

28 August 2023

## Old Parliament House's 100-year journey begins

*MoAD celebrates the first sod turned on the site that would become Parliament House.*

Rare archival footage and recently colourised historical photographs bring to life the moment construction began on Old Parliament House, as the Museum of Australian Democracy at Old Parliament House (MoAD) celebrates 100 years since the 'turning of the sod' with a new display called *Breaking Ground*.

Curator Ms Alice McKenzie Ebbels explains more about that day, 100 years ago.

'In 1923, despite consisting largely of sheep paddocks, there was a flurry of activity in Canberra to prepare the capital for the nation's first parliamentary home (as well as the infrastructure to support it). Hundreds from across the Southern Tablelands made their way by car, horseback and bicycle to attend a simple ceremony marking this historic occasion,' says Ms McKenzie Ebbels.

'At 3 pm on Tuesday 28 August 1923 Federal Minister for Works and Railways Percy Stewart said a few words before a steam shovel belched to life like "an elephant, waving its trunk in the air until finally it dug its great teeth into the ground" (as reported in *The Argus* the following day). Those assembled posed with clumps of earth, and history was made.'

'This step would mark an almost 4-year construction journey to finish one of Canberra's first iconic sites. The building would go on to house the government from 1927 to 1988 and become the backdrop to many important historical moments.'

The display features images, from the National Archives and National Library of Australia's collections, and video from the National Film and Sound Archive, which offer a look at life in Canberra a hundred years ago.

'We hope these images and the story of the early days of Canberra ignite the imagination of all Australians and inspire an interest in key moments in our democracy,' says Ms McKenzie Ebbels.

*Breaking Ground* is on display in the Senate Government Party Room from 28 August 2023.

### Available for interview:

**Curator** Ms Alice McKenzie Ebbels **Topics:** The specifics of turning of the sod event, exhibition and the beginnings of Canberra.

**Images:**



*Images: National Library of Australia / National Archives of Australia  
(left to right nla.obj-163110662, nla.obj-136772262, nla.obj-162776815, / NAA:A3560, 441)  
Colourisation by Lucent Imaging*

For enquiries, high-res images and videos, please contact  
Joshua Crouthamel on (02) 6270 8120 or email [media@moadoph.gov.au](mailto:media@moadoph.gov.au)