

National Centre of Biography, ANU

Biography Workshop

Ian Hancock

On Writing About Ainsley Gotto

Date: Thursday 29 March 2018
Venue: Jean Martin Room, Beryl Rawson Building,
13 Ellery Cres, ANU
Time: 12 midday until about 1.30 p.m.
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June Mendoza, Portrait of Ainsley Gotto (Private Collection).

Born in 1946, Ainsley Gotto left school after completing Year 10. She turned down possible careers in ballet and theatre, attended secretarial college in Canberra and joined the typing pool at the Department of Immigration. In 1968, when aged 22, she was appointed, controversially, Prime Minister Gorton's Principal Private Secretary (Chief of Staff). In her late 20's Ainsley was a company director with Drake International, a Monaco-based, world-wide employment agency. As her networks multiplied, she lived an international jet-set lifestyle, appreciated by the rich and famous for her connections, sharp mind and social skills. Living in Queensland from the mid-1980s she fused a 'Bohemian' and rural way of life with that of an award-winning interior designer. In Sydney from the mid-1990s she became a Liberal Party activist and political confidante and a major figure in the national and international Women Chiefs of Enterprise, ending her working life as chief of staff to a federal shadow minister.

Three of many questions: how and why did she advance so far and achieve so much, what price did she pay, and what can we learn from looking at her different lives and careers?

Ian Hancock has published book-length biographies of John Gorton, Nick Greiner and Tom Hughes, biographical chapters on Roden Cutler, David Martin and John Carrick and several entries in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, including one on Harold Holt. He has published two books on the Liberal Party of Australia, two books (one co-authored) on settler society in Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe, and articles and chapters on British imperial history and on politics in southern and eastern Africa and in Australia. He is currently working on biographies of Ainsley Gotto and Josiah Symon and, with Nicholas Brown, on a biography of Frederick Wheeler.