# Staffers to prime ministers Audio transcript

Carol: It was a very easy-going office. Everybody… It was fairly democratic. There was not really any hierarchy except that the Senior Private Secretary, I suppose if it came to a crunch, probably had more say-so, but it didn’t ever come to that. It was a very good team. That’s to say that membership of it changed a bit, but we were all sort of there for Whitlam.

It was very interesting. I think you have to keep your eyes and ears open and your mouth shut. Often we didn’t know what was going on around us. There were issues, big issues running, and we wouldn’t have known quite what was happening. Sometimes you would know, sometimes you wouldn’t know.

When the House was sitting, oh dear, we used to burn the candle at both ends. Whitlam was always up on his feet making speeches when he was leading for the opposition, so there were always speeches being typed and retyped. This is before word processors. Sometimes we’d even get to the stage where pages were going into the chamber as they came off the typewriter.

He probably had a previous draft with him, which he might have had hand written, changes to which was a fallback, but no, we were sort of sailing pretty close to the wind in terms of time pressures often. Then if there was a press briefing, I would take notes of that. I had notes against which we could check something if something needed to be checked.

Afternoons were probably more of the same. Just a lot of typing letters, speeches. We would dash down to what we used to call “The sheltered workshop,” the staff dining room. Usually it was a pretty quick lunch. We didn’t linger. In the evenings we had a longer break, and we often used to eat over at The Lobby. Well, we were earning good money and we didn’t have time to shop, so you could spend money on a dinner at The Lobby, because it was about the only time you spent money.

Work was all-consuming, and then we’d come back at 8:00 and we’d work until midnight. Then we would go to a party. Looking at it from today’s perspective, goodness. Graham’s office used to be called by the cleaners, “The big ashtray.” We all smoked there. I used to smoke. When the phone rang, my phone rang, I’d light up a cigarette, and then I’d have that in the ashtray, the phone would ring again, I’d light up another cigarette. Sometimes I’d have two going at once.