

Canberra's First Hotels and Boarding Houses

The first permanent hostel built in the FCT was the Hotel Canberra, which opened in December 1924. It was known as the Politicians' Hotel and until named was referred to as Hostel No 1. It was followed by Hotel Ainslie (built 1925 and from 1927 called Gorman House) and Hotel Kurrajong. The Bachelors Quarters at Acton opened in 1912. Others followed including the Printers Quarters that opened in 1926 and Hotels Acton, Ainslie and Wellington along with Houses Brassey and Beauchamp that opened in 1927.¹

Other early Hotels are Kingston and Civic. The latter, like the Hotel Wellington, was pulled down some years ago. All Hotels and Houses in Canberra were segregated according to sex, marital status and income earned. People were allocated accommodation. Single ladies were moved into Beauchamp and Gorman Houses along with a few married couples. Hotels Canberra and Kurrajong were used by politicians and following the availability of alcohol I have been told that the politicians who did not drink stayed at the Kurrajong and those who did at the Canberra.

Not mentioned in the document quoted below is the Lady Hopetoun Club buildings (3 houses in Blandfordia) used to accommodate working class women (domestics and typistes (typiste - female: typist - male spellings.) The club was disbanded by the time the letter quote below was written.

Canberra was a dry city between 1913 and towards the end of 1928.

Australian Archives A430/1 G1212

6th November, 1929 MEMORANDUM to:-

The Chief Commissioner

HOTELS & BOARDING HOUSES

By your direction I attach particulars of accommodation, tariffs and classification of the business of the hotels and boarding houses under the control of the Commission. All establishments were intended primarily for the housing of Members of Parliament and as residences for the officers of the Commonwealth Public Service and their families until such time as the provision of their private homes had been completed. Owing to the curtailment of the original programme by which all Departments were to have been transferred as speedily as possible, the accommodation at the higher grade hotels has never been fully occupied, except at certain seasons, and it has been found necessary to close Hotel Ainslie altogether, and Hotel Kurrajong during the period that Parliament is not in session, while at the same time other accommodation is not fully occupied. The details referred to are as under:-

Hotel Canberra opened 1/1/1925

[The actual date of the official opening was in December 1924 - This was in fact only half the accommodation. A further five pavilions were added by Contractor John Howie in 1925. At the back of the hotel was Hunt's garage and undercover parking for cars including Mrs Barton's Safety Coach. She founded the first omnibus service between Canberra and Queanbeyan and also ran tours around Canberra. She died on 9th April 1938 aged 59 years. She along with her husband who died in October, 1933 are buried in St John the Baptist Church Cemetery in Reid in the ACT - Ref Jean Salisbury *St John's Churchyard...*]

¹ Beauchamp House, now called Ian Potter House, is a concrete structure. The Power House in Kingston was the first concrete building erected in Canberra and there are also 25 cottages in the same building material in Blandfordia (Forrest & Griffith).

Accommodation for 196 persons, consisting of:- Suites (consisting of Double bedroom, bathroom & sitting room) 18 Double bedrooms with bathrooms attached 5 Double bedrooms with balcony 10 Double bedrooms 34 Single rooms 62. (Of this accommodation, 5 single rooms and 3 double rooms are occupied by Hotel Staff, and a number of rooms in E pavilion by certain domestic staff for whom the domestic accommodation designed with the building is insufficient. All Suite accommodation has on occasions been used as Bedrooms.) Temporary garage accommodation for 34 cars.

Tariff-

Full per day per week Concession per day per week; Single Room 1 person 25/- 7 pounds 10- 16/- 5 pounds; Dble room 2 persons 50/- 14 pounds 10/- 32/- 9 pounds 10/- ; Suite 1 person 45/- 12 pounds 10/- - 9 pounds; Suite 2 persons 65/- 18 pounds 10/- - 11 pounds; Bed & Breakfast only 15/- ; Breakfast only 4/-

Extras

Private sitting room 15/- 3 pounds 15/- ; Private bathroom 5/- 1 pound 5/- 1 pound; Children Under 10 years - half rates.

The trading is on the lines of a first class hotel, for both permanent residents and casual visitors. It has been moderately filled when Parliament is in session, and well filled at holiday seasons, and at times by parties of visiting Public Bodies, conferences, etc, but at other seasons (particularly during the winter months), is comparatively empty. Average of accommodation occupied during 12 months is 30%.

Liquor Trade - Service to the Public and Dining Rooms from small Service Bar - is practically confined to Hotel Residents.

Hotel Kurrajong - opened 21/12/1926



Above: Hotel Kurrajong, 1926

Accommodation for 137 persons, consisting of - Double Rooms 28, Single Rooms 81 (of the above, 1 double room and 2 single rooms are reserved for staff and 1 double room used by the Tourist Bureau.) Garage accommodation for 6 cars.

Tariff

Full Concession per day per week per day per week; Single Room 20/- 5 pound 10/- 12/6d 3 pounds 15/-; Double Room 40/- 10 pounds 10/- 25/- 7 pounds 10/- ; Bed & Breakfast 12/- Children under 10 years half rates.

Special tariff for Members of Parliament only - Bed & Early morning Tea only 8/- per night; Extra for reservation of room 1 pound per week.

Trading as a first grade hotel. Specially reserved as home for Members of Parliament, but any accommodation no so required has been available for casual visitors. Has generally been closed while the House is not in Session, except when required for large parties of visitors to the Territory.

Liquor trading very small on the same style as Hotel Acton, and discontinued when the Hotel is closed.

Hotel Acton - opened 5/5/1927

Accommodation for 128 persons consisting of - Suites (Double Bedroom, Bathroom & Sitting Room) 4 Double Bedrooms with Bathroom 4 Double Bedrooms 33 Single Bedrooms 46 (Of this accommodation, 1 double room and 2 single rooms are required for staff purposes.) Garage accommodation for 15 cars.

Tariff

Full Concession per day per week per day per week; Single Room 20/- 5 pound 10/- 12/6d 3 pounds 15/-; Double Room 40/- 10 pounds 10/- 25/- 7 pounds 10/-; Suite 1 person 37/6d 10 pounds 10/- 25/- 6 pounds 15/-; Suite 2 persons 50/- 14 pounds 10/- 40/- 9 pounds 10/-; Bed & Breakfast only 12/-; Private sitting room 12/6d 3 pounds 10/-; Private bathroom 4/- 1 pound 10/- 15/-; children under 10 years, half rates

Trading - first grade hotel. Permanent residents consist of Senior Public Service and Commission officers and a few members of the Press. Was extensively used as a temporary residence for Public Servants whilst awaiting the completion of their own houses.

The bedrooms are all of extra large size and apparently designed for permanent lodgers. Average accommodation occupied for 12 months approximately 40%. Liquor Trading from service bar to Public Rooms is a very moderate one.

Hotel Wellington - opened 5/5/1927

Accommodation for 54 persons consisting of- Single rooms 22 Double rooms 16 Garage accommodation of 12 cars

Tariff

Full Concession per day per week per day per week; Single room 17/6d 5 pounds 11/6d 3 pounds 5/-; Double room 35/- 9 pounds 10- 23/- 6 pounds 5/-; Bed & Breakfast 10/-. Children under 10 half rates.(One double room reserved for Manageress and 1 Single bedroom for Liquor Bar.)

Trading - second grade hotel; has been well patronised by Members of Parliament and their families, Public Servants and Commission Officers, Pressmen etc. This hotel is comfortably furnished and has proved popular. Average accommodation occupied for 12 months approximately 55%. A Liquor License, owing to lack of Bar accommodation etc has been restricted to lodgers only.

Hotel Ainslie - opened 12/9/27

Accommodation for 60 persons, consisting of - Single rooms 16 Double rooms 22 Garage accommodation for 6 cars

Tariff:

Full Concession per day per week per day per week; Single rooms 17/6d 5 pounds 10/- 11/6d 3 pounds 5/-; Double rooms 35/- 9 pounds 10/- 23/- 6 pounds 5/-.

This hotel was intended to be used as a second grade hotel on similar lines to Hotel Wellington, but has been closed for some months, its accommodation not being required, owing to the cancellations of the

removal of further Public Service Departments from Melbourne. Hotel Ainslie is well furnished and well equipped, and is very comfortable for both permanent and casual lodgers. [For many years this Hotel was run by the Spendlove family and was known as Spendlove's Hotel.]

BOARDING HOUSES

Brassey House opened 27/8/1927

Accommodation for 60 persons consisting of: Single room 36 Double room 12 Garage stalls for 6 cars

Tariff

Full Concession per day per week per day per week; Single room 12/6d 3 pounds 10/- 2 pounds 15/-;
Double room 25/- 7 pounds 5 pounds 10/-.

Trading- Brassey House by reason of its moderate tariff has always been well filled by lower grade Public Servants and Commission officers and their families, as more or less permanent lodgers. Casual visitors are accommodated whenever possible, but very little room is available for this. Average accommodation occupied for 12 months is approximately 75%.

Gorman House - opened 1/7/1925 [First name - Hotel Ainslie].

Below: Hotel Ainslie 1926. In 1927 the complex was renamed Gorman House.



Accommodation for 124 persons, consisting of - Single rooms 84 Double rooms 20

Tariff

Single room 30/- per week; Sharing double room 30/- per week.

It is maintained exclusively as a Boarding House for lady officers of the Public Service and Commission Staffs. Average accommodation occupied for 12 months, 75%.

Beauchamp House - opened 8/8/1927 (now called Ian Potter House)

Accommodation for 60 persons, consisting of - Single rooms 16 Double rooms 22

Tariff

Single room 2 pound per week; Sharing double room 30/- per week

Occupied by lady officers of the Public Service and Commission Staff. Average accommodation occupied for 12 months 85%.

Bachelors Quarters. Acton - opened 1/1/1925 [The Bachelors Quarters opened in December, 1912 and were extended in the early 1920s.] The quarters were later renamed Acton Guest House and then Lennox House and belong to ANU.]

Total Guest capacity 128, Single rooms 100, Double rooms 14

Tariff -

Single room 40/- per week ; Sharing room 35/- per week

A residential establishment for men only. Chiefly occupied by Public Servants and Commission Officers from all branches of the service. Average accommodation occupied for 12 months, 80%.

Kingston Quarters - opened 31/8/1926 [originally called Printers Quarters]

Total guest capacity 162; Single rooms 18, Double rooms 72

Tariff -

Single room 40/- per week; Sharing room 35/- per week

Mainly a residential establishment for male employees of the Government Printing Office, and of other Government and Commission undertakings. The number in residence is affected largely by the sittings of Parliament, particularly in regard to Printing Office employees. Average accommodation occupied for 12 months - 50%.



Above: View from the Printers Quarters early 1920s. Photograph loaned by member of Bruce family. The site of the Printers Quarters is now covered with Fraser Court opposite the Kingston Shops. In the background is Red Hill.

Liquor Trading was commenced on Saturday, December 22nd, 1928. Hotel Licenses were issued to Hotels Canberra, Acton, Kurrajong and Wellington. Three Cafe Licenses were issued and for the purpose of this class of trading, premises were secured at Sydney Building, City, Foy's Fair Building, Kingston and a shop in the Manuka Arcade. These premises were named respectively, City Cafe, Kingston Cafe, and Manuka Cafe, and a lease of each place for a period of 6 months was taken. Manuka Cafe was closed on 16th June, 1929 owing to insufficient business, and the lease of the premises were not renewed. The leases of City and Kingston Cafes were renewed for a further period of six months, which expire in December, 1929. The Cafes were cheaply fitted out for trading, on the understanding that such trading by the Commission was a

temporary measure only, and that the business would be offered for lease to private enterprise as soon as a Liquor License Ordinance was gazetted.

Liquor is dispensed from a Bar in each Cafe, and tables and chairs have been provided for the convenience of the customers. It is desired to point out that from the point of view of control, that this convenience is far from satisfactory, as it is difficult for a Bar Manager to know whether or not he is serving a person already under the influence of drink, when the sale is actually made to another member of a party. A section of the Bar is reserved for sales by the bottle only - the contents not to be consumed on the premises. The Cafes are patronised by a very large section of the public, who prefer not to sit in the lounges at the Hotels to consume their drink, and these two Cafes handle the major part of the liquor trading in the Territory. On the closing of Manuka Cafe, the trading at Kingston Cafe automatically increased, and that establishment now handles the largest turnover...



Above: View from southside of Molonglo River. Formal gardens in foreground are part of the landscape in front of the Provisional Parliament House. The hill on the eastern side of the road is Mt Vernon, later renamed City Hill.
Below: York Park with Pavilion 1927. The park now has buildings erected upon it. In 1928 Bert Hinkler landed in his plane in this park. The park was near the Hotel Wellington.

