



Media release

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## **“If these walls could talk” – New exhibition on the Federal Parliamentary Press Gallery that shaped Australian political journalism**

A new exhibition turning the lens back on the people and moments that defined Australian political journalism is now open at the Museum of Australian Democracy (MoAD) at Old Parliament House.

The new *Press Gallery* exhibition takes visitors inside the original working spaces of the Federal Parliamentary Press Gallery, where reporters worked between 1927 and 1988;

filing stories under pressure, chasing exclusives and sitting quite literally above the nation's decision makers. It recognises journalists, media and staff whose work informed the nation.

This period of the Press Gallery's life at Old Parliament House is widely regarded as the defining era of Australian political journalism.

*The Press Gallery* Curator Amy Lay says the physical environment of Old Parliament House shaped the way journalism was practised.

"The building itself provided both opportunities and limitations. Journalists worked in cramped offices and studios, rushing between the chamber, their desks and around the building, sharing common areas and rubbing shoulders with politicians. That proximity to power produced a particular style of reporting that's hard to replicate today," Lay says.

"The closeness created an unusual familiarity between the media and politicians. Journalists had access to moments when guards were dropped – enabling exposés, major scoops and political insight."

MoAD is unique not only in collecting and sharing stories of Australian democracy, but also in interpreting the history of the building itself – a place where so much of the nation's political story has unfolded.

Chair of the Board at Old Parliament House, and former Federal Parliamentary Press Gallery President Barrie Cassidy, says the Press Gallery has long played a vital role in Australia's democratic life.

"Stepping inside this exhibition takes me straight back to a time when the Press Gallery really was at the centre of political life. It reminds you how close journalists were to power and how critical that closeness was to holding governments to account," Cassidy says.

"A strong, independent press is essential to a healthy democracy. The Press Gallery played, and continues to play, a vital role in ensuring Australians understand what's happening in Federal parliament."

Many of Australia's political journalists began their careers in these corridors, including Old Parliament House board member, author and journalist Niki Savva.

"It was both thrilling and a privilege to work in this building, to observe and report at close quarters some of the most dramatic historical events of our time – events which have shaped our democracy," Savva says.

"I learned so much from so many brilliant journalists. I learned, and am still learning, how much power journalists and the media have over the thinking of politicians and the ways they react to what is written and published about them."

Female journalists are featured prominently in the exhibition as trailblazers who transformed a male dominated Press Gallery, challenging entrenched norms and reshaping Australian political journalism from the inside.

Visitors can step back in time in the exhibition, bringing the Press Gallery to life through recreated workspaces, historical objects, audiovisual material and interactive displays embedded within the historic spaces themselves.

*The Press Gallery* exhibition is open now at the Museum of Australian Democracy at Old Parliament House. Entry is free from 9am to 5pm daily (except Christmas Day).

## KEY INFO

### ***The Press Gallery* Exhibition**

Now open from 9am – 5pm daily, free.

#### **Location:**

House of Representatives Press Gallery & Chamber, Museum of Australian Democracy (MoAD) at Old Parliament House

#### **For media enquiries:**

Media enquiries: [media@moadoph.gov.au](mailto:media@moadoph.gov.au) or call (02) 6270 8120

#### **Images**

Available [here](#)

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**Image caption:** Press Gallery photographers on a Ten Eyewitness

News car outside Parliament House 1982

L–R: (back) John Crowther, Peter Heap, Bill Errington, (front) Tim Young, David Bartho.

Courtesy National Archives of Australia

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