

# ANDREW FISHER



## His Record:

- ❖ Three times Prime Minister of Australia (1908-09, 1910-13 & 1914-15); First Labour Prime Minister.
- ❖ Member of Legislative Assembly for Gympie (1893-1901).
- ❖ Secretary for Railways and Minister for Public Work (1899) in first Labour Ministry in the world.
- ❖ Member of the House of Representatives for Wide Bay (1901-1915).
- ❖ Minister for Trade and Customs (1904).
- ❖ Ordered three ships for Australian Navy (1908).
- ❖ Established the Commonwealth Bank (1911).
- ❖ Established Baby Bonus (1912).
- ❖ Appointed High Commissioner in London (1916-1921).
- ❖ Began building Canberra as the Federal Capital.

## The Andrew Fisher House

The century-old Andrew Fisher House is a typical miner's cottage of the early goldfield era.

It was the birthplace in 1874 of Margaret Jane Irvine, who was destined to become the wife of Andrew Fisher. The Irvine family later moved to an adjoining larger house, whilst still retaining ownership of the cottage, and it was here that Andrew Fisher lived as a boarder for six of his eleven years residence in Gympie, and it was here that he presumably met his future wife.

After their marriage on 31<sup>st</sup> January 1901, Mr and Mrs Fisher lived briefly in the cottage before parliamentary duties necessitated their taking up residence in Melbourne. Evidence indicates that over at least a few succeeding years they lived at the cottage at various times when visiting constituents in the Federal electorate of Wide Bay.

The Andrew Fisher House consists of four rooms with a front and side veranda. The outer walls are partly enclosed with weatherboards, but even where the studs and pine linings are exposed, they are still in reasonably sound condition. The whole structure is extremely modest in design and execution.

When the cottage was donated for historical purposes, a Committee Representative of Gympie City and Widgee Shire Councils, Service Clubs and Historical Society was formed to undertake its removal to a site near the Museum and also its restoration. The work was financed by contributions from the State Government, both local authorities and individuals. Furniture donated locally has enabled the Ladies Committee to furnish the cottage in the style of the period.

The Committee expresses its thanks and appreciation to all who assisted in so many ways in the preservation of this segment of the Australian Heritage.

## Achievements in Parliament

- ❖ In 1893 Fisher won a seat for the Labour Party in the Colonial Queensland Parliament. He lost in 1896, but won again in 1899. He was a proud supporter of Federation.
- ❖ Fisher became a part of history in December 1899 when he was assigned Minister of the Labour Government in Queensland and, in fact, the world.
- ❖ Fisher moved to the Commonwealth Parliament in 1901. He became Minister for Trade and Customs in 1904.
- ❖ In 1905 he was Deputy Leader, then Leader in 1907.
- ❖ In 1908 Fisher formed a government and became Prime Minister.
- ❖ In June 1909 the protection and free traders, now known as the fusion, deposed Fisher.
- ❖ Back in opposition, Fisher worked hard to make Labour more attractive to the voters.
- ❖ At the election of 13 April 1910, he regained power and became Prime Minister again.
- ❖ The next 3 years saw major advances under Fisher's leadership.
- ❖ A start was made on the construction of Canberra.
- ❖ Track work began on the long-promised trans-continental railway.
- ❖ Fisher established the Commonwealth Bank.
- ❖ Andrew Fisher expanded the pension system to enable payments to invalids.
- ❖ In 1913 the Liberals gained a small majority, but within 15 months were defeated again at an early election.
- ❖ During the campaign in 1914, Fisher made his notorious commitment to support Britain's war efforts 'to the last man and the last shilling', despite his personal opposition to it.
- ❖ Now in his third term as Prime Minister, Fisher's health was failing.
- ❖ Fisher resigned in October 1915 to be appointed High Commissioner in London where he remained until his death in 1928.
- ❖ Andrew Fisher was the first Prime Minister with an absolute majority in Parliament.
- ❖ His was the classic working class hero story, from working in coalmines at age 10 to being the leader of the nation.
- ❖ Fisher was Member of the House of Representatives for Wide Bay during 1901 to 1915.
- ❖ He ordered 3 ships for the Australian Navy in 1908.

# Gympie miner who became Australian PM

**THE political career of Andrew Fisher, three times labor Prime Minister of Australia from 1908 to 1915, began on the Gympie goldfields as a direct result of his involvement in the miners' union.**

"From pit boy to Prime Minister" is how some historians have described Andrew Fisher, the coal miner from Crosshouse in Scotland.

From all accounts Fisher was a modest and deeply sincere man whose commitment to social justice, and concern for the underprivileged, went hand in hand with his dedication to the Labor Party. He was an inspiring example of honest worth, dignity, principle and commonsense.

He liked to be known as Andy Fisher, and later in his life refused a Knighthood.

Fisher was about ten years-old when he went down into the pits. His father was crippled with disease and the family needed his wage to survive. Despite working twelve hours a day six days a week, and four hours on Sunday, the boy somehow managed to gain an education, which he saw as a liberating force.

When he was just seventeen Fisher was elected Crosshouse district secretary of the Ayrshire Branch of the Miners Union, becoming a thorn in the side of mine owners to such an extent that he was black-listed as a strike leader.

Out of work because of his union activities Fisher decided to emigrate to Australia with his brother James, arriving in Brisbane in August 1885. Within a month they were working at the Burrum coalfield north of Maryborough.

When his application as manager of a new mine was turned down in 1888 he left Burrum for the Gympie goldfields, finding work at the North Phoenix No. 10.

Over the next five years his union involvement became political. He taught himself shorthand and studied political philosophy.

With an eye on the State elections in 1893 Fisher set about what would now be described as raising his public profile. He joined the Oddfellows Lodge, local Presbyterian church and Gympie Chess Club. He was superintendent of the Sunday School, a shareholder in the Gympie Co-operative Society, organised debates and even joined the local Defence Force.

He won Gympie for the Labor Party but lost his seat in 1896, a defeat he attributed to the press "not being impartial".

He bought a printing press, learned how to work it, then ran off issue after issue of the Gympie Truth while working as an engine driver in a small mine. This determination was rewarded when he regained his seat in 1899.

The Commonwealth of Australia was founded in

1901, with the opening of the first Federal Parliament on New Year's Day. At the age of thirty-nine Fisher was elected to Federal parliament as the member for Wide Bay, and was appointed Deputy Leader of the Labor Party.

That same year he married Margaret Irvine, daughter of Henry and Margaret Irvine, whose house had been his home almost since his arrival in Gympie.

In 1908 Fisher headed his first Government, however a fusion of opposition parties brought it down a year later.

Labor won the 1910 election with a comfortable majority in both houses and Andrew Fisher once again became Prime Minister.

It was the Fisher Government of 1910-13 which negotiated the purchase of land from New South Wales to build a Federal capital.

Fisher gave King O'Malley, the Tasmanian Minister for Home Affairs, all responsibility for the capital, including submitting a list of Aboriginal words for consideration as the name of the new capital.

At the next cabinet meeting O'Malley confessed he had no list and proposed the Federal capital be named Fisher.

An indignant Fisher rejected the suggestion as a "Yankee joke" Thus Andrew Fisher turned down the offer to have the capital of Australia named in his honour. On his

suggestion it was given the Aboriginal name Canberra.

Fisher was into his second stint as Prime Minister when, in 1911, he returned to Scotland and received a warm and emotional welcome at Cross-house. He was in England to represent Australia at the Imperial Conference and attend the coronation of King George V in London.

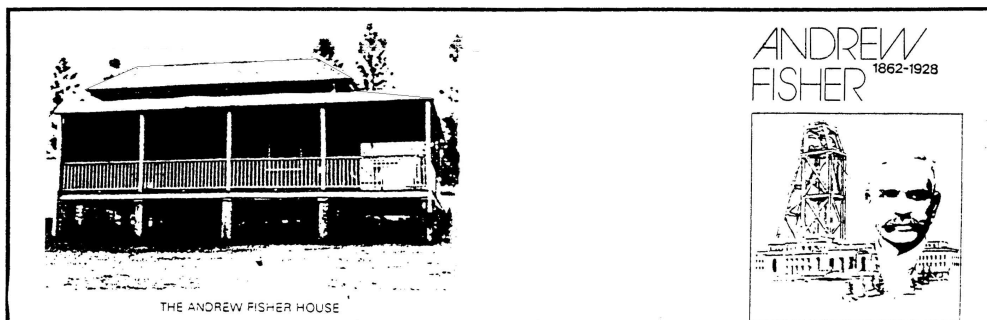
Thirteen months after taking office as Prime Minister for the third time, in October 1915, Andrew Fisher resigned as Prime Minister and leader of the Labor Party. He then took up the post of High Commissioner of Australia in London, an appointment he held until 1921.

The burden of office, failing health and his opposition to compulsory conscription for armed services during the initial stages of the First World War were contributing factors in his resignation.

He died in London in October 1928, at the age of sixty-six. Australians living in Britain paid the cost of erecting a memorial over his grave at Hampstead Cemetery and this was unveiled in 1930 by Labor Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald of Great Britain.

Andrew Fisher was survived by his wife, five sons and a daughter.

Andrew Fisher's Cottage now stands as a memorial to this outstanding man in the grounds of the Gympie Mining Museum.



THE ANDREW FISHER HOUSE