraine Lee, Squatter's Dream and Nancy Haywood. Apart from rose breeding, Clark was involved with the Victorian horse racing industry. He was founding president of the Moonee Valley Racing Club and, in March each year, the Alister Clark Stakes is still run. The winning horse is presented with a garland of red roses and a splendid silken horse rug embroidered with red roses.

Enjoy the Rex Hazlewood Garden before returning to the tennis courts.

6 SENATE TENNIS COURTS An original feature of the Old Parliament House Gardens, the Senate tennis courts previously had a clay surface—the red colour reflecting that of the Senate Chamber. The same is true of the green surface, formerly grass, of the House of Representatives courts. The first roses planted in the Gardens were climbers on the tennis court fences, including Black Boy and Countess Stradbroke, which were planted in April 1931.

The tennis courts were a popular feature of the Gardens. However, access on Sundays was denied until 1938 for fear of alienating the God-fearing residents of Canberra. Although Parliamentary staff and members of the Press Gallery had access from an early period, wives and families of parliamentarians had to wait until 1976 to use the courts, and then only when Parliament was not sitting.

The timber for the pergolas and arbours in both this and the House of Representatives Gardens was salvaged from the demolition of the Woolloongabba Pub, formerly across the road from the 'Gabba Cricket Ground in Brisbane.

Keep the tennis courts on your right and go back towards Old Parliament House through the Senators Gate. Toilet facilities are on your right. Exit the gardens, turning left onto Parliamentary Drive, then right past the front of Old Parliament House.

- 7** The rose beds around Old Parliament House were planted in the 1980s, when many of the roses in the gardens were replaced. John Smith Murdoch intended that plantings around the House be ‘loose and low’ and not obstruct views of the building.

Continue past the House and enter the House of Representatives Garden via the corner gate. Pause behind the small timber cottage in front of you—the Bowling Green Clubhouse.

- 8** The garden bed behind the Bowling Green Clubhouse is planted with roses retained after the reconstruction of the gardens in 2004. These roses are a reflection of those previously grown in the gardens.

Continue along the outside path, and turn right at the second path, which takes you into the centre of the Macarthur Rose Garden.

- 9** **MACARTHUR ROSE GARDEN** Named in honour of John and Elizabeth Macarthur, founders of the Australian merino wool industry, this garden was the last to be constructed under the direction of Robert Broinowski. The central planting of red Étoile de Hollande roses has been reinstated in the reconstruction, reflecting the original gift in 1937 of 100 roses by Miss Rosa Sibella Macarthur-Onslow, great-granddaughter of John and Elizabeth. The original roses came from the Macarthurs’ Camden property. In 1938, Miss Macarthur-Onslow donated a further 50 Shot Silk roses in recognition of Elizabeth Macarthur’s role in developing the Australian wool industry.

The roses planted in the Macarthur Rose garden reflect the European passion for anything ‘Oriental’ during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Tea roses, hybrids of the Chinese rose species *R.gigantea* and *R.chinensis*, are so named because their fragrance is similar to that of green tea. China roses were also bred from *R.chinensis*.

Noisette roses, the third type of rose in this garden, resulted from a chance hybrid of a China and Moss rose.

Continue through the Macarthur Rose Garden to the intersection with the East/West path under the Honey Locust trees. Turn back to face the Macarthur Rose Garden.

- 10** **THE OLD PARLIAMENT HOUSE GARDENS** comprise an open design of formal gardens set in lawns with a minimum of trees. The original trees were pairs of (from right) Silver Maples (*Acer saccharinum*), Honey Locusts (*Gleditsia triacanthos*), Southern Nettles (*Celtis australis*) and Desert Ash (*Fraxinus oxycarpa*). The Silver Maples were a gift from the Canadian Government to the people of Australia, one of several Canadian gifts in the national capital. These plantings are repeated in the Senate Gardens.

Turn back south and continue along the path into the Ladies Rose Garden.

- 11** **LADIES ROSE GARDEN** This garden was named in honour of the women who donated roses to create the original garden. In 1933, Broinowski approached Dame Mary Hughes, wife of the former Prime Minister, William (Billy) Hughes, to be the project patron. She in turn approached other parliamentary wives to support the project. Roses cost one shilling and four pence per bush.

The Ladies Garden has had a chequered history. Soon after it was planted, a quarter of the rose bushes were removed and the area converted into a rubbish tip. In 1965, squash courts were constructed in the south-west corner. Fortunately, these courts were removed during the reconstruction and the beds planted according to their original layout.

Many of the original roses planted in the Ladies Rose Garden were Hybrid Teas and their smaller cousins, the Floribundas. This combination has been maintained in the current planting in quadrants of colour—red, pink, yellow and white.

Walk towards the tennis courts to exit the Ladies Rose Garden. Turn right towards the kiosk in the centre of the garden. Stop underneath the verandah.

- 12 BOWLING GREEN** One of the original facilities of the gardens, the Bowling Green was actively used by Members and Senators. The clubhouse was erected in 1937 and was the only structure in the gardens for many years. Until 1985, the clubhouse stood on this side (south) of the green but was moved to its current location when a two-storey annexe to the House was built. The annexe was removed in 1999.

The kiosks and tennis pavilions in both the House of Representatives and Senate Gardens are new inclusions. They are based on original designs for shelter pavilions and the architectural detailing of both reflect that of Old Parliament House.

Walk towards Old Parliament House under the pergola. Before you pause at the fountain, note the bronze timeline in the footpath. The chronology begins at the fountain.

- 13 CENTENARY OF AUSTRALIAN WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE COMMEMORATIVE ARTWORK AND FOUNTAIN**

Located on the parliamentary axis (Constitution Place through Old Parliament House to Magna Carta Place), this artwork celebrates the centenary of Australian women's suffrage. With the passage of the Commonwealth Franchise Act in 1902, women were able to vote and, a world first, to stand for parliament, which they did in the election of 1903.

The artwork comprises a fountain and timeline, both of which feature a glass mosaic inspired by wisteria in flower, in the women's movement colours of green, purple and white. The timeline records the milestones and significant achievements of Australian women in Federal Parliament.

Walk out through the Members Gate and to the plinth located in the footpath.

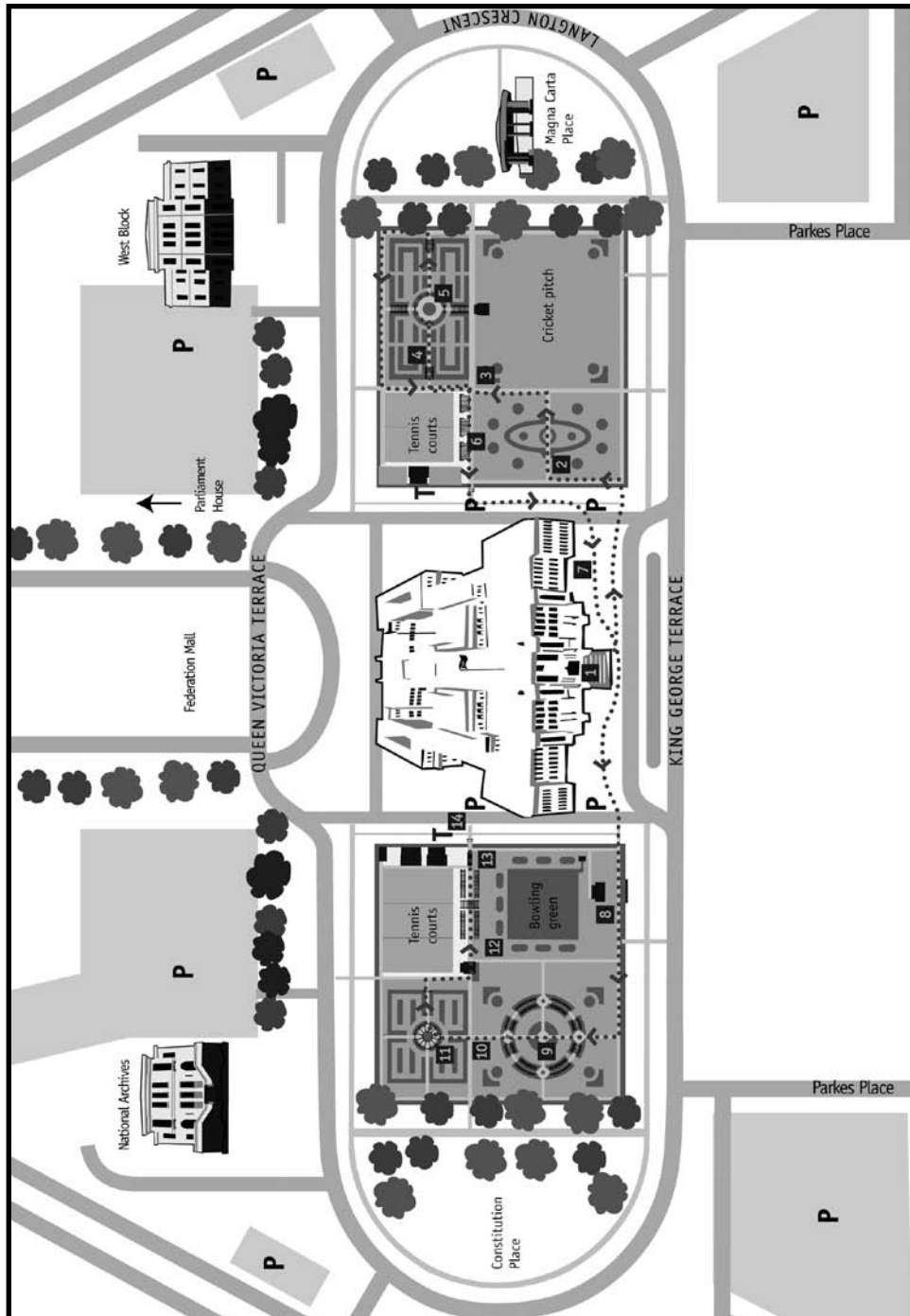
- 14** Located here are some remnant pieces of the original footpath laid in 1927. Beneath the footpath is the Lansom Pneumatic Tube, used to convey each day's Hansard parliamentary proceedings to the Commonwealth Printing works in Kingston.

This ends Old Parliament House Gardens Walk.

The tennis courts in both the House of Representatives and Senate Gardens can be hired for social games. Lessons are also available.

To book the Old Parliament House Gardens for your next function, contact the National Capital Authority on 02 6271 2888

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