

# PARLIAMENT POST

## HIDDEN HISTORIES AND UNTOLD MYSTERIES

### Past meets present at Parliament House

Parliament House might look old and fancy from the outside, but inside it's buzzing with activity. It's the place where Victoria's laws are created, debated and voted on. It's where the big decisions that affect everyday life get made.

After each state election, the political party that wins

the most seats becomes the government. If no party wins enough seats on its own, the bigger parties often team up with smaller parties or independents to get the numbers they need. It's a bit like group projects at school — sometimes you choose your team, sometimes you negotiate.

#### Victoria's Parliament has two main rooms, or "houses"

The Legislative Assembly	<b>the lower house</b>
The Legislative Council	<b>the upper house</b>

This two-house setup comes from Victoria's history as a British colony — the UK Parliament uses the same structure. The government is formed by whichever party has the most seats in the Legislative Assembly.

But Parliament House isn't just about debating. The building also includes beautiful old libraries, dining rooms, offices and meeting areas where politicians and staff plan, research and talk through ideas that shape the state's future.

Long before Parliament House was built, the land it sits on was part of Naarm

(Melbourne), a major gathering place for the Kulin Nation. Five Aboriginal clans — the Wurundjeri, Boonwurrung, Wathaurong, Taungurung and Dja Dja Wurrung — met in the area for thousands of years. The Kulin Nation lived in the region for around 40,000 years and had a thriving population of more than 20,000 people before colonisation.

Today, Parliament House stands as a mix of old traditions, modern politics and ancient Aboriginal history — a reminder that Victoria's story is long, layered and still being written.



### New Year's Merriment At Spring And Bourke

2nd January, 1850

The dawn of the New Year was greeted yesterday with scenes of the most extraordinary and good humoured festivity at the intersection of Spring and Bourke Streets, where a considerable number of townsfolk assembled to indulge in what many cheerfully proclaimed as "good old English merriment." The proceedings commenced shortly after breakfast, when citizens of all classes—labourers, merchants, diggers newly arrived from the interior, and a fair number of ladies—

gathered to witness an assortment of amusements seldom seen in our young colony.

The first of these entertainments, and perhaps the most curious, was a spirited goat race, in which several stubborn creatures raced along a rough course to the great amusement of onlookers.

Next followed the pigs with greasy tails race, which produced roars of laughter as competitors endeavoured to seize the slippery animals, whose gleeful squeals only increased the confusion. Many a respectable gentleman, having slipped in the dust or collided with a fellow pursuer, arose with coat and dignity equally disordered.

As the day progressed, the assembly participated in wholesome pastimes such as quoits, skittles, and a vigorous match of football, played in a manner far rougher than the refined codes emerging in England. The culmination of the revelry was the climbing of the greasy pole, upon the summit of which various small prizes had been affixed. Many attempted the ascent, few succeeded, and all were loudly encouraged by the surrounding throng.

Such scenes of cheerful disorder served to remind the populace that, although Melbourne remains a young settlement at the edge of the Empire, her citizens retain the jovial spirit of the mother country.



# After Seventy Four Years, Parliament Finally Gets Its Tea Room

Melbourne, 1929



The Dining Room at Parliament House

At long last, and to the evident relief of anyone who's ever tried to conduct government business on an empty stomach, the new Refreshments Room at Parliament House has officially opened—bringing to an end one of the most drawn out building projects in Victoria's history. Seventy four years without proper refreshments! One wonders how the colony survived.

The saga began back in 1851, when Melbourne was a rough and ready boomtown, bursting with ambition and very short on patience. The hunt was on for a site for a grand Parliament House, and—naturally—everyone disagreed with everyone else. Surveyor General Robert Hoddle, the fellow who gave the city its famous grid, suggested a tidy patch between Spring and Evelyn Streets. A fine idea, said some; absolutely not, said many more.

After months of argument thick enough to cut with a butter knife, Spring Street won the day—specifically the high ground near St Peter's Church. But then came a fresh question: Which direction should this magnificent building actually face? For three years, politicians danced around the issue until, in April 1854, they finally settled on a west facing design “opposite the eastern extremity of Bourke Street.”

Even then, the decision pleased almost no one. Architect Peter Kerr declared the whole thing ought to be pushed back from the street for maximum grandeur. Meanwhile city workers grumbled loudly about losing their straight line path to town, now rudely interrupted by the rising edifice.



Parliament House from Bourke St, Melbourne

A design competition in 1853 only fanned the flames. One winner was declared, then withdrawn; another was chosen and promptly altered. At last, in December 1855, construction began. And then continued. And continued. And continued.

Now, in the bright bustle of 1929, Parliament House stands complete at last—with its long awaited Refreshments Room ready to serve tea, sustenance, and no doubt a healthy dose of political gossip. It may have taken three quarters of a century, but Melbourne can finally raise a cup to a job finished—if not quickly, then at least splendidly.

## Parliament Once Again Discovers Its Power To Imprison

It appears that the Parliament of Victoria, having recently turned its attention from the weighty affairs of the colony, has chosen once more to exercise its rarely used but never forgotten power to imprison those who offend it. This authority, though seldom called upon, is cherished like a family heirloom—brought out only on special occasions, dusted off, admired, and put to use with great seriousness.

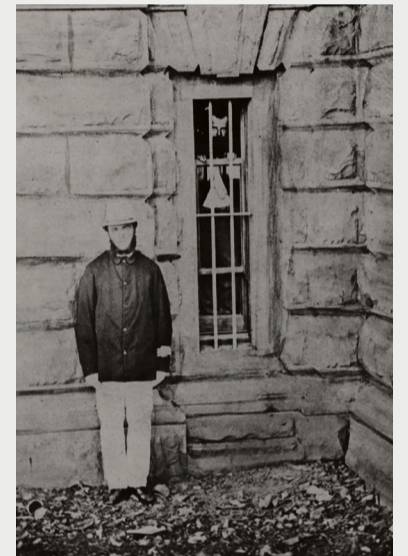
We begin with Mr. George Hill, publisher of *The Argus*, who in 1862 was found guilty of contempt. Since Parliament

did not trouble itself with a jail when the building was designed, a small room at the rear—no doubt intended for storage of brooms or parliamentary secrets—was rapidly converted into a cell. Iron bars were affixed, locks were secured, and the room gained an importance previously undreamt of by its architect.

The same luxurious accommodation was offered to Mr. Hugh George in 1866. His published assessment of the cell — “damp, close, musty, and stifling” — was so persuasive that even Parliament conceded that perhaps improvements could be considered. They were not, naturally, implemented, but

they were at least considered, which is nearly the same thing.

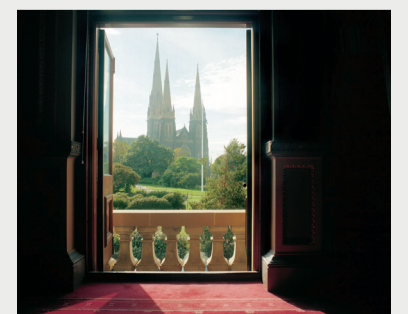
An inspection shortly afterwards confirmed that the chamber was, in essence, a very small swamp with a door. The air was noted to carry a “disagreeable odour,” thoughtfully provided by a neighbouring toilet. It was further observed that the window could not be opened and that, if it could, the air entering would likely worsen matters. With this expert testimony on record, Parliament decided that any future offenders should be deposited elsewhere.



Incarceration of Hugh George - Royal Historical Society of Victoria

Thus, when Messrs. Hugh Glass and John Quarterman were accused of corrupt practices later that year, they were dispatched straight to Melbourne Gaol, where conditions were reportedly an improvement—an achievement which says much about the Parliament's cell and little about the gaol.

And now to the matter of the hour: Mr. James McKean, M.L.A., sentenced to eight days' imprisonment for criticising Parliament—an activity many believed to be a national pastime. Perhaps fearing further unfavourable reviews of its cell, Parliament placed Mr. McKean not in the infamous room but in the Serjeant-at-Arms' quarters. From here he enjoyed sweeping views from St Patrick's Cathedral to Toorak and Yarra Bend—punishment which many Melburnians would endure gladly for a holiday.



View from Parliament House

# What Are They Hiding In Parliament?

From Our Anonymous Gossip Correspondent

Melbourne is buzzing once again with rumours—yes, those rumours—about the mysterious chambers and shadowy tunnels lurking beneath Parliament House. While the honourable members insist these underground spaces are “structurally necessary,” the public seems quite convinced they are perfect for secrets of a far more entertaining nature.

## Pistol-Packing Politicians?

Word has it that the subterranean rooms are used for shooting practice by politicians. Whether they aim at targets or at each other remains unspecified. (Some would argue both are equally likely.)

## A Secret Getaway?

And of course, the favourite whisper in every tearoom: the alleged secret train platform, supposedly built to whisk members away should danger arise. No sightings have been confirmed—but we will continue to keep an eye out.

## But Wait—What Else Might They Be Up To Down There?

Given the rich imagination of the public—and the even richer behaviour of our representatives—one cannot help but speculate:

- A hidden corridor for sneaking out before awkward votes?
- A private room for very enthusiastic debates, safely out of earshot?
- A secret pantry stocked with biscuits forbidden by official catering budgets?
- Or perhaps a chamber devoted to storing all the promises made during election season—there being no safer place than a room no one can find.

Whatever the truth, one thing is certain: the stories beneath Parliament House grow stranger every year, and the politicians aren't talking. Which, of course, only makes the rumours louder.



One of the potential entrances to the rumoured tunnels

# Parliament House Gets a Makeover: Melbourne's Most Stylish Glow Up

February 2026

If you've ever walked past Parliament House on Spring Street and thought, “Wow, that building looks fancy,” you're right—but you should've seen it a few decades ago. Back then, the place was crumbling, leaking, and literally dropping stones off its façade.

(Yes, one even landed on an MP's car. Fortunately, no damage to the MP, except to their pride).

But over the last twenty years, Parliament House has had a massive glow up—one that mixes heritage vibes with clever modern design.



Restoration works on the stone facade of Parliament House

## A 16 Year Stone Glow Up

The biggest transformation wrapped up in 2023 after 16 years of restoration work on the outside of the building. Specialists checked every single stone, replaced the broken ones with bluestone from Port Fairy and sandstone from Gosford's Piles Creek quarry, and even hand carved decorative pieces like acorns and columns to match the originals. It's basically the architectural equivalent of a full skincare routine.

## Queen's Hall: Now Even More Instagram Ready

Inside, Queen's Hall—the giant, light filled space in the centre of Parliament—got a huge makeover too. It took more than 800 litres of paint to restore the hall, and workers had to protect or move 360 kg chandeliers and historic portraits before they even started. Now the space feels brighter, fresher and totally ready for a photo shoot.

## Modern Problems, Modern Solutions

One big challenge: Parliament House was built long before elevators, accessibility standards or modern office layouts. So, in 2018, a sleek new Members' Annexe was added in the eastern gardens—complete with workspaces for 102 MPs and connected to the main building through a bridge and even a tunnel.

More recently, the East Wing got an update, adding new lifts, stairs and better pathways so the whole building is easier to move through—without messing with the heritage architecture.

## The Final Look

So what's the vibe now?

A mix of old school glamour and modern polish. Parliament House still looks historic and impressive from the outside, but behind those walls is a building that's been carefully repaired, refreshed and redesigned so it can last another hundred years—and look good doing it.

## Protest on the Steps: How Parliament House Became Melbourne's Meeting Place

January 2026

For many decades, the steps of Victoria's Parliament House have been more than just a grand entrance—they've been a place where people gather to speak up for what they believe in. One of the most powerful examples happened during the Vietnam War.

In May 1970, around 70,000 people took part in the first Vietnam Moratorium, calling for troops to come home and for conscription to end. The main gathering point was Treasury Gardens, but the crowds filled nearby streets and moved through the area around Parliament House, making their message impossible to ignore. A year later, a similar protest was held on the steps of Parliament House.

These protests brought together people from all walks of life—students, teachers, union members, religious leaders, and more—all united in their belief that the war had to stop. Their actions matched a long tradition of protest on the Parliament steps. Back in 1856, stonemasons marched to Parliament House to demand an eight hour workday—and they won. Later, supporters of women's voting rights also held rallies that helped bring about big changes in Victoria.

Even today, the steps continue to host marches and rallies on issues like climate action, marriage equality, First Nations justice and refugee activism.

From the 1800s to now, the Parliament steps have given everyday people a place to stand together, speak out and help shape Australia's future.



Queen's Hall, 1892 - 1900

# Are There Really Ghosts in Victoria's Parliament House?

February 2026

Victoria's Parliament House might look like a serious place where only politicians hang out, but according to people who work there, it has a spooky side too. Over the years, staff and security guards have reported all kinds of ghostly encounters—some creepy, some kind of cute, and some straight up terrifying.

One of the most famous sightings is a little girl who appears around the building. Security staff say they've seen her skipping through the halls and around the gardens before she suddenly walks through a wall and disappears. If Parliament had a "least scary ghost," she'd probably win—though she still gives people a good jump scare.

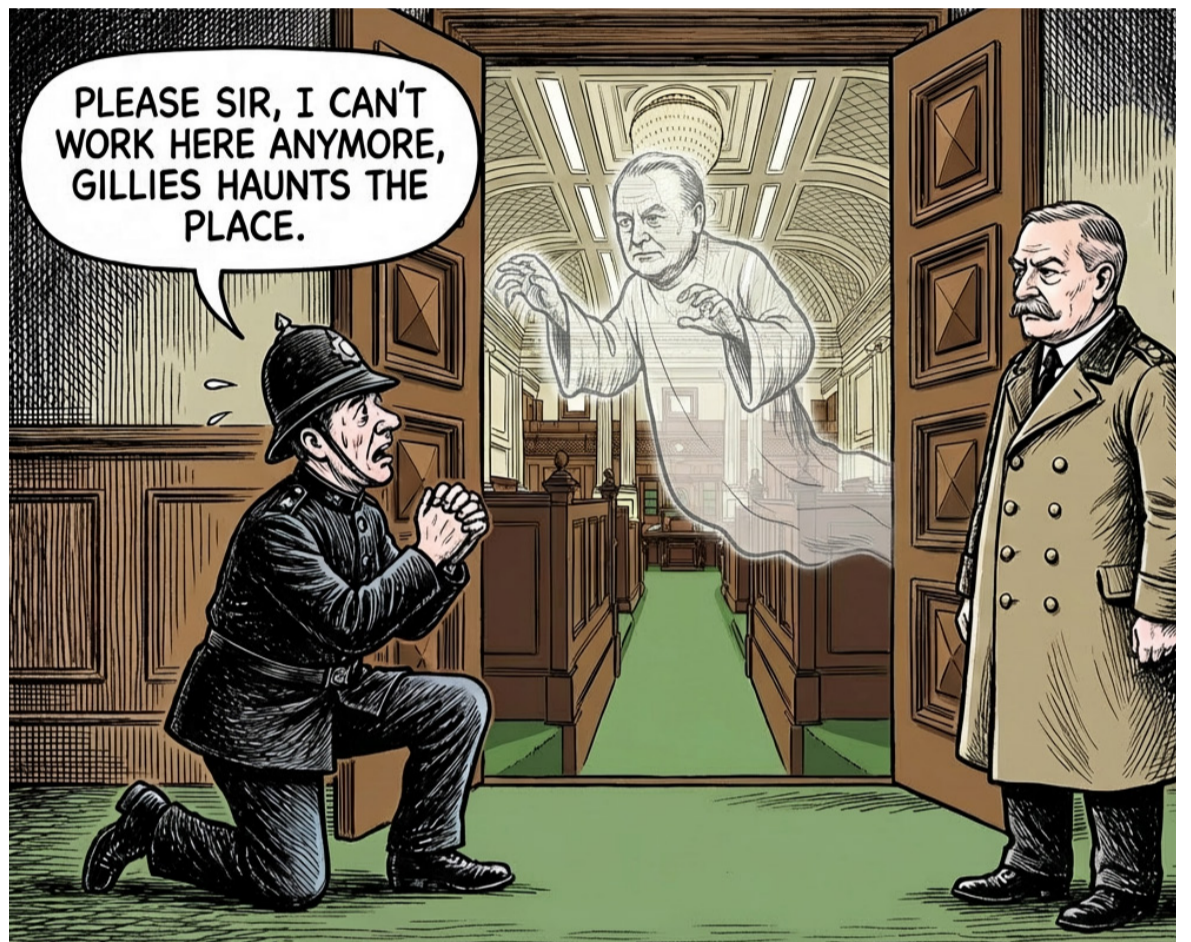
The Parliamentary Library also has its own troublemaking spirit. Librarians have talked about books being flung off shelves for no reason and hearing mysterious whispers while they're trying to stack books. Imagine doing homework there and having a

ghost comment on your book choices—no thanks.

But the creepiest story goes back to 1924, when a police officer actually begged to be reassigned. Why? He said he kept seeing the ghost of former Premier Duncan Gillies. According to him, Gillies would march through the lobbies like he still ran the place, and even hover over the Speaker's chair as if checking up on Parliament. It was so disturbing the officer couldn't handle working there anymore.

None of these stories show up in official documents, but they've been passed around Parliament for years. Whether you believe in ghosts or think it's all just flickering lights and overactive imaginations, one thing's for sure: Parliament House isn't just home to big political decisions—it's also home to some big mysteries.

So next time you walk past the building, maybe take a peek at the windows. Just... be ready for who—or what—might be looking back.



## Meet Clarence: The Lion Who Finally Found His Roar

Interview with Clarence the Lion (Plaster, c. 1888 — Present)

If you've ever wandered into the North Library at Victoria's Parliament House, you may have spotted a very proud, very regal lion staring back at you from inside a glass display case. That's Clarence, the Parliament's long lost guardian—and he has quite the story to tell.

**Q: So Clarence, what exactly are you doing in Parliament House?**

**Clarence:** "Well, I was supposed to be famous. Back in 1887, architect Peter Kerr wanted two huge bronze lions guarding the entrance of Parliament House—symbols of courage, strength and all that royal stuff lions are known for. Sculptors all over Melbourne were invited to enter a competition, and John Mackennal won with a design that everyone agreed would look amazing on the front steps."

**Q: But... you never made it outside. What happened?**

**Clarence:** "Ugh, the 1890s depression. They cut the budget, and my bronze body never got made. So instead of becoming a grand outdoor statue, I ended up as a plaster model—basically the prototype of the lion I could have been. Parliament shelved the project, literally."

**Q: And then you disappeared for decades?**

**Clarence:** "Yep. People forgot all about me! It wasn't until 1951 that some workers stumbled upon two plaster lions—me and my unfortunately crumblier twin—hidden in a tunnel beneath Parliament House. We had quite the glow up potential, but nothing happened for a long, long while."

**Q: How did you finally get your moment of fame?**

**Clarence:** "In 2018, conservators from the Grimwade Centre rescued me, fixed me up, and gave me my current home in the North Library. Now I have a custom display case, great lighting, and visitors who actually stop to admire me. Not bad for someone who spent 60 years in a tunnel!"

**Q: And the name "Clarence"—where did that come from?**

**Clarence:** "Oh, that was inspired by a lion from a 1965 movie. And honestly? I think it suits me. Regal with a hint of Hollywood."

**Q: Any final thoughts for visitors?**

**Clarence:** "Look up next time you're at Parliament House. Buildings tell stories—and sometimes, so do the creatures guarding them."



## Windsor Court Uniforms: Dressing Like History

Long ago, some Parliament staff wore outfits that looked like they came straight from a royal court. These were called Windsor Court uniforms, and they were worn by Chamber officers and attendants.

Chamber officers had two versions of their uniform. One was the Full Windsor Court Uniform for big events. This outfit was extremely fancy. It included a black tailed coat with special cuffs, a wig bag on the back (a little pouch once used for coins or snuff), a waistcoat, knee breeches, white gloves, lace ruffles, and even silver buckled shoes. They also wore wigs—yes, like old fashioned white horsehair wigs. The other was a reduced uniform (for normal parliamentary sitting days).

This version was simpler, with a morning coat, waistcoat and wing collared shirt—but still worn with wigs.

These wigs are handmade from horsehair and designed in the same style barristers use in court—looped on top with tight curls around the sides. The Chamber officers' uniforms were last worn in 1999, and by 2003, Parliament decided not to use uniforms or wigs at all.

Attendants wore deep navy-blue uniforms with stiff collars. On special opening days, they added a starched shirt front, wing collar and bow tie. The first female doorkeeper, Charlene Kenny, started in 1980. Since there wasn't a uniform designed for women, she received a navy skirt, vest and jacket instead. Attendants

- **The longest serving Usher was Albert A. C. Le Souef, who served for 30 years.**
- **The first female Usher of the Black Rod, Sally West, began in 2019.**

stopped wearing the Windsor style in the mid-late 1980s.

### The Usher of the Black Rod: Keeper of Tradition

One of the most important ceremonial roles is the Usher of the Black Rod. This position began in England in 1361. The Usher carries a Black Rod, which is both a symbol of authority and a ceremonial tool. Before 1952, the Usher knocked on the Assembly door using the heel of his shoe! Today, they knock using the rod itself.

### Serjeant-at-Arms: Guardian of the Mace

In the Legislative Assembly, the Serjeant-at-Arms carries the mace, a medieval weapon that now symbolises the Speaker's authority. When the Speaker is in charge, the mace stays proudly on display. These uniforms and traditions may look old fashioned, but they tell the story of how Parliament keeps order, honours history, and celebrates the important work done inside its chambers.

## When Victoria Turned to Gold: How a Rush Changed a Colony— and Parliament House Too

February 2026

Imagine living in a place so full of excitement that people from all over the world rushed there hoping to strike it rich. That's exactly what happened in Victoria during the gold rush, which began in 1851. As news spread that gold had been discovered in places like Ballarat and Bendigo, thousands of hopeful miners—called “diggers”—set off with picks, shovels, and dreams of finding sparkling treasure. Soon, Victoria grew from a quiet colony into one of the busiest places on Earth. New towns popped up almost overnight, and people from Britain, China, America, and Europe sailed in hoping for a better life.

The gold rush had an impact on all institutions in Victoria, not least Parliament House, which today still features items and traces of the gold era.

All that gold didn't just make miners dream—it helped build cities. Melbourne boomed and became known as “Marvellous Melbourne.” Parliament House itself became part of this golden story.

The artist William Strutt captured the excitement of the gold rush in pencil and watercolour. His book *Victoria the Golden* shows everything from diggers' tents to the arrival of horse drawn gold escorts carrying precious gold into the Treasury on

Spring Street. Strutt even recorded major moments like the opening of Victoria's first Parliament. In 1907, the Premier bought Strutt's album for £120 so it could be kept safely in Parliament's Library.

Inside the Parliamentary Library, talented artists used gold leaf to decorate the ceilings, walls, and pillars in 1882. A newspaper at the time joked that “turn where one will, there is gold!” because the rooms glittered so brightly with gold decorations.

Gold also appears in Parliament's most important symbol: the mace. This long, heavy ceremonial staff shows the Speaker's authority in the Legislative Assembly.

The current mace, first used in 1901, is made of solid silver covered in gold plating. It weighs more than eight kilograms—about as much as a big bowling ball. In 2022, a master goldsmith updated the engraving to reflect Australia's new monarch, King Charles III.

Parliament also keeps pocket sized gold scales once used to weigh gold, and historic gold licences that remind us how tough life on the diggings could be.

From glittering goldfields to golden symbols in Parliament House, Victoria's gold rush changed the colony forever — leaving behind stories, treasures, and buildings that still shine today.

