

**Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation
Committee—Supplementary Budget Estimates 2005-06
(October 2005)**

**Parliament Portfolio, Department of Parliamentary
Services**

Answers to Questions on Notice

Topic: Historic Memorials Committee's last meeting.

Question P9, Hansard page number 36 (31/10/05)

Senator FAULKNER—And could you take on notice when it had its last meeting?

Ms Penfold—We will take on notice as much as we can find. The papers I have seen suggest that it has never met, but we can provide those.

Answer:

The files belonging to DPS provide no clear answer on when the Historic Memorials Committee last met.

A history of the Committee written in 1988 is at **Attachment A**. The Committee does not appear to have met since that document was prepared.

Since then, the business of the Committee has been conducted by each individual member being approached by the Secretariat, as required, and by exchanges of letters.

*Compiled by
Deborah Raubin
1987-88*

THE HISTORY OF THE HISTORIC

MEMORIALS COMMITTEE

Attachment A

The Minute Paper of the Executive Council of 22 December 1911 (see attachment A) established the Historic Memorials Committee and defined the parameters within which it could function. The members of the Committee were appointed according to their status in the Parliament and their role clearly defined. They would form a group to become "a Committee of consultation and advice in reference to the expenditure of votes for the Historic Memorials of Representative Men"¹. This appears to be straightforward unless the questions are asked: To whom does the H.M.C. give advice? With whom does it consult? There can be only one answer to these questions. The H.M.C. advised the Commonwealth government and consulted with the government on the acquisition of historic commemorations of noteworthy Australians. This interpretation of the H.M.C.'s role implies that the memorials acquired were the property of the Commonwealth government and not of the H.M.C. itself. However the very narrowness of the range of the collection gives it a unique and separate status within the vast Commonwealth collections. The H.M.C.'s acquisitions were to be representative of the continuity of the Australian Parliament and were to preserve for the future, memorials of men and events judged by the Committee to be important.

The Federation of the Australian states into a Commonwealth government in 1901, encouraged sentiments of nationhood and the men who had done so much to promote federation required to have their place in history assured. From 1901 until the formation of the H.M.C., questions had been asked in the Parliament regarding the proper commemoration of the important events leading up to 1901. There are also letters from artists endorsing the plan to commemorate history by works of art, some self-interest, perhaps,

prompted their response. Tom Roberts, in a letter to Deakin - 11.3.1910, offers encouragement and approval..."this is the beginning of a new nation" and he shows concern "that we shall leave behind nothing that will give the future anything that will show what you all were as men to look at..." "It is the duty of the present for the future"².

Bertram McKennal, the sculptor, writing to P.M. Fisher 17.2.1913, referring to the H.M.C., states that "any movement of this kind does so much for the coming men who will see Australia one of the greatest nations". Prime Minister Fisher, speaking in the Parliament in Melbourne on 5.10.1911, perhaps best expresses the feelings of his time. 3?

In reply to a question from Mr Groom on the desirability of permanent memorials, Fisher states "The government hopes to preserve for the public, in oil or in stone likenesses of the prominent statesmen of Australia....."

As time passes, the opportunities for getting faithful portraits are becoming fewer and fewer and the time is ripe for doing something in the direction indicated"⁴ P.M. Fisher went on to explain that 500 pounds in the Parliamentary vote was provided for historic memorials, and that such a sum would not be the limit of expenditure. A month later the H.M.C. was formed to advise on spending the vote.

Fisher's words from the Parliamentary Papers of 31.10.1912 express the feelings of the times, "all the battles fought and won count for little compared with the great works of art and the effects of literature upon the growth and development of a people and the morals of a nation. Mankind is more largely indebted to the ethical writers and the great painters for the progress of human society than it is to legislation passed by parliament or to Judge-made laws"⁵.

X Thus, Prime Minister Fisher was to influence the character of the H.M.C. in such a way, that it would reflect the artistic values and attitudes of the times. The H.M.C. was composed entirely of parliamentarians, as set out in the guidelines laid down by Fisher. They were to represent the government in power and the opposition. (See Attachment A). Fisher believed that art was beyond all political differences and he had no desire to monopolise control of the committee⁶. It was immediately apparent that the members of the H.M.C. were not art experts and that advice would be needed on aesthetic and technical matters. For this reason the Commonwealth Art Advisory Board was gazetted on 30.12.1911. Membership of this Board was honorary and only travelling expenses were paid. The Board was to represent the states though this fact was not mentioned in the Gazette notice. The first Board members understood this, and the second meeting of the H.M.C. on 20.2.1912 expressed this desirability of state representation on the Board. Thus the first members were, Hugh Paterson from Melbourne, G.V.F Mann from Sydney, James Ashton from Adelaide, and by default, Mr Thistlethwaite from Brisbane. Victoria was to have had two members, but Bernard Hall refused the honour, claiming that as a practising artist he had insufficient time. The other members were the directors of state galleries or art societies. It is of interest that Melbourne was seen as the most significant representative (two members being proposed) and that the other states were not represented at all. Since the new Federal government sat in Melbourne, this was, perhaps, to be expected. No objections to the membership of the C.A.A.B. by some states to the exclusion of others, seem ever to have been raised.

The administrative work for the H.M.C and for the C.A.A.B. was carried out by the Secretary of the Prime Minister's Department. Mr Shepherd was the first Secretary and exercised considerable control until 1920. He was responsible for the drawing up of the contract with artists and the questions of copyright. The C.A.A.B. were also of assistance in these matters as the

parliamentarians had little experience of legal questions in relation to artists. However, early meetings of the H.M.C. were dominated by Fisher and his views. No sculptures were commissioned by the H.M.C. as Fisher's opinion held that "memorials should be in oil rather than stone"⁸ Mr Deakin was in favour of collecting photographs but this was never decided upon. The Committee, guided by Fisher, did decide whose portraits should hang in Parliament House. On 31.10.1912,⁹ Fisher declared that the Governors General, the Prime Ministers, the Presidents of the Senate and the Speakers of the House of Representatives should be commemorated by oil paintings. ~~Other distinguished Australians were to be included. No definition of this term is anywhere spelled out.~~ The first Committee meetings applied the term "distinguished Australians" to the "fathers of Federation". This was not very helpful in later years when it was decided to broaden the collection to include explorers and literary men. So difficult was this question that prior to World War II, it was hoped that a committee could be set up to make decisions as to what a distinguished Australian might be. Unfortunately the war intervened and nothing was done. After the war Australian art became more important and the C.A.A.B began the collection which was to form the nucleus of the National Gallery. The H.M.C. continued its stated policy and commemorated parliamentarians with oil paintings. Since 1912, very few portraits outside the chosen group have been included. The general policy seemed to be that if other persons were to be granted a memorial then this would open the flood-gates as it were and it would be difficult to refuse everyone who believed their Head of Department worthy of inclusion in the collection. Most requests did come from government departments and they were refused for the reason given above. ¹¹

From 1912 to 1919, 19 portraits had been acquired and 4350 pounds spent. (This was a response to a question in Parliament)¹¹⁻². By 1927, when the H.M.C. collection was transferred from Melbourne to Canberra, 28 portraits were listed for display in the new

Parliament House. There was no mention of any statues or busts or photographs. The portraits were only those of the political men already decided on at the first meeting. The two early views of the national capital site are the only works not portraits. These two paintings commemorate an important event in Australian history. The idea of commemorating noteworthy events was never decided upon by the H.M.C. Generally, the only works not of politicians, are of the openings of the Parliament by members of the British Royal family. This suggests that the H.M.C. saw its role as chiefly connected with the Parliament and politicians. However from its inception the H.M.C. was offered gifts and offers to purchase. Not all these were of works of art. Many items could be classed as memorabilia and these were always refused by the H.M.C. though they were often passed on to the Parliamentary Library. The portrait of Capt. Cook by Nathaniel Dance was acquired by the Library in this way ^{12/13}. The memorabilia could not fit into the collecting policy of the H.M.C., but today we should regret that they could not buy "Black Thursday" by William Strutt, which was offered to the H.M.C. in 1927 ¹⁴. It is now part of the State Library of Victoria collection and has been included in the Bicentennial art exhibition.

The Parliamentary Library, by 1927, had a large collection of art works as evidenced by ~~the~~ this question in Parliament. Dr Malony:

I ask you Mr Speaker, whether the large collection of art treasures stored in the cellars of this building (i.e. Melbourne) cannot be made available (for display, on the occasion of the visit of Duke and Duchess of York to open the Parliament) ^{13/15}.


The reply from Mr Groom states:

Historical paintings and drawings will be selected from the collection under the control of the Library committee. They

must remain under the control of the Library committee and continue to be as they were intended to be, part of the National Library. ¹⁴⁻¹⁶

This suggests to me that the collection of the H.M.C. was not regarded as a decorative collection of art works, as was the library collection.

The establishment of Canberra as the National Capital reawakened the interest in a National Gallery, which had first been tentatively put forward in 1918. The H.M.C. broadened its scope and commissioned portraits of the early explorers, Stuart, Mitchell and Wentworth, Sir Joseph Banks and Kendall (the poet). The Secretary of the Prime Minister's Department writing to the Joint House Committee late in 1927, said:



These portraits were obtained by the H.M.C. in connection with the Government's proposal to establish a National Gallery to include portraits of Australians famous in Politics, Art, Literature and Science. As there is no suitable place to store these portraits until their permanent location can be decided upon can they be stored at Parliament House, Canberra? ¹⁵⁻¹⁷

This was agreed to and the portraits are still there as the present Australian National Gallery does not collect portraits. Until 1946, the H.M.C. continued to commission replica portraits of famous explorers and two poets. These works have not become part of the A.N.G. collection, whatever may have been the intention of the H.M.C.

Meetings of the H.M.C. became infrequent during the early 1930's, no doubt due to the economic depression and political unrest. This period culminated in the second world war which again made matters of art of minor importance. Portraits continued to be commissioned and accepted at meetings in 1939, 1941, 1944, then

in 1945 the H.M.C. meetings became more frequent and great interest was once again shown in the creation of a National Gallery.

At this point in the history of the H.M.C., some general conclusions might be drawn.

Clearly the Committee saw itself as responsible for preserving an important part of Australian Parliamentary history. For this reason the artists chosen to accept commissions, tend to be those already acknowledged as leaders in the art world. Thus we have works by, Roberts, McCubbin, Longstaff, Lambert, McInnes, etc. These artists could be relied upon to give a good likeness of their sitters and were also technically expert. As these were official portraits they had to convey the ideas of a parliamentarian acceptable to society at that time. The early portraits viewed today, appear rigid of pose and unnatural. In their time they expressed the ideas of a politician as a man of dignity, rectitude, a man who held his high political office in great respect. Only the portrait of Sir George Reid by Lambert fell short of the ideal. At the H.M.C. meeting 17.11.1914, this work caused considerable consternation. It showed Reid, reclining in a chair, not standing, and the painting was not the usual size. The consensus of opinion was that this work was a "caricature of the man".¹⁸ The painting must have been approved by the C.A.A.B. for it to have been presented to the H.M.C. for its approval. So although the portrait was frowned upon at the time, it fortunately, has remained in the H.M.C. collection. However, the Committee stated that in future all poses must be standing and the painting of a standard size. G.V.F. Mann, chairman of the C.A.A.B., expressed dissatisfaction with these ideas on artistic grounds. On 25.9.1916, he wrote to the Committee attempting to have their decision changed. He was not successful. Mann explained that when the portraits were hung in the Gallery intended for their exhibition, they would present an uninteresting display. The H.M.C. did not agree with him.¹⁹

However, the C.A.A.B. had an important input to the early meetings. Mann was responsible for suggesting that conservation work be undertaken and that the paintings in Queen's Hall, Melbourne, be moved around. The Board frequently required that artists make alterations to their portraits. The archive files record that this was common but, unfortunately do not often explain the alterations. Norman Carter made two attempts at the portrait of Sir Joseph Cook and finally a sketch was accepted as the finished work. How frequently the C.A.A.B. allowed a sketch to be accepted for a finished work, is unclear, but the portrait of William Johnson by Florence Rodway is also a sketch, accepted at the same meeting as the Carter work, 4.5.1921. The H.M.C. always accepted any recommendations made by the C.A.A.B. and for this reason the Board was very concerned to establish a good collection of high artistic merit. The H.M.C. relied upon their expert advice.

The C.A.A.B. also presented ideas to the Committee, ideas not primarily concerned with the portrait collection. Mann suggested that small examples of Australian art should be purchased for Commonwealth offices and 100 pounds be set aside for this purpose. The suggestion met with approval from the H.M.C. but nothing was done at the 1920 meeting except discussion. The idea of a National Gallery was mentioned frequently from 1918 onwards, but the H.M.C. always deferred making any decision, but they did approve.

~~There are indications in the early archive files that the H.M.C. and the C.A.A.B. believed the portraits acquired were to be part of a National Collection.~~

At the Committee meeting of 26.9.1941, the Committee passed a resolution suggesting to the Joint House Committee, "that as all portraits acquired by the government, through the H.M.C. belong to the National Collection, it is the view of the H.M.C. that the paintings hanging at Parliament House, should be moved around from time to time". I believe this is conclusive evidence that the H.M.C. understood its role as that of advising the Commonwealth Government as set out in the Minute Paper of 1911. The H.M.C. also held that the

portraits commissioned by the Committee "belong to the National Collection".

After 1940, the history of the H.M.C. is more closely related to the role of the C.A.A.B. and the desire to establish a National Gallery.²⁴

The H.M.C. continued to commission portraits of the members designated as "representative men" from the Parliament.

However, it seems to have acquired a wider role in advising the Commonwealth on what works of art should be accepted as gifts or purchased. This new development, perhaps grew out of the H.M.C.'s recommendation to other Institutions, those items not required by the H.M.C. collection e.g. the Ellis Rowan collection, which is part of the National Library collection. The Commonwealth Art Collections list of 1946, has this collection of the works of Ellis Rowan as H.M.C. I assume this can only be because of the H.M.C. approved of the purchase, by the Library. This also occurred with purchases made by the C.A.A.B. The H.M.C. approved the gift or purchase and the works became listed as H.M.C. collection. The C.A.A.B. acquired the power to purchase works of art without reference to the Commonwealth Government. At the Board meeting of 21.2.46, Mann stated that at the H.M.C. meeting of 2.6.38, the C.A.A.B. was "authorised to acquire works of art without waiting upon the final approval of the Government, as delay might mean that the opportunity to acquire a particular work would pass away".²⁵ This power had not been exercised as the war had intervened. It is not explained how the H.M.C. gave this power to the C.A.A.B. The H.M.C. acquiesced in this although, Chifley, the Prime Minister had reservations and suggested that "the approval of the Treasurer should be sought and obtained".²⁶ This was agreed to at the meeting but there is evidence from a Treasury note that clearly states that the C.A.A.B. had departed from regulations. The Board purchased many works for the National Collection and

for overseas posts and government properties. The files have insufficient information to say that the H.M.C. approved all purchases. The most significant paintings do appear in the records, e.g. E. Phillips Fox "The green parasol", Rupert Bunny "Slave women" and "Street musicians", Max Meldrum "G.V.F. Mann".²⁷

The problem of accepting gifts next arose. From my research it appears that the H.M.C. could not accept gifts, nor could the C.A.A.B. All art works were given to the Commonwealth. There seems to have been no formal way for gifts to become the properties of individual institutions. They remained the property of the Commonwealth and copyright was vested in the Commonwealth, as it is for art works held in the H.M.C. collection. A meeting of the C.A.A.B. on 21.1.48 settled the gift problem. Mr McKenna, secretary to the Prime Minister's Dept. suggested that "A letter offering the painting should be addressed to the Prime Minister and the work offered for the national collection".¹²⁸ The Board agreed with this suggestion "that in such matters as a gift portrait being secured for the national collection, the owner must submit the offer to the Prime Minister".²⁹

This is an interesting development as it implies that the Prime Minister could decide to accept or reject a painting without taking any advice from the Board or the H.M.C. It is now not possible to check this. Works of art may have gone to a Prime Minister without the C.A.A.B. being aware of it, if they were rejected. The secretary of the Prime Minister's Dept. certainly carried much influence. There is evidence of this in a letter from McDonald, chairman of the C.A.A.B. to McKenna, asking him to present certain works to the Prime Minister (Menzies) Streeton's "Pastoral" at 500 pounds is regarded as "definitely a Gallery picture", he goes on "could you please take the necessary action in recommending it to the government". There is also "McInnes portrait of C.J. Dennis at 165 gns.

McKenna's reply of 19.8.52 says "I shall place both matters before the Prime Minister for his consideration at the first opportunity."³⁰

There is no mention here of the H.M.C. There is a suggestion that a portrait of C.J. Dennis be acquired but it seems to be without reference to the Committee. As this is a portrait of an Australian writer it could have come within the ambit of H.M.C., but apparently this was not so. The period from 1950 until 1965 seems to have been dominated by the Prime Minister's Dept. So that the C.A.A.B became very conservative.

The H.M.C. seemed to have no part in the collecting that was being carried on by the C.A.A.B. The Board continued to become more powerful. When in 1953, it was discovered that External Affairs had a vote of 1,000 pounds to purchase works of art for overseas posts, the Board had the vote transferred to Prime Minister's Dept. "so that proper supervision of the purchases under this vote could be exercised by the C.A.A.B."³¹ External Affairs had their own expert advice and had purchased two Drysdales.

~~The collection which was to form the nucleus of the national Gallery was acquired by the C.A.A.B. without advice from the~~

~~H.M.C.~~ However this did have some small influence on the H.M.C. The language changed. The meetings did not accept works into the H.M.C. collection but "into the National Collection of art treasures" or "for the inclusion in a National Gallery of Australian Art". The Ivor Hele portrait of Menzies is accepted for "inclusion in the National Collection of Art Treasures".

This was in 1956. In the same year the two Bunny's are acquired "for the National Collection of Art Treasures". The C.A.A.B. had recommended them in line with its policy of acquiring Australian works of art "for the ultimate inclusion in a National Gallery of Australian Art". As early as 1946, A.D. Colquhoun's portrait of

Sen. Dorothy Tangney had been accepted for the "National Collection" but during the 1950s the terms become more grandiose.

The H.M.C. accepted the terminology suggested by the C.A.A.B. or perhaps by the Prime Minister, though this does seem to indicate that the H.M.C. collection was seen as part of the National Collection.

Whilst the C.A.A.B. was forming the National Collection it continued to advise the H.M.C. on choice of artists for commissions and on the technical and artistic merit of the portraits submitted. The years from 1946 until 1960 are dominated by the artists Ivor Hele and William Dargie. Both men are excellent technicians but conventional in outlook. There were no problems so long as these artists continued to be commissioned. The portrait of Viscount De Lisle by Clifton Pugh, commissioned in 1965 caused some disquiet. The first portrait was not accepted and a second one, completed in 1967 did not satisfy all the members of the H.M.C., but it was accepted. Viscount De Lisle had chosen the artist and he seemed pleased with the result.

Drysdale had been chosen to paint Mr Gorton but he was unable for reasons not specified, to complete the work. He was paid for his sketch but allowed to keep it. It would have made an interesting addition to the H.M.C. collection. Mr Gorton had his portrait painted by June Mendoza, who was not on the C.A.A.B. list of artists, but the H.M.C. purchased the work though it represents a departure from the more conservative portraits. The portrait of Mr Whitlam by Pugh was not commissioned but purchased after it won the Archibald Prize, and again this is a less conventional work. Parliamentarians of the 1970s seemed to have a greater interest in art than previously had been exhibited to the H.M.C. Artists were chosen who were not on the acceptable list. The H.M.C. did not refuse a politician's request for a particular artist and these are the portraits which tend to be the most interesting.

Over the last 10-15 years the H.M.C. has tended to meet less and less frequently. ~~There are no longer ideas of national galleries to be discussed, nor collecting policies.~~ Since, in 1976, the National Gallery came into being and the C.A.A.B. was disbanded, the H.M.C. is responsible ~~only for the portraits of one or two politicians a year.~~ The members of the Committees no longer discuss the paintings at a meeting. A work is approved by the Visual Arts Board, on its artistic merit and then taken to Parliament House. The members of the Committee are informed and asked to view the portrait. They respond by letter, approving of the painting or not, as the case may be. The portrait of Sir John Kerr by Sam Fullbrook, commissioned on 12.10.77, was the only finished work to be rejected outright. This is a strange case as the V.A.B. had approved of the work and delivered it to Parliament House. Approval was then withdrawn for technical reasons (cracking of the surface), not for the quality of the likeness. The H.M.C. rejected the portrait and it is not part of the collection, but belongs to the Commonwealth. Sir John Kerr did not see the painting before it was rejected, it is possible he may have accepted it. Mr Fraser rejected his portrait by Westwood even though it had been accepted by the V.A.B. and the H.M.C. Another portrait was done of Mr Fraser by Ivor Hele and this was acceptable to him. The portrait by Westwood will remain in the H.M.C. collection although it cannot be displayed, yet. The portrait of Sir Ninian Stephens represents a break with tradition. In this painting by Albert Tucker, the Governor-General is shown outdoors in an informal pose. When this work is compared with the early portraits, it may be appreciated as an indication of our changing society and of different attitudes to men in high office.

The H.M.C. will continue the tradition of preserving the representations of our parliamentary members. The portraits reveal society's expectations of its politicians, the way these men see themselves and the way in which an artist sees them. They (the portraits) represent a sociological document valid now and for the future.

THE HISTORY OF THE HISTORIC
MEMORIALS COMMITTEE.

FOOTNOTES.

1. Attachment A, the Minute Paper establishing the H.M.C.
from file 78/2855-2.
2. Archive file 1913/4041/6.
3. *ibid.*
4. Parliamentary Papers: 1911.
5. Parliamentary Papers:31.10.1912.
6. *ibid.*
7. Commonwealth Gazette: December 1911.
8. Parliamentary Papers:1912.
9. *ibid.*
10. *ibid.*
11. File 78/2915. A letter from Mr Fraser of 4.9.73 clearly explains that the H.M.C. would not propose either oil or photo portraits of the Permanent Heads of Departments. In this instance the request came from the Department of Construction. Not only did the H.M.C. refuse permission for new portraits to be painted but it also refused to accept into the collection existing portraits of lesser Parliamentarians and high ranking public servants. See also File L 370/1/11.
12. House of Representatives. 11,12.18.
13. File A457, B508/7.
14. File A458 AL 370/2.
15. House of Representatives 11.12.1918.
16. *ibid.*
17. File A458/1 F 370/1.

FOOTNOTES continued

18. From a file held in the Department responsible for the administrative servicing of the H.M.C. This file has no number and is known as "Archives".

19. *ibid.*

20. *ibid.* Also more recent examples, file 78/3463 for the controversial portrait of Lord de L'Isle by Pugh.

Fraser by Westwood, File 78/2925, when an accepted work was rejected by the sitter.

21. Department "Archive " file. Also file A457/1 Q 508/7.

22. *ibid.*

23. File 78/2915.

24. Department "Archive" file. Also file CRS457 B508/7.

A National Gallery was envisaged as the permanent home for the portraits collected by the H.M.C. from 1918 on. The matter was frequently referred to at meetings but nothing was done. The C.A.A.B. urged the establishing of a National Gallery but in 1918 the idea of a portrait gallery seemed more appropriate. The whole idea changed depending on the membership of the H.M.C. and of the C.A.A.B. In 1927 the portraits were obtained in connection with a proposal to establish "a National Gallery to include portraits", file A458/1 F370/1. By 1941 the idea had become "a national collection", file 78/2915. Thus at the H.M.C. meeting of 31.7.46, the portrait of Dorothy Tangney was "accepted for the National Collection" file L370/1/11.

FOOTNOTES continued.

25. File L370/1/11.

26. *ibid.*

27. File 78/3463

28. File Q370/1/11.

29. *ibid.*

30. File A775/19.

31. File A775/24.

32. File 78/1749.

33. File 78/2925.

Attachment 4.

COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA.

Prime Minister,

Melbourne, 22nd December, 1911.

Departmental No. 19.

MINUTE PAPER FOR THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL.

Executive Council No. 53

SUBJECT.

HISTORIC MEMORIALS OF REPRESENTATIVE MEN.

APPOINTMENT OF COMMITTEE IN CONNECTION

WITH EXPENDITURE.

Recommended for the approval of His Excellency the Governor-General in Council that- the appointment of -

The Prime Minister

The President of the Senate

The Speaker of the House of Representatives

The Vice-President of the Federal Executive Council

The Leader of the Opposition in the House of Representatives

The Leader of the Opposition in the Senate

as a Committee of consultation and advice in reference to the expenditure of votes for Historic Memorials of Representative Men.

Approved in Council.

Deakin
Governor-General.

22nd Dec 1911

Filed in the records of the Council.

Andrew Fisher

Ed Steward