

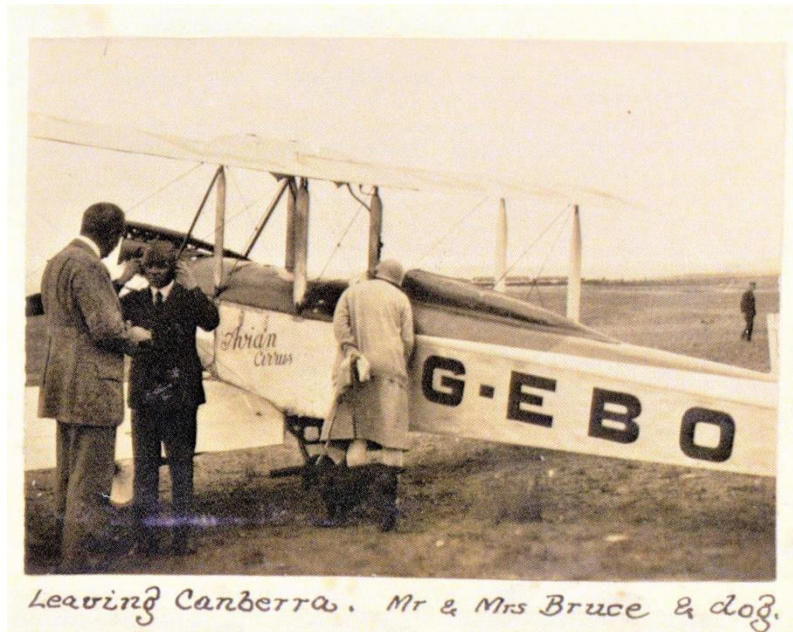
## PM BRUCE IN DOG HOUSE OVER KENNEL

The location of a residence for the Prime Minister was included on Walter Griffin's 1912 entry for the planning of the Federal Capital – on the east side of what was known as Kurrajong Hill. However, after much prevarication, a site for the Prime Minister's temporary cottage was finally selected by the architects Oakley and Parkes and agreed by the Federal Capital Commission in 1925. The Bruce's moved in on 5 May 1927, just a couple of days before Parliament was opened. This humble abode was not equipped with any canine accommodation.



*PM Bruce, his wife and pet dog at The Lodge, Canberra, c 1927  
NAA A3560, 7649*

There are several pencil notes in the margins of George Jefferis' and John Whelan's manuscript "*Around Australia's Capital*", their record of journeys around the FCT from 1926 to 1932 which is held by the Society and is listed on the ACT Heritage Register. One such note accompanies a small, poor quality photograph (below) of Bert Hinkler about to fly out of Canberra and also includes Prime Minister Bruce, Mrs Bruce and their dog (unfortunately in the long shadow cast by SM Bruce). Hinkler's flying visit was in March 1928.



*The Bruce's dog is roughly at lower centre and on leash held by Mrs Bruce. Jefferis and Whelan, 'Around Australia's Capital', volume 1, page 50.*

The marginal comment wryly states that: "The dog is mentioned as it has been rather prominent on account of its kennel having cost about £75 to build." It is not clear if this is the rumoured cost at March 1928 when Hinkler was here or 1931 when this volume was written. Either way, the cost was already notorious.

I was curious to find out more about the £75 kennel. Happily the National Archives has a file quaintly titled "Prime Minister's Cottage" which contains some relevant correspondence (NAA CT86/1, 58). On 9 September 1927 Bruce's Private Secretary, G.B. Cooke, wrote to the Secretary of the FCC to advise that Mrs Bruce was bringing the family dog with them to Canberra and wanted a dog kennel to be made available. A handwritten note at the bottom of the letter informs the dog is a Cocker Spaniel.

The cost of the kennel was initially estimated at £3/16/5d. The Executive Architect asked the Building and Construction Branch on 26 September for the estimates to be checked, an overhead added and the relevant paperwork prepared. Nothing on file indicates the initial estimate was significantly increased. Neither is there any indication if the kennel was to be a temporary, provisional or permanent structure. However it was most likely temporary as The Lodge itself was originally a temporary official residence (Graeme Barrow, *The Prime Minister's Lodge: Canberra's unfinished business*. Dagraja Press, Canberra, 2008, page 16).

Rumours of the cost grew from the modest original estimate, at first gradually and then wildly. Parliament was, as ever, keenly scrutinising the cost of anything proposed for Canberra, even as petty as a dog kennel. Percy Coleman (Member for Reid) felt £8

was too much and was “an excellent, illustration of the extravagance of this government, I mention that it was stated in the press, and the statement remained uncorrected, that £8 was spent on building a dog kennel for the Prime Minister - or rather, I should say for the Prime Minister’s dog.” (*Hansard*, 29 February 1928, p3450). I can just imagine the chuckle that rippled around the opposition side of the chamber!

By late 1930 the cost was rumoured to be around £30 according to Senator Elliott who was getting stuck into the FCC for its extravagance:

“When the Federal Capital Commission was in control of building operations in Canberra honourable senators were astounded to learn, that the reconstruction of Yarralumla had cost £78,000, the Prime Minister's lodge £30,000, and a dog kennel at The Lodge £30.” (*Hansard*, Senate. 5 August 1930)

A year later there was a massive leap in the rumoured cost of the kennel. Mr Thomas White (Liberal, Member for Balaclava) said a member of the Labour party said that in his electorate Bruce's dog kennel was rumoured to have cost £2,000 (*Hansard*, 11 March 1931, House of Representatives).

One wonders what limit there was to the political inflation of the rumoured cost of the dog kennel. Much was made of the mythically outrageous cost of the kennel and the episode lived on, being dredged up from time to time. So we read that in 1939 Senator Collings asked about proposed additions to the Prime Minister's Lodge.

"Senator Foll, the Minister for the Interior, informed him that the only addition proposed by Mr. Menzies was a wood shed. But there's no telling what part that wood shed is going to play in the next elections, after what happened in the case of Mr. Bruce's dog kennel.” (*The Canberra Times*, 10 June 1939).

The last word should go to Robert Warren, the gardener at The Lodge from 1928 to 1953. Interviewed in 1954 when he was awarded the Imperial Service Medal by Her Majesty the Queen, he referred to the kennel as “the £100 dog kennel”. Completely deflating the whole saga he revealed that “in reality the dog kennel was made from scrap.” (*The Canberra Times*, 31 July 1954)

Maybe this myth of escalating costs should be revived in the light of recent renovations to the PM’s Lodge? Oh, and what was the Cocker Spaniel’s name?