



DEPARTMENT of the
HOUSE of REPRESENTATIVES

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ALUMNI Newsletter



Clerk's Message

Dear Alumni

After several atypical years, this May saw a return to more usual arrangements for the Budget, with the Treasurer presenting the bill and delivering his speech on 9 May, the second Tuesday in the month. As you all know, 9 May is a special date in Australia's parliamentary calendar. This year, in addition to being Budget Day, it marked the 122nd anniversary of the very first sitting of Australia's Parliament in Melbourne in 1901, the 96th anniversary of the Parliament's first meeting at Canberra in 1927, and the 35th anniversary of the opening of our permanent Parliament House!

To mark the occasion, Speaker Dick and President Lines hosted a birthday event in the Great Hall, restricted to people currently working here. The highlights of the celebration were, an Indigenous Welcome to Country, remarks from the Presiding Officers, the ACT Primary Schools Choir, acknowledgement of staff with 35 years of service supporting the Parliament, and cake! On a related issue, I mention that the alumni ranks have grown recently with the inclusion of Belynda Zolotto who just retired from the department after 35 years of service.

If you want to be reminded of how beautiful Parliament House is, you might wish to visit the public exhibition to celebrate the building's 35th anniversary, in the Presiding Officers' Exhibition Area (near the Post Office), until 18 November. And, if you're thinking of visiting before August, make enough time for a look around an exhibition on Australia's First [16] Prime Ministers, in the Public Exhibition Area. They are both great.

Perhaps you were able to see the outside of Parliament House during National Reconciliation Week (NRW) and enjoy the colourful illuminations each night. I have included a lovely photo taken by our Auspic colleagues (who are formally part of the Department of Parliamentary Services) (*see below*). Of course, the most significant event during the week (NRW) was the conclusion of consideration in the House of the Constitution Alteration (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice) 2023.

For those of you keen to follow developments in relation to implementing the recommendations of the Jenkins review of Commonwealth parliamentary



workplaces, just posted to the Parliament's website is the latest record of progress. A number of recommendations are reported as completed, and they appear first in the tracker table. The remaining recommendations are identified after that as 'in progress', with notes on their status, and information on next steps and expected completion. You can stay abreast of developments — [Progress of recommendations – Parliament of Australia \(aph.gov.au\)](#)

Finally, we anticipate holding a Parliament House Open Day this year during Floriade, although the date is yet to be agreed. The theme will include the 35th anniversary of the building, and I will forward information about these celebrations when we have them.

Until next time, best wishes.

Claressa Surtees
Clerk of the House



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Alumni on (past) assignment - Nigeria

BY GILLIAN GOULD

Africa has always fascinated me. In 1971 I undertook a four-month-long trek overland by Land Rover across Africa, from Tunisia to Capetown, on my way home to Australia after two years in Canada. The route took me across the Sahara to the ancient city of Kano in northern Nigeria, through the rainforests of the Congo and on to the game reserves of Kenya and Tanzania. After a short stay by the white sands of Mombasa it was on to South Africa for the voyage across the Indian Ocean home. I was therefore thrilled, during my 18 years in Department of the House of representatives (DHR), to be chosen on two occasions to return to Nigeria, in 1992 and 1999.

The first time, with Jim Pender and Mark Swinson, Deputy Clerk of the New South Wales Legislative Assembly, was to conduct a month-long workshop for parliamentary officers preparing for the return of Nigeria to civil rule. This was a significant departure from the approach hitherto adopted by the Australian Parliament of providing attachments to staff from overseas legislatures. Typically, programs had

involved briefings on Australia's parliamentary system, discussions with a range of officers of the Senate and DHR, attendance at management meetings and observation of the Chamber and committee proceedings. Visiting officers had frequently combined programs with short periods in State Parliaments. Such programs however were limited to one or two visiting officers at a time.

Since the early 1960s Australia had provided assistance of this kind to officers from Nigeria. One notable participant in 1970 was Mr Timothy Ojo who had worked in the Nigerian National Assembly during the First Republic (1963–1966) and as Deputy Clerk in the Second Republic (1979–1983). It was expected that the Third Republic would be instigated in 1993. In light of this Nigeria hoped to train sufficient staff to support its 30 state legislatures and large National Assembly of over 600 Members and Senators.

As substantial numbers of officers would require training it was clear that our conventional form of attachment would be impractical. Fortunately, in

May 1992, the Clerks Designate to the Nigerian House of Representatives and the Senate were visiting Australia. Everyone agreed that a workshop in Nigeria would be the most cost-effective way of training the greatest number of parliamentary officers within a short time-frame. The proposed workshop was organised around two phases: Phase I for staff from Nigerian State Assemblies and Phase II for officers of the National Assembly.

Jim, Mark and I set off on 6 August 1992, initially to Harare where we put the finishing touches to our program for the workshop. While there, thanks to our High Commission, we were privileged to meet the Speaker of the Parliament of Zimbabwe, the Hon Nolan Chipso Makombe. We were assigned a Parliamentary protocol officer, Juliet, who on the Saturday took us on a tour around Harare, including to Domboshawa to see the remarkable balancing rocks and Stone Age cave paintings.

Then it was on to Lagos where we were met by the acting Australian High Commissioner and, after a night in that bustling city, we took the one-hour flight to the planned city of Abuja which had replaced Lagos as Nigeria's capital in December 1991, only a few months prior to our arrival. Comfortably installed in the Sheraton Hotel we had ideas of exploring this new city, only to be dissuaded by our hosts, our safety being their utmost concern. Discouraged from walking (or in Jim's case running) around the city our exercise routine was confined to the hotel's swimming pool.

The *Nigeria-Australia Parliamentary Workshop* was officially opened on 11 August by a representative of the Secretary to the Federal Military Government. The program began with a presentation by the aforementioned Mr Timothy Ojo who discussed the forthcoming democratic government in its historical context.



▲ The group attending the National Assembly component

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After introducing ourselves with a short description of our backgrounds, Jim gave a presentation on 'a week in the life of the National Assembly' which provided an opportunity to concentrate on specific Nigerian rules and Constitutional provisions. As the States observed the Standing Orders of the National Assembly we did not have to differentiate too much in our method for conducting the two workshops.

From then on it was very much a 'hands-on' approach as the participants prepared for a mock sitting of the Assembly. The roles of the key players, namely the Speaker, Deputy Speaker, Clerk, Deputy Clerk, Majority and Minority Leader and their deputies, Votes Officer, Order Paper Officer, Secretary to the Rules and Business Committee and Bills Officer were randomly selected by the participants. We soon found out that the Nigerians loved to role-play!

A daily program was duly drawn up, the 'Clerk' read the Proclamation and the mock sitting began. At the end of the first Sitting Day the Rules and Business Committee met to determine an Order Paper for the next sitting. Participants were guided through the steps that had to be taken to introduce a Bill. We suggested, much to the amusement of the role-players, that a 'Member' introduce a 'No Hooting of Horns in Abuja' Bill as on our way by car to the workshop venue each day we had noticed road signs prohibiting the use of horns (although with little effect!).

Role-playing continued through the referral of Bills to Standing Committees. At this point participants investigated in detail the role of committees. Although we mainly sought to focus on Nigerian procedure we had taken some video clips of Australian committees in action, notably the Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Senate Estimates, which showed public hearings in action. This led to some startling emulation of some of our politicians by our Nigerian friends! (In fact as the mock sittings progressed we found that they much preferred to be 'politicians' than



▲ I do solemnly swear .



▲ No hooting of horns .

clerks.) We also distributed examples of briefing papers to Members, minutes of meetings and reports prepared by staff. How the reports of investigative committees might impact on public policy and administrative practice raised immense interest and led to some stimulating discussion.

While we have no concrete evidence to suppose that the workshop was in any way responsible, we noticed in the print media in the fortnight following Phase 1 that there was a

proliferation of committee inquiries in the various State Houses into matters of executive expenditure in keeping with the accountability principle which had been mentioned continuously throughout the workshop!

By the end of the workshop participants had 'role-played' their way through Committee of the Whole consideration of a Bill and the assent process. Specific staff responsibilities were addressed at every stage.

Through the technique of role-play 62 Nigerian parliamentary officers had actually performed the required tasks and witnessed the results of this work. The participants learned together. Indeed, a gratifying aspect of the Workshop was to see the participants gradually become more familiar with and confident in using their own Standing Orders.

The Workshop was officially closed by the Secretary to the Federal Government, Alhaji Aliyu Muhammed, on 3 September. During the closing ceremony each Nigerian participant was presented with a Certificate by the Australian High Commissioner.

In our honour, and to show their appreciation for our contribution, our hosts organised a reception and dinner to which 250 participants and dignitaries

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▲ Gill in discussion

were invited. Jim, Mark and I were each presented with a traditional Yoruba outfit which we were persuaded to wear for the occasion. We in turn felt the Workshop most worthwhile and thoroughly enjoyed our interaction with the Nigerians, both in formal settings and in social activities.



▲ Yoruba outfits

One particularly memorable event arose after I mentioned that I had visited Kano some years before. Thereupon our hosts determined that I should

visit Kano again and of course Jim and Mark were to come along too. Over a weekend we were driven Nigeria-style the 450 kilometres via Kaduna along some testing roads. Our hotel was a far cry from the Sheraton in Abuja. However, it was an adventure and provided a wonderful opportunity to see the old city walls of Kano which date back to the 14th century and some spectacular scenery on the way.

We returned to Australia after a short attachment to the UK House of Commons, confident that the Nigerian legislatures were in capable hands.

We looked forward to hearing more about the return to democracy in 1993. Alas, the Third Republic collapsed before it had begun, toppled in a palace coup on 17 November 1992.

In May 1999 as Nigeria once again prepared for civil rule I returned to Abuja, this time with David Elder. David had been selected to lead a Resource Team of eight Commonwealth Parliamentary officials to conduct the *Nigeria/Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) Workshop for Legislative Clerks of Nigerian Legislatures*. The team also included clerks from Zimbabwe, India, Kenya, the Yukon, the Canadian House of Commons and the United Kingdom House of Commons. On this occasion David and I spent a few days in London en route to Nigeria meeting members of the team and coordinating the program.

The Workshop was officially opened on 17 May by Alhaji Ibrahim Salim, the Clerk of the National Assembly, only two weeks before President Obasanjo was to take office and institute the Fourth Republic on 29 May. It was attended by 90 clerks from both houses of the National Assembly and 27 participants from the country's 36 state legislatures. I was delighted to



▲ The team

Alumni on (past) assignment - Nigeria by Gillian Gould *...continues from page 4*

recognise a small number of Nigerians who had participated in the 1992 workshop. Apparently some had gained experience in running State legislatures for several months before the military aborted the return to democracy.

As in 1992 the program began with a presentation by Mr Timothy Ojo on the historical context of Nigerian legislative practice and procedure. Participants were then acquainted with the functions and characteristics of Parliamentary government in general. Having a Resource Team drawn from seven CPA Parliaments provided a valuable opportunity to familiarise Nigerian clerks with a variety of approaches adopted by other democratic legislatures. The special characteristics of the Nigerian system – essentially a hybrid of the UK and US systems – were then addressed, leading to some interesting questions from the floor.

This workshop assumed a very different format from the first one as it was necessary to train the very large number of participants within the shorter timeframe of five days. As the new National Assembly Complex was not quite ready for occupation (although we were treated to a brief tour by the supervising architect), the venue for the workshop was an auditorium of 200 seats in the International Conference Centre in Abuja.

For the remainder of the five days the focus was on the specific



▲ In session

procedures of a week in the Nigerian National Assembly. Each member of the Resource Team took the lead on a particular aspect of the week, commencing with the Opening of a new Parliament, election of Presiding Officers, and Oaths and Assets Declarations. Participants were introduced to the procedure for the passage of Bills and their referral to committees, and consideration of reports in Committee of the Whole. Forms of entries in Votes and Proceedings were addressed and the procedures for Assent. While there was less opportunity for role-play we did organise some mock sessions

on the Opening of Parliament and on committee hearings in which the participants engaged with enthusiasm.

There is no doubt that the contribution of the Resource Team was much appreciated by the Nigerian authorities and Parliamentary staff and again there was a good deal of pomp and ceremony surrounding our visit. I was once again presented with a beautiful Nigerian outfit. Being part of both the 1992 and the 1999 ventures has for me been a great honour and very rewarding. I am happy to say that since 1999 there have not been any military interventions in the Fourth Republic, resulting in 23 years of uninterrupted civil rule. 🌿



Photo: GettyImages

A SHORT HISTORY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES...

A project is underway on the history of the Department of the House of Representatives, led by Fleur Hall, the Director (Legislation and Records) in the Table Office. Fleur is undertaking complementary lines of enquiry focussed on both archival records and social history. She is keen to speak to former staff of the department about their memories, experiences and contribution. If you are able to spare some time for a chat, please get in touch. Fleur can be contacted via email: Fleur.Hall.Reps@aph.gov.au or by phone on (02) 6277 4788.

Editor's note

This request by Fleur Hall reminded me of an appeal by Arthur Wilks for historic information on table tennis in the two parliamentary buildings which I published in Issue 16, August 2016. Memories of his request in turn reminded me of an article in the Melbourne *Herald* on 17 July 1929 which some alumni might be familiar with and which I have repeated below:

CRISIS BY "DEN"

The Usher of the Black Rod has banned the playing of ping pong by members of the Federal Parliamentary staff in the basement of Federal Parliament House during certain hours and has precipitated a crisis.

– Momentous news from Canberra

CEASE your vain and silly chatter of the things that do not matter,
Such as Preference and Arbitration laws.

There is brewing a sensation that will shortly shake the nation:
For up at Canberra they have a Cause
Where the laughter sounds no longer thro' the legislative halls
Or the pinging and the ponging of the ping pong balls.

Now the minions were disporting with arcadian cavorting,
Playing ping pong in the precincts of the House.

'Twas their privilege and pleasure—thus to occupy their leisure
And no Head had hitherto been known to rouse.


When, striding thro' the corridors as Caesar one time trod.
Came the autocratic Usher of the Big Black Rod.

Oh', his brows were wreathed with thunder as he gazed in stupid wonder,
As he heard the sinful pinging and the sacrilegious pong.
And he said: "Henceforth I ban it. If

I knew who 'twas began it
I would have him drawn and quartered, for 'tis obviously wrong".
Then back adown the corridors, unbending as a god,
Went the adamantine Usher of the Big Black Rod.

They are talking, and with reason, of conspiracy and treason
In the one time sylvan city: and in groups of threes and fours
One may see the lowly minions voicing treacherous opinions
As they plot within the precincts and creep down the corridors.
Potential martyrs to the Cause would risk a term in quod
To get even with the Usher of the Big Black Rod

What know they of Australia who know not the regalia
That clothes the dreaded despot in the capital afar?
Why moan of the deficit now that ping pong's made illicit
And they may present a plotter any moment at the Bar?
For the mighty ping pong issue hangs upon the Jovian nod
Of the high, Olympian Usher of the Big Black Rod.

(PS "DEN" is C J Dennis who was a member of the Press Gallery at the time and the Usher of the Black Rod was Robert Arthur Broinowski who later became Clerk of the Senate) 

VALE – Dean Da Costa

It is with deep sadness and heavy hearts that we advise of the death of our former colleague and dear friend, Dean Da Costa, who passed away on 19 May 2023. Dean worked in the Department from April 1989 to July 1991 and impressed his colleagues with his commitment, engaging personality and strong work ethic.

Dean's technical background with the Royal Australian Navy and PMG was particularly valuable when he assisted with the technology upgrade of the House of Representatives Print Room and the reclassification of the printers. It was a very successful project, and the Industrial Relations Commissioner complimented the Department and the Unions on the high level of cooperation, mainly due to Dean's collaborative approach, warm nature and expertise. Print room staff presented Dean with this trophy in appreciation of his work there.




He undertook many other tasks with the same sharp focus and determination. Engaging Dean always guaranteed a good outcome. When his contract with the Department finished, he moved to the Senate where he spent a number of years and was also held in high esteem there.

Shortly after the establishment of the Department of the House of Representatives Alumni, Dean volunteered to be Secretary. He took on

the responsibilities of the role with the same degree of commitment he applied to all his work and always produced his best. He was supportive to the Board in many ways and his sharp wit and good humour helped to make our meetings a joy. He really embraced the role and never regarded it as onerous, staying on longer than he had anticipated. He was disappointed when, at our last AGM, he had to resign due to ill health.

Dean's character was exemplified by the stoic way he endured his illness. He 'cross'd the bar' on his own terms. Condolences have been extended to his wife Kay and family. While Dean had a private funeral, Kay has advised that later in the year the family plans to have a 'festival of Dean' where we can celebrate his life together. Advice of this will be made available when details are known.

Vale Dean – you will be missed and remembered. 

FURTHER INFORMATION

For any further information on alumni events or information please contact email - DHRalumnisec@gmail.com, Alumni.reps@aph.gov.au or go to the blogspot - <http://depthouseofrepsalumni.blogspot.com.au/>.