

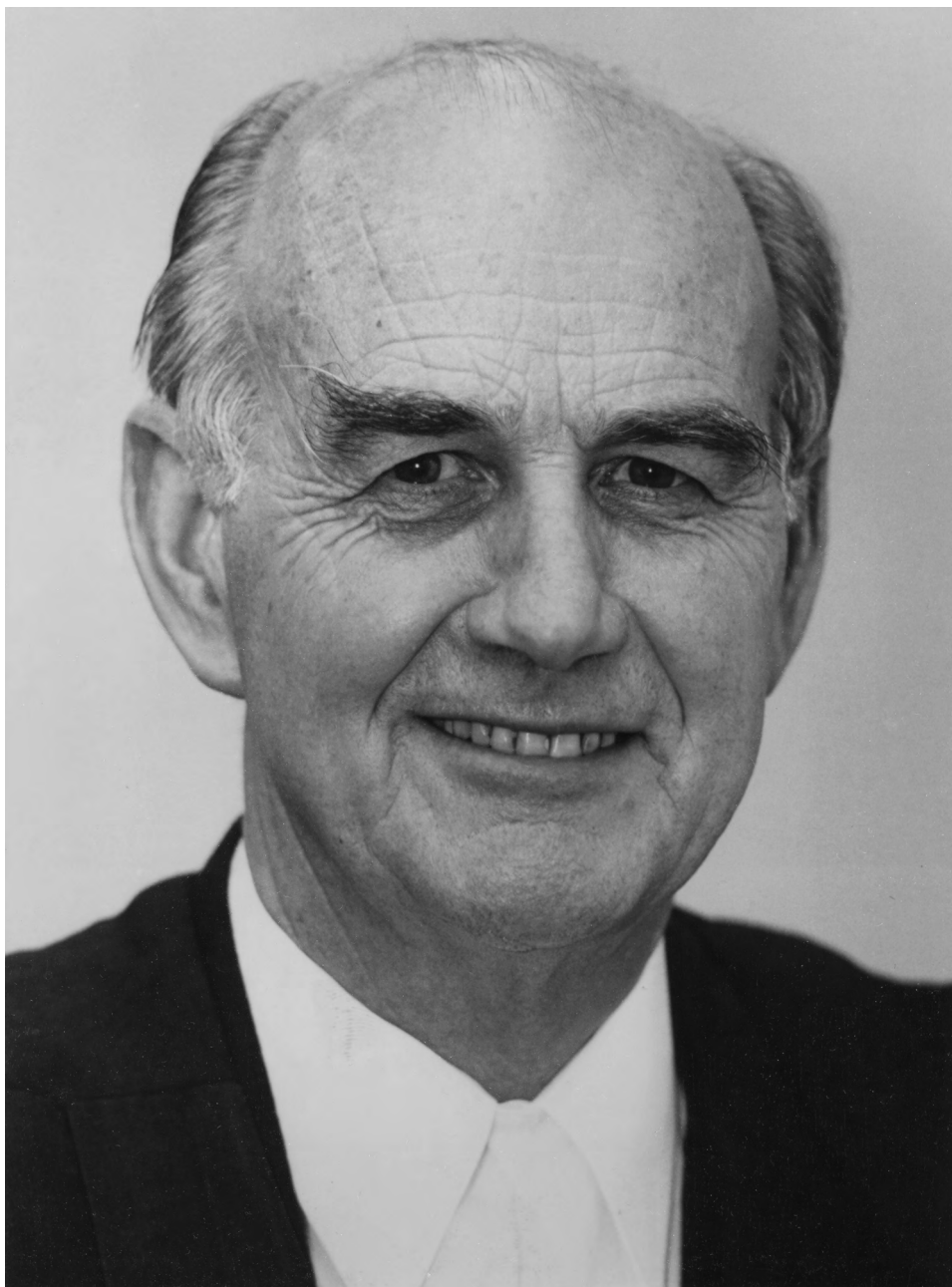
# Barlin, Lyndal McAlpin (Lyn): Clerk 1991–1997

Nicholas Brown

Lyndal McAlpin Barlin, thirteenth Clerk of the House of Representatives, was born on 27 July 1932 at Taree, New South Wales, youngest of seven sons of locally born parents Charles Barlin, dairy and beef farmer at Lansdowne, and his wife, Mildred. Lyn travelled by train and later bus to attend Taree High School, coming first-in-class and winning several prizes, and staying with relatives in the town during World War II to complete his schooling. He chose not to follow one brother, who enrolled in the University of Sydney to study science, and also declined opportunities to attend teachers' college and to take a position as a junior chemist at Arnott's Biscuit Factory, Homebush. Encouraged by another brother, George, a pioneer in Canberra radio and television, Lyn went to Canberra in 1949, securing appointment to the Public Service Board. In 1951 he moved to the Superannuation Board in the Treasury. Among the first men to reside at the previously women-only Gorman House hostel, he became keenly interested in the life of the rapidly growing national capital.

The functions of parliament rather than politics engaged Barlin's attention as he observed the conduct of the House of Representatives from the public gallery. In 1954 he sought transfer to a clerk's position in the Department of the House of Representatives. Joining a small, committed team as its most junior member, he soon developed a breadth of knowledge of the House, its powers, procedures, and personalities. The exercise of all three impressed him in June 1955, when journalist Frank Browne and newspaper proprietor Raymond Fitzpatrick were called to appear before the Bar of the House for publishing in the *Bankstown Observer* allegations concerning misconduct by the member for Reid, Charles Morgan—an act seen as an attempt to discredit and silence a member. The alleged misconduct occurred two decades earlier. Both men were imprisoned for three months for a serious breach of parliamentary privilege—the only time the House has exercised this power, and against the advice of Frank Green, then Clerk of the House. The case gave Barlin an early sense of 'being at the centre of things' (Barlin 2020); he agreed with the judgement but considered the punishment harsh.

'ORDER, ORDER!'



**Figure 7: Lyn Barlin.**

Source: Department of the House of Representatives.

When (Sir) John McLeay was elected Speaker in August 1956, Barlin became the first member of the department's staff to be appointed private secretary to the Speaker. Assisting McLeay in familiarising himself with the administration and operation of the House, he admired the Speaker's impartial management of often turbulent debates, and further refined his own appreciation of rules and practices. In July 1960, in Perth, he married Beryl Townsend, a flight attendant, with whom he raised three sons and a daughter, and who became a leading advocate for Canberra's child welfare services. Appointed Serjeant-at-Arms and Clerk of Committees (1969), then Senior Parliamentary Officer (1970), and Clerk Assistant (1977), he observed major transitions in the House that included the growing demands of serving parliamentary committees, heightened press scrutiny, and the impact of changes of government.

These pressures demanded vigilance and skill in the performance of Barlin's duties in supporting the Speaker in maintaining order. Near midnight on 8 April 1970, the opposition's angry protests at repeated moves by the Speaker, Sir William Aston, to close debate culminated in Labor backbencher Gordon Bryant being named and suspended after calling Aston a 'disgrace'. Refusing an order to leave the chamber, Bryant was surrounded in solidarity by party colleagues, making Barlin's job as Serjeant-at-Arms in removing him more delicate. With Bryant refusing to withdraw, the sitting of the House was suspended until the next morning, by which time the opposition caucus had persuaded Bryant to apologise. On 10 June, five women chained themselves to the railing of the public gallery in protest against the Vietnam War—again requiring the suspension of the sitting while Barlin accompanied police with bolt-cutters to release and remove the protesters. The security of the House would become an increasingly sensitive dimension of Barlin's responsibilities.

Such incidents aside, overseeing the management, program, and conduct of the House meant constant, often personal, advice to members. It also fostered a distinctive perspective on the House's dynamics. Through 1975 Barlin had a keen sense of mounting pressure on the Labor government, especially when watching Gough Whitlam leave for Government House on 11 November to seek approval for a half-Senate election but return as a dismissed prime minister.

Barlin was actively involved in discussions urging the need for the replacement of the provisional Parliament House. As an initial Joint Clerk to the Joint Standing Committee on the New and Permanent Parliament House, Barlin built on the contribution of Jack Pettifer in advising on the functional requirements of a new building. The committee's 1977 report, advocating the completion of the project by 26 January 1988, gave momentum and focus to this task. Appointed Deputy Clerk in 1982, Barlin appreciated opportunities to offer guidance on aspects ranging from the provision of space to support the operation of the House, to involvement with the Parliament House Construction Authority and the architects on finer aspects of

design. Quite late in construction—against the wishes of many parliamentarians and some fellow officers—he joined the then Speaker, Joan Child, in lobbying to leave the historic Speaker's chair, a replica of that in the House of Commons, in the old chamber and to commission a new chair, constructed from Australian timbers by David Upfill-Brown.

A special point of pride for Barlin was his being one of Queen Elizabeth II's escorts as she toured the new parliament building before opening it on 9 May 1988. He had, by then, developed a great depth of experience of both the traditions and the innovations in parliamentary practice. This was heightened by serving as secretary to the Australian parliament's delegations to conferences of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) in Zambia (1980), Kenya (1983), and Barbados (1989), and in periods of secondment to the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (1982), and to the United Kingdom (1978, 1980) and Canadian (1984) Houses of Commons. Attendance at CPA conferences involved overseeing the preparation of briefing papers on the economic, environmental, social, and security policy issues confronting parliamentary democracies across Commonwealth countries. The meetings of the Society of Clerks-at-the-Table, included in the CPA conference programs, provided Barlin with opportunities to discuss topics ranging from the role of the Clerk in the development of parliamentary procedure to the framing of laws relating to freedom of information. These agendas built on frequent, less formal exchanges among parliamentary officers, reviewing parliament's functions and performance.

When appointed Clerk of the House on 23 March 1991, Barlin already had several major reforms to his credit, reflecting his interest in balancing the pressures of legislative business with ensuring the people's representatives had a voice and accountability. In October 1984, he assisted in the preparation of resolutions requiring the registration of all members' interests, including any financial dealings of spouses and dependent children; he was then appointed the first Registrar of Members' Interests and secretary to the committee overseeing the new arrangements. In 1992, drawing on a Canadian model, Barlin guided the introduction of the opportunity for members to make statements on any topic of concern not exceeding ninety seconds, during an allocated period immediately prior to question time. This initiative proved popular with members. He was, as members recognised, also instrumental in the establishment of the House's Main Committee, later known as the Federation Chamber, in 1994. This innovation provided more time for debate on bills on which there was expected to be agreement, on private members' business, and for the discussion of committee reports. The Federation Chamber continues to play an integral role in the work of the House.

Barlin's commitment to preserving and balancing the roles of the House was matched by a determination to defend its integrity. The rushed handling of the government's superannuation guarantee legislation at the end of a sitting in June 1992 led to a 'vigorous' (Brough 1992) and public exchange between Barlin and the Clerk of the Senate, Harry Evans. Discrepancies between the actual amendments made to the bill by the Senate and those listed in the schedule of amendments prepared by the Senate Table Office, and then agreed to by the House before it adjourned, led to pressure on Barlin to correct them by simply substituting a new schedule. But he insisted that, whatever the intention might have been, bills passed in both chambers must be identical before being presented for the governor-general's assent. This position was supported by advice from the solicitor-general that the problem would not be solved just by amending the relevant paperwork; supporting Barlin's position, this advice maintained it was necessary that 'the proposed law be passed in the same terms in each House' (Brough 1992). The Speaker subsequently told the House 'that he understood it was intended to move a motion in the Senate to the effect that a corrected schedule of amendments made by the Senate on 24 June 1992 be forwarded to the House and that the House be asked to reconsider the bill with the corrected schedule' (VP 1990–91–92/1634–35, 18.8.1992).

Members respected Barlin's determination, as Kim Beazley later observed, to resist attempts to 'slowly, steadily and quietly' diminish the House's 'powers and prerogatives' (H.R. Deb. 27.6.1997, 6590). Barlin's emphasis on proper procedures in such cases was reflected also in the constant, subtle vigilance that he exercised within the chamber. As Beazley also noted, members of the House would 'look for the lift of the eyebrow, the slight curl of the lips' (H.R. Deb. 27.6.1997, 6589) to gauge the extent to which proceedings stayed in order.

Barlin was appointed AM in June 1995 in recognition of his service to parliament, not least in administering a department that had grown from six to 175 members of staff in his time. When his retirement was announced in June 1997, the Speaker, Bob Halverson, spoke of his having 'meticulously observed' the Clerk's impartiality, while Beazley as opposition leader observed that he demonstrated 'more of a sense of innovation' than many of his predecessors (H.R. Deb. 27.6.1997, 6586, 6589). Dedicated to high standards in government, he embraced other aspects of the national capital and its environs. As Clerk to the Joint Committee on the Australian Capital Territory, he oversaw inquiries into freehold rural landholdings and the introduction of random breath-testing of drivers. Trout fishing and clay target shooting were among his recreations. Modest and affable in demeanour, he was judged by one of the Speakers with whom he worked, Stephen Martin, as a 'quintessential' parliamentary officer (Lamberton 1995), his expertise and wisdom having been refined over more than forty years of association with the House.

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This text is taken from '*Order, Order!': A Biographical Dictionary of Speakers, Deputy Speakers and Clerks of the Australian House of Representatives*', edited by Stephen Wilks, published 2023 by ANU Press, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.

[doi.org/10.22459/OO.2023.05](https://doi.org/10.22459/OO.2023.05)