



Clerk's Message

It was great to see so many friends at the Alumni reception on 5 March – and to see them all looking so well. To me, the interest people showed, particularly in the welfare of friends and former colleagues, reflected what we'd like to think of as the best qualities of the department.

Alumnists will recall very well the changing dynamics in the House and on committees as each Parliament nears its end. This year, and as usual, after the Prime Minister obtained the Governor-General's agreement to dates for dissolution and election, I sent an email to all members advising of the details. I would like to share with alumnists one of the responses from a very long-serving member – because the views expressed reflect every bit as much on former colleagues as on present ones:

Thanks ... and my very best wishes to you and every one of the excellent team that all of us who have had the privilege of membership depend on.

We look forward to seeing people at the AGM on 6 September 2010.



Bernard Wright



Retirement Of Ian Harris AO

On 4 November 2009 the Clerk of the House, Mr Ian Harris AO, retired. Ian took up the position on 27 July 1997 and, like other Clerks before him, could have expected to serve in that role until his 65th birthday. Subsequent legislation however significantly affected the timing of his retirement.

On 26 June 1997 the Public Service Bill 1997 was introduced into the House of Representatives to replace the much-amended 75-year-old Public Service Act 1922. The bill, which was part of the then Government's reform agenda, was radically different in form and content from the 1922 Act. It sought to redefine the nature of public service legislation and embody a new conceptual framework for public sector management. It also proposed that a separate legal framework be created for staff employed by the then five Parliamentary Departments. While the proposed Parliamentary Service Bill 1997 followed the philosophy, content and structure of the Public Service Bill 1997, it also included certain modifications designed to ensure the independence of Parliament from executive government.

In particular the Parliamentary Service Bill 1997 contained specific conditions pertaining to the tenure of the clerks of each House by limiting the maximum term of their appointment to ten years. The bill deemed their term of office to have begun from the date on which the new Act commenced. Hence the enactment of the bill would prescribe the date by which Ian would be required to retire.

The bill was referred to the Public Accounts Committee for consideration. While the members of the committee agreed on most elements of the proposed legislation, there were some matters concerning conditions and termination of employment on which the committee could not reach consensus. These differences were spelled out in an advisory report presented to the Parliament in September 1997. Reflecting different policy directions identified by the committee, the House and the Senate twice failed to agree on the total reform package and on 6 April 1998 the House formally laid aside the bills.

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Grant Harrison

Grant joined the Department of the House of Representatives in 1987 as a research officer on the Transport Safety Committee. He worked on the Community Affairs Committee and the Environment & the Arts Committee before being appointed



Secretary to the National Capital Committee. Grant also served as secretary to the committees on Legal & Constitutional Affairs; Public

Accounts; Treaties; Transport, Communications & the Arts; ASIO and Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade. Grant also worked in the Clerk's Office, as Deputy Clerk in the Main Committee and the Chamber and, for 12 months, was Chief of Staff to the Minister for Regional Development, Local Government and Territories.

Grant left the Department in 2003 to spend time at home with his two boys which he says "Was fun until they told me to get a job, because being around all the time was cramping their style".

In 2005 he started working on a voluntary basis with a civil society network (the Asia-South Pacific Bureau of Adult Education) providing policy and capacity building support to community organizations in the region. This became a part-time job involving travel throughout the region, particularly to Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu.

This led Grant to a development assistance company (Hassall & Associates, now part of GHD Pty Ltd) in 2007, designing and delivering development assistance projects for clients such as AusAid,

the Asian Development Bank and the World Bank. While continuing his focus on projects in Melanesia he was also Project Director for AusAid's China-Australia Governance Program.

In July 2010 Grant was appointed Deputy Director of the Centre for Democratic Institutions at the Australian National University. CDI works to improve parliamentary and political practice in Indonesia, East Timor, PNG, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. For Grant it is a perfect combination: development issues, parliamentary reform and Melanesia all in one job.

Perhaps Grant's experience is proof that once parliament gets its grip, you cannot shake it!



Brenda Grifferty

Brenda joined the Department of the House of Representatives in early 1985 when it was decided to allow females to be part of the Attendant service.

"The job for me was really satisfying, as I enjoyed and was interested in, following Chamber procedures. It became even more so when I was part of the team of Chamber Attendants". "I found moving to the new Parliament House a challenge, especially with the amount of walking involved. Mind you I did not notice any weight loss!

At first the only way in for everyone was via the House of Representatives entrance, so getting the mail and newspapers around was a bit of a headache but everyone seemed to be enjoying the experience and staff going to the Senate side often carried various items over there thus saving us Attendant staff a journey. There was a real sense of camaraderie."

In 1988 Brenda moved from attendant duty to join the staff of the Registry and then moved to the Table Office, as it was called then.

After a return to the United Kingdom for four years Brenda returned to work as a casual in various areas of the Department finally retiring in 1999. She and husband Kevin returned to Queensland, where they had originally lived when coming to Australia in 1977.

Since returning to Queensland Brenda has worked as a volunteer in the Tourist Office located in Manly. As she says: "That was very enjoyable experience and I met so many people from all over the world."

"The most amazing was, when talking to a couple who lived in Cyprus, I found they had lived near me when I was young, and that Anne, the lady from Cyprus, had been in the class below me at Senior school."

The pair remain in contact still and meet when the couple journeys to Australia to see their daughter.

Brenda also does volunteer work at St Vinnie's which helped her to soon make friends in the area.

At first, when Kevin and Brenda returned to Queensland, they often went away at weekends, visiting various areas, but after their daughter presented them with a grandson, James, needless to say, their time was not their own. James and Grandpa were virtually joined at the hip but now James has started school and he is growing up fast. Brenda spends a lot of time researching family history and has found various distant cousins. She has traced her family tree back to the 1600s.

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Like most alumni before and after, Doug Blake was a student of the government Gazette. He was given a taste of the Parliament, particularly the House of Representatives, by his Gorman House roommate, a technician working on the parliamentary broadcast. He observed the House from the broadcasting booth at the back of the old Chamber in 1949 and when he saw a vacancy in the Department advertised in the Gazette thought he should apply. For Doug it was second time lucky. He was pipped at the post at his first attempt by Keith Bradshaw (later to become Clerk of the Senate) and when Keith moved to the Senate Department Doug's next application was successful and he was appointed to the Department in 1950.

His first post was Accounts Clerk and if alumni think the Department was running a tight budget during their period in the Department they should spare a thought for Doug. The Department lacked even the basic technologies of the day so Doug purchased items such as a date stamp, ruler and sticky tape dispenser from Kennards in Civic using the Department's account. In view of the subsequent reception by his colleagues he returned the articles for refund. This did not prevent Doug continuing to drag the Department into the modern post war era and throughout his career he pressed for procedural and organisational reforms.

Doug continued to challenge his senior departmental officers in other ways. As the number one Rugby Union referee in the Australian Capital Territory he was selected to referee matches where the ACT and region played visiting international sides. The Springbok tour of 1956 was one of those visits and Doug was tipped to get the match. During proceedings on the steps of Parliament House following the opening of the Parliament that year, the Governor-General, Sir William Slim, was heard to say to the then Serjeant-at-Arms

“hope you get the match Blake!” He did but had difficulty getting the time off to carry out his refereeing role. He was required to return to work immediately after the match. Doug went on to referee matches involving Australian teams playing the All Blacks, the British Lions, the New Zealand Maoris and Fiji.

Back in the Chamber a number of memorable and funny events occurred on Doug's watch. One member tied the shoe laces together of one of his colleagues and then had him called out of the Chamber with the obvious consequences; another member was caught with his prosthesis (leg) lying on the seat beside him; and in another episode a member was escorted from the Chamber by a colleague in a white jacket. These happenings proved to Doug that the parliament is not always without a sense of humour as is often depicted.

Doug recalls that he had to bend to the wishes of former Clerks. One particular Clerk had such a dislike for the Senate that he insisted when any joint committee was established the Serjeant-at-Arms and Clerk of Committees should attend to ensure that the rights of the House were protected. It was during this time that Doug was secretary to a number of definitive committees. The Select Committee on Accommodation provided Doug with an opportunity to suggest that while the committee was recommending extensions to Parliament House someone needed to take the initiative of committing to a new Parliament building and many alumni would be acutely aware of where that led. He was also the secretary of the pivotal Select Committee on Aircraft Noise.

Further information:

For any further information on alumni events or information please contact email - Alumni.reps@aph.gov.au

One of the opportunities that the Department afforded Doug was the chance to travel. Through travel he made many friends in other parliaments, many of whom he is still in contact with today, and more importantly gained many insights and ideas on procedures and parliamentary administration. He was able to interpret these ideas into practice back home. Doug was responsible for removing the processing of answers to questions on notice from the Chamber and this led to other matters like the Votes and Proceedings being compiled outside as well. Doug was a catalyst in dividing the Department into Offices such as the formation of a separate Committee Office and Table Office.

His involvement in reforming procedures and applying new ideas he acquired during his travels was not confined to the Australian Parliament. In 1977 Doug was awarded the Independence Medal by the newly independent Papua New Guinea government. This was an acknowledgment of Doug's long commitment to establishing the Papua New Guinea National Assembly. There was always a photo of him conducting a standing orders workshop in Port Moresby with such notables as the Governor-General, Sir John Guise, hanging in his office. The standing orders compiled at that time are still the basis of those used in that parliament. His imprint is also on the standing orders of Nauru and he is fondly remembered by many members and officers of Pacific parliaments.

Doug retired from the Department on 31 July 1985. He was Clerk from 1982, succeeding Jack Pettifer. He was made a member of the Order of Australia in 1986 as testament to his service to the Parliament. When asked about the most memorable aspect of his career he admitted to liking everything but in particular his association with the Pacific nations and his time on exchange at the House of Commons in London.



Following the 1998 election the Parliamentary Service Bill 1999, which revived almost all elements of the 1997 bill, was introduced into the House on 28 June 1999. After considerable debate and several amendments the legislation passed both houses on 11 November 1999.

The Parliamentary Service Act 1999 came into force on 5 December. Ian's ten year tenure thus also commenced on this date. By the provisions of the Act his previous service from the date of his appointment would not count towards the maximum ten year period for which he could remain in office. The Act also stipulated that a person could serve only one term as Clerk. Consequently, the House of Representatives farewellled Ian after a period of twelve years as Clerk in November last year.



“One relative lives in Adelaide and was born on the same day as myself. Our great grandparents were siblings. She sent me a photo of her aunt and it gave me goose bumps. I was looking at myself 30 years ago. All her relatives are amazed.”

Brenda finds researching family extremely interesting and can definitely recommend it as a hobby.

“We love where we live, just up the road from Moreton Bay, and can easily reach Brisbane. My Canberra friends are always in touch and giving me big surprises.

Do not let anyone say retirement is an easy street. Life is always busy even if it only involves going for x-rays and blood tests (our doctor is very into testing).

Working for the Department was very rewarding and has given me many happy memories which I will always treasure.”



Parliament House Open Day

Parliament House Open Day is on again and this year will be held on Saturday 18 September 2010 from 9am to 5pm. This year the theme is “Your Parliament House & Garden” Imaging – creating – working – sustaining. Parliament House and its environs will be open to the people of the Canberra region and visitors from elsewhere, with the Floriade festival 2010 theme of Imagination. The Department of the Senate are the lead coordinators this year and may require volunteers for other duties on the day

Alumni Association Annual General Meeting

The next AGM will be held on 6 September 2010 at Parliament House. There is plenty of scope for members to be involved in the Alumni by nominating for one of the executive positions (co-chairs, secretary, newsletter editor and blogspot moderator). All executive positions will be vacated and members are urged to consider nominating. Further details and the agenda will be advised closer to the date.

Vale John Cummings

John Cummins died at Pambula on 29 June 2010 after a long fight with cancer. He worked in the Department from 1973 until 1996, principally in the Committee Office, and returned subsequently to assist in further committee inquiries. He also spent a period of secondment with the ACT Legislative Assembly initially setting up their committee office and later on Select Committee inquiries. As one of his former colleagues said “Another great character gone”. He is sadly missed by his former colleagues many of whom remained close friends.

Alumni Blogspot

<http://www.depthouseofrepsalumni.blogspot.com/>

A primary aim of the Alumni Association is to encourage members to continue the networking and friendships they enjoyed while members of the department. To this end a blogspot has been established to provide social interaction opportunities on a more informal basis. The website maintained by the department will continue to be the formal point of contact and to house the official documents of the association. Parliament of Australia: House of Representatives: Alumni

It is envisaged that the blogspot may be used by members to post photos, advise on upcoming events, advertise goods or services, or seek advice. The board has ratified a set of rules relating to posting material on the blogspot, which are on the Departmental site. The rules require a moderator to be appointed each year and Evelyn Kearns will undertake this role until the next Annual General Meeting. There is an email link on the site for members to send material to the moderator for posting. It should be noted that all text has to be keyed in, as it is not possible to cut and paste to the site. If members want to post an article or document, it can be linked on the site or included in the newsletters that are hosted by the department and linked on the site.