

## Alexander Bruce of Acton by Jessie Gibbs (Nee Bruce)

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Alexander Dickson Esson Bruce was born on 8th February, 1884 at Arbuthnott, Kincardineshire, Scotland, fifth son of William and Martha Bruce, Farmers of Kincardineshire, Scotland.

Alexander Bruce became the second Superintendent of Parks and Gardens in Canberra and was responsible for much of the early street plantings in the city as well as the rose gardens in front of the Provisional Parliament House. Members of his family also had the travel bug and moved from Scotland to other countries. His brother, William Bruce Bsc FHAS became Professor of Agriculture Edinburgh and East Scotland College of Agriculture, his sister, was Dr Elizabeth Bruce, New York USA and another brother, Samuel E Bruce became a university lecturer at University of Saskatchewan, Canada.

Alexander Bruce was educated in public schools and began his apprenticeship on the estate of Sir Henry Cook - Glencourse, Midlothian, Scotland. His botanical training was carried out at the Royal Botanical Gardens Edinburgh and his technical training at Heriot Watt College, Edinburgh. He became an Assistant Instructor of Horticulture, Cheshire Council, Cheshire.

In 1910 Alexander Bruce arrived in Western Australia where he worked at several jobs including coal mining. He returned to Scotland to persuade his wife, Catherine, to return with him to Australia. She agreed and with their children, David and Robert left Scotland and arrived in Perth on 29th July, 1912.

They settled in Collie WA where Alexander worked at a Co-operative mine. His next position was at Hamel where two more sons, William and Douglas were born. He was employed as an assistant to the State Nursery in Hamel and his next move in 1919 was to Fremantle where he took up the position the Curator of Parks and Gardens with the Freemantle Municipal Council. The youngest child and only girl, Jessie was born here in 1919. The next move was to Subiaco where Alexander took up the position of Park Superintendent and it was while he was here that he applied for the Canberra job.

The family arrived in Canberra in May, 1927 in time to attend and view the official opening of Parliament House on the 9th. Catherine Bruce said that it was colder in Canberra than Scotland. The family spent the first two to three nights in the Hotel Canberra before moving to a cottage in Torrens Street Braddon. This house was far too small and shortly afterwards they then moved into an Acton cottage usually kept for a bank manager. When Mr Weston retired and moved from Acton the Bruce family moved across the road into Weston's former house. At this time Alexander Bruce was appointed Superintendent of Parks and Gardens. In July, 1932 he was admitted into the Commonwealth Public Service and in 1935 was awarded the MBE for his work which was the responsibility for preparation of planting schemes, selection of trees and shrubs and the planting of the city area.

Mr Bruce was well remembered by a neighbour, Mr Charles Daly who wrote a series of articles in The Canberra Times. These stories have been collected and edited by Shirley Purchase and reprinted in a book called As I Recall Reminiscences of Early Canberra. In the chapter, Garden Tradition Mr Daly speaks highly of Mr Bruce and records that

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*Bruce gave strong support to the Canberra Horticultural Society, of which he was a president and his help to the new residents in establishing their gardens was readily accorded and widely appreciated. It was very unfortunate that an unreasonable official attitude lost us his services, in the mid-thirties, when the City of Sydney eagerly appointed him as the Superintendent of its Parks and Gardens.*

Jessie Gibbs, only daughter of Alexander and Catherine Bruce describes the Canberra Years in the following manner:

*We were all very happy, William, Doug & I attended Ainslie School then on to Telopea Park High School. Only my mother hated the cold winters - we all did but of course being young was an advantage. Mother and Dad worked hand in hand for the Burns Club - we all danced every*



*Saturday Night at the Albert Hall. When Dad was President of the Horticulture new dress for that. Growing up in Canberra was great. My Mother was a wonderful lady. We all had parties for our birthdays and Christmas - she was an excellent cook and had a great sense of humour. Our home was always full of people, laughter and love.*

Left: Bruce children and friend at Acton.