

History Notes: Longest Serving WA MPs
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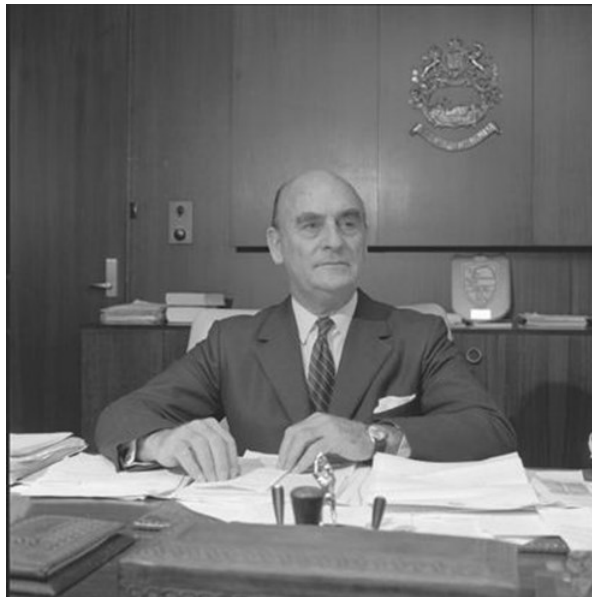
Longest Serving WA MPs

Honest John: longest serving WA parliamentarian

The longest serving member of the Western Australian Parliament is the Hon John Tonkin AC who served continuously in the Legislative Assembly for over 43 years from 1933 to 1977. John Trezise Tonkin was born on 2 February 1902 in Boulder, Western Australia to John Trezise Tonkin, engine driver and his wife, Julia. He was educated at Boulder City Central School and was dux of the school in 1916. He also attended the Eastern Goldfields High School in 1917 and Claremont Teachers' College. His working career began as an office boy at Kalgoorlie Electric Power Company. He taught at various country schools in WA and finally at the metropolitan North Perth Primary School until the start of his parliamentary career. In

his early 20s, Tonkin joined the Australian Labor Party and remained a member for 70 years. In 1927 and 1930, he contested the WA seats of Sussex and Murray-Wellington before winning North-East Fremantle in 1933. In 1950, the seat was abolished and he then won the seat of Melville. In 1944 he was appointed Minister for Education and Social Services. By 1955 he was the Deputy Premier and from 1971 to 1974 he was Premier of Western Australia. The Tonkin government established Australia's first parliamentary

ombudsman and an environmental watchdog; and passed the state's inaugural Aboriginal heritage legislation. Tonkin was defeated in the 1973 election and retired two years later. He died in South Perth on 20 October 1995, aged 93 years. A state funeral service was held at Wesley Church in Perth.



Premier John Tonkin

Photograph: courtesy of State Library of WA
Call no: BA1119/P269



"To my mind there can be no better investment than money spent in training the intellects and improving the minds of the boys and girls of to-day who will be the men and women of tomorrow".

Hon John Tonkin

Inaugural Speech

Hansard

18 July 1933

List of longest serving MLAs in Western Australia

Name	Term	Years	Months	Days
Tonkin, John Trezise	1933–1977	43	10	11
Collier, Philip	1905–1948	42	11	21
Johnson, William Dartnell	1901–1905, 1906–1917, 1924–1948	39	6	26
Grayden, William Leonard	1947–1949, 1956–1993	39	5	11
Wilson, Arthur Alan	1908–1947	39	5	6
Hegney, James	1930–1947, 1950–1968	35	10	29
Stubbs, Sydney	1911–1947, (MLC 1908–1911)	35	5	12
Sleeman, Joseph Bertram	1924–1959	35	–	–
Hawke, Albert Redvers George	1933–1968 (MHA, SA, 1921–1924)	34	11	15
Troy, Michael Francis	1904–1939	34	8	22
Jamieson, Colin John	1953–1986	32	11	25
McLarty, Sir (Duncan) Ross	1930–1962	32	1	5
North, Charles Frederic John	1924–1956	32	–	16
Mann, James Isaac	1930–1962	31	11	19
Marshall, William Mortimer	1921–1952	31	5	7

Longest serving MPs in WA

The longest serving member of either House of the Parliament of Western Australia is the Hon John Trezise Tonkin who served continuously for 43 years, 10 months and 11 days in the Legislative Assembly from 1933 to 1977. The only other Western Australian state MPs to serve more than 40 years continuously were Philip Collier MLA (42 years, 11 months and 21 days from 1905 to 1948) and Vernon Hamersley MLC (42 years, two months and 19 days from 1904 to 1946 in the Legislative Council). The Hon Michelle Roberts, the current Member for Midland, is the longest serving woman and the longest serving member in the Parliament of Western Australia.

List of longest serving MLCs in Western Australia

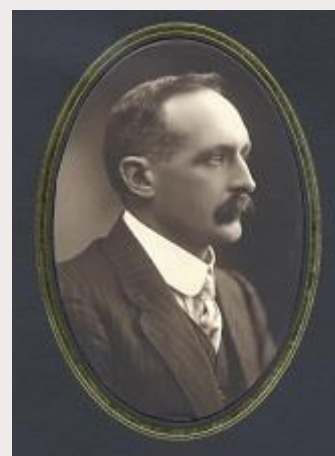
Name	Term	Years	Months	Days
Hamersley, Vernon	1904–1946	42	2	19
Drew, John Michael	1900–1918, 1924–1947	41	2	13
Kirwan, Sir John Waters	1908–1946	38	–	–
Moore, Norman Frederick	1977–2013	36	–	–
Baxter, Charles Farquharson	1914–1950	35	9	12
Miles, George James Gallop Warden	1916–1950	33	8	3
Wittenoom, Sir Edward Horne	1894, 1895–1898, 1902–1906, 1910–1934	32	1	27
Griffiths, Clive Edward	1965–1997	32	–	–
Heenan, Eric Michael	1936–1968	32	–	–
Seddon, Sir Harold	1922–1954	32	–	–
Baxter, Norman Eric	1950–1958, 1960–1983	31	–	15
Fraser, Gilbert	1928–1958	30	5	10
MacKinnon, Graham Charles	1956–1986	30	–	–

Vernon Hamersley: longest serving MLC

The Hon Vernon Hamersley is the longest serving member of the Legislative Council (42 years, two months and 19 days). On 24 April 1901 he contested Toodyay as an Independent. Hamersley was then a Liberal until 1920 when he joined the Country Party. He was elected the MLC for East Province on 5 August 1904 in a by-election. In May 1916 he ran again for election but the result was declared void. However he was returned at a by-election and held the seat until 24 October 1946. He was Father of the House from 1921 to 1946.

Vernon Hamersley was born 18 March 1871 in Guildford, Western Australia, the son of Samuel Richard Hamersley, pastoralist and

farmer, and Matilda Brown. He was educated at Guildford Grammar School, WA, Magdalen College School, Oxford and Downton Agricultural College, Salisbury in England. On 6 August 1895 he married Clara Hicks, daughter of Joseph and Rosina Snow at St Peters Church, Beverley, WA. They had one son and two daughters. Hamersley farmed with his father in York until 1895. He inherited 'Hasely', Toodyay from his grandfather which he developed as a farm and stud. He was also part-owner of Mt Barnett cattle station, Kimberley, WA. Vernon Hamersley died 24 October 1946 in West Perth and was buried at Culham Cemetery, Toodyay, WA.



Hon Vernon Hamersley: Photograph from the Parliament of Western Australia

Philip Collier: second longest serving MP



Hon Philip Collier
Photograph: Parliament of WA

The Hon Philip Collier is the second longest serving state MP in WA. He was born on 21 April 1873 at Woodstock, near Melbourne, Victoria. On 27 June 1900, he married Ellen Heagney Dunaford, daughter of Edward and Catherine Dunaford. Collier was a miner at Steiglitz near Ballarat, Victoria and NSW. He was also a construction foreman at the Greater Melbourne Sewage Co in Northcote. In 1904 he moved to WA and mined at the Perseverance Goldmining Company in Kalgoorlie. He was a firm union member holding various positions including vice president of the

Goldfields Trades and Labour Council. On 27 October 1905, he was elected MLA for Boulder in WA and retained the seat until 18 October 1948. He held a number of portfolios including Mines, Railways, Water Supplies and Forests. He was the Leader of Opposition as well as Premier and Treasurer twice in the 1920s and 1930s. From 1939 to 1948 he was Father of the House in the Parliament of WA. He served the longest terms as an Australian Labor Party parliamentary leader (19 years) and ALP Premier (nine years). He died on 18 October 1948 in Mt Lawley, WA.

"I submit that the prosperity of any nation depends on the distribution of its wealth, not on the total production whatever", Hon Philip Collier's Inaugural Speech, 12 July 1906



Philip Collier addresses a luncheon party of prospectors at Mt Keith

Photograph by LE Shapcott. Photograph courtesy of the State Library of Western Australia. Call number: 001183D

Michelle Roberts: longest serving woman parliamentarian

The Hon Michelle Roberts is the longest serving woman in the Parliament of Western Australia. She is also the longest serving member, having served for 30 years, and is known as the Mother of the House. On 19 March 1994, Roberts won the seat of Glendalough in a by-election, following the resignation of Dr Carmen Lawrence, former Premier of Western Australia. The seat of Glendalough was abolished in 1994 and at the next election on 14 December 1996 she won the seat of Midland which she still holds.

From 2001 to 2005 she was Minister of Police and Emergency Services. After Labor's win at the March 2017 election she was appointed Minister for Police and Road Safety. On 29 April 2021, she was elected to the role of Speaker (30th) of the Legislative Assembly. She is the first woman to hold the position in the Parliament of Western Australia in 131 years.

Michelle Hopkins Roberts was born in Perth on 29 February 1960 to William and Frances Thomas. Charles

Hopkins, the former Lord Mayor of Perth is her uncle. She was educated at Sacred Heart in Point Peron; Highgate and North Inglewood primary schools and Mercedes College in the city of Perth. She graduated with a Bachelor of Arts at the University of Western Australia and then completed a Diploma in Education.

Roberts joined the Australian Labor Party in 1978 and was the first woman President of the state Australian Labor Party from 2000 to 2007.

After university she was a teacher at John Curtin Senior High School from 1983 to 1987. In 1983 she married Gregory Roberts at Mercedes Chapel in Perth. They have three daughters. From 1987, Roberts worked as a policy and research officer with various government departments.

Michelle Roberts was councillor for the City of Perth from 1986 to 1993 and Deputy Mayor for the last two years of her service.



The Hon Michelle Roberts 'on the steps of Parliament House in West Perth', 21 March 2021

Photographer: Jackson Flindell, The West Australian

List of longest serving women MPs in WA

Name	Term	Years	Months	Days
Roberts, Michelle Hopkins MLA	1994–	30	ongoing	
MacTiernan, Alannah Joan Geraldine MLA and MLC	1993–1996 1996–2010 2017–2023	22	9	25
Quirk, Margaret Mary MLA	2001–	23	ongoing	
Ellery, Suzanne Mary MLC	2001–	22	ongoing	
Doust, Catherine Esther MLC	2001–	22	ongoing	
Constable, Elizabeth MLA	1991–2013	21	7	17
Cardell-Oliver, Florence Gillies MLA	1936–1956	20	1	23
Farina, Adele MLC	2001–2021	19	11	29
Faragher, Donna Evelyn Mary MLC	2005–	18	ongoing	
Talbot, Sally Elizabeth MLC	2005–	18	ongoing	
McAleer, Margaret MLC	1974–1993	18	11	29
Edwards, Judith Mary MLA	1990–2008	18	3	11
Ravlich, Ljiljana Maria MLC	1997–2015	17	9	16



Portrait of the Hon Alannah MacTiernan speaking in the Legislative Council, 2017. Alannah was a member of Parliament for over 22 years which includes over 13 years as a member of the Legislative Assembly. She retired on 10 February 2023.

Who is nominated Father or Mother of the House?

Following the British House of Commons tradition, the Father or Mother of the House is the member who at the time has the longest period of continuous service in a parliamentary chamber. If the longest serving members began their parliamentary terms on the same day, the member who was sworn in first is nominated Father or Mother of the House.

First Father of the House

In the Parliament of Western Australia, Lancel Victor De Hamel was nominated the first Father of the House. He was the Father of the House in the Legislative Assembly from 9 December 1890 to 3 July 1894. The first Father of the House in the Legislative Council was Sir George Shenton. His term as father lasted from 24 December 1890 to 21 May 1906.

First Mother of the House

For the first time in the Parliament of Western Australia there is a Mother of the House in the Legislative Assembly. The Hon Michelle Roberts is the longest serving parliamentarian, following the resignation of the Hon Colin Barnett in 2018. On 5 February 2018, Roberts received the title Mother of the House. It appears that she is the first designated Mother of the House in a lower house of an Australian parliament.

First Mother of the LC

And also for the first time, there is a Mother of the House in the Legislative Council. The Hon Sue Ellery is the longest serving parliamentarian in the Legislative Council following the resignation of the Hon Simon O'Brien in 2021. Whilst the Hon Kate Doust has been in Parliament for the same time, the Hon Sue Ellery was sworn in first.



Sir George Shenton, ca. 1900

Image courtesy of the [State Library of Western Australia](#)

Call number: 1905B/10

Shenton was the first Father of the House in the Legislative Council.

Origin of Father of the House

According to the Oxford English Dictionary the 'father of the house' is the longest serving (or sometimes the oldest) member of a society or institution". The expression was originally used to refer to the father of the city eg in 1668 N Hardy in the *Royal Commonwealths Man* referred to the "eldest Alderman upon the bench that had served in the Office of a Lord Mayor, to whom is given that honourable title of the Father of the City". The expression was used in the House of Commons in 1893 as recorded in the **Daily Telegraph** on 8 July: "The Right Hon. C. P. Villiers, M.P., 'Father of the House of Commons', was robbed of his watch on Thursday".

Fathers and Mothers of the House, Legislative Assembly

Name	Term as Mother/Father
De Hamel, Lancel Victor*	9 December 1890—3 July 1894
Harper, Charles** (first elected December 1890)	3 July 1894—27 October 1905
Piesse, Frederick Henry (first elected December 1890)	27 October 1905—26 October 1909
Quinlan, Timothy Francis (first elected April 1897, previously member December 1890–June 1894)	26 October 1909—3 October 1911
Taylor, George (first elected April 1901)	3 October 1911—12 April 1930
Troy, Michael Francis (first elected June 1904)	12 April 1930—18 March 1939
Collier, Philip (first elected October 1905)	18 March 1939—18 October 1948
Marshall, William Mortimer (first elected March 1921)	18 October 1948—19 August 1952
North, Charles Frederic John (first elected March 1924)	19 August 1952—7 April 1956
Sleeman, Joseph Bertram (first elected March 1924)	7 April 1956—21 March 1959
McLarty, Sir (Duncan) Ross (first elected April 1930)	21 March 1959—17 May 1962
Hawke, Albert Redvers George (first elected April 1933)	17 May 1962—23 March 1968
Tonkin, John Trezise (first elected April 1933)	23 March 1968—19 February 1977
Jamieson, Colin John (first elected February 1953)	19 February 1977—8 February 1986
Grayden, William Leonard (first elected April 1956, previously member March 1947–October 1949)	8 February 1986—6 February 1993
Blaikie, Barry Roy (first elected February 1971)	6 February 1993—14 December 1996
Cowan, Hendy John (first elected March 1974)	14 December 1996—16 October 2001
Bradshaw, John Leslie (first elected 19 February 1983)	16 October 2001—26 February 2005
Trenorden, Maxwell Wayne (first elected 8 Feb 1986)	26 February 2005—6 September 2008
Ripper, Eric Stephen (first elected 19 March 1988)	6 September 2008—9 March 2013
Barnett, Colin James (first elected 11 August 1990)	9 March 2013—5 February 2018
Roberts, Michelle Hopkins*** (first elected 19 March 1994)	5 February 2018—

*Lancel De Hamel had been a member of the old Legislative Council since 1889.

**Charles Harper had been a member of the old Legislative Council since 1884.

*** Michelle Roberts is the first Mother of the House.

Fathers and Mothers of the House, Legislative Council

Name	Term as Father
Shenton, Sir George*	24 December 1890—21 May 1906
Hackett, Sir (John) Winthrop (first nominated December 1890, resigned December 1891, re-nominated 8 December 1891)	22 May 1906—19 February 1916
McLarty, Edward (term commenced July 1894)	19 February 1916—21 May 1916
Clarke, Ephraim Mayo (term commenced August 1901)	22 May 1916—15 April 1921
Hamersley, Vernon (term commenced August 1904)	15 April 1921—24 October 1946
Cornell, James (term commenced May 1912)	24 October 1946 —25 November 1946
Baxter, Charles Farquharson (term commenced May 1914)	25 November 1946—2 March 1950
Seddon, Harold (term commenced May 1922)	2 March 1950—21 May 1954
Fraser, Gilbert (term commenced May 1928)	22 May 1954—1 November 1958
Heenan, Eric Michael (term commenced May 1936)	1 November 1958—21 May 1968
Hislop, James Gordon (term commenced November 1941)	22 May 1968—21 May 1971
Logan, Leslie Arthur (term commenced April 1947)	22 May 1971 —21 May 1974
Griffith, Sir Arthur Frederick (term commenced June 1953)	22 May 1974 —21 May 1977
MacKinnon, Graham Charles (term commenced May 1956)	22 May 1977 —21 May 1986
Griffiths, Clive Edward (term commenced May 1965)	22 May 1986 —21 May 1997
Moore, Norman Frederick (term commenced May 1977)	22 May 1997 —21 May 2013
House, Barry John (term commenced October 1987)	22 May 2013 —21 May 2017
O'Brien, Simon McDonnell (term commenced 22 May 1997)	22 May 2017—21 May 2021
Ellery, Suzanne Mary MLC (term commenced 22 May 2001) **	22 May 2021—

*Sir George Shenton had sat continuously in the old Legislative Council since 1875.

** Sue Ellery is the first Mother of the Legislative Council.

Sources

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Portrait of Giz Watson, 21st March, 2012, State Library of Western Australia, BA2970

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Sir George Shenton, [photograph], 1900, State Library of Western Australia, 1905B/10

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