



Roy Lilley's editorial on the 5<sup>th</sup> July took us back to the [Griffiths Report](#). Commissioned at a time when the NHS was run consensually between administrators and clinicians. As Roy said; 'It defined the shape of the NHS for a generation'.

At the time it was hugely controversial and we are fortunate that one of our readers [Dr Andrew Craig](#) was there and took part in the RCN negotiations. This is his recollection and a fascinating insight into history being made.

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Talk of clinicians managing services and mention of Roy Griffiths' report for the Thatcher government on NHS management made me recall that I was the RCN senior administrator charged with drafting the RCN Council's initial response to the Griffiths management letter after it appeared in October, 1983.

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It had been a fraught Council meeting with lots of "the sky is falling", "end of nursing as we know it" doom saying and disparaging remarks about supermarket mentality taking over the NHS.

The sound bite about Florence Nightingale looking for someone in charge certainly didn't endear them to Mr Griffiths either. Down at the grassroots, the members were fractious and what few nurse general managers existed were feeling distinctly unloved.

The Council's decision was that a letter to the Prime Minister had to be written, making clear that nurses must always lead nursing whatever other changes happened.

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I well remember the late night session after the Council meeting at Cavendish Square.

Me at the IBM typewriter (those were the days) and Trevor Clay still new in the General Secretary post and other

RCN panjandrums clustered around arguing over what they wanted in the letter.

It was tricky, getting the tone right about defending top nurses without saying something that would compromise the still tender nurses pay review body deal hammered out with Norman Fowler.

Not ideal drafting conditions, but we got there in the end and I was left to polish it up, get Trevor's signature and deliver it to Number 10.

The whole basis of the RCN's concern and opposition to Griffiths at the outset was the fear that nurses would no longer manage nurses if general management was implemented.

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It was a defence of tribalism, of course, and also an expression of insecurity. That is what it all came down to – that there would be no boss nurses because they would lose out to general managers.

It was an article of faith at the time around Cavendish Square that only a nurse could manage other nurses, even though everyone in that room that night knew there were many senior nurses on consensus management teams who were not up to the challenges of moving things forward and who would never get to top positions by merit alone.

Ironically, it was also the beginning of the College's understanding that nursing leadership was something that had to be invented and taught and could not just come from seniority, title and position.

That was another chapter of hard struggle, because nursing leadership through talent was condemned as elitist in its early days (not now of course).

Anyway, after the letter damning Griffiths the grocer and his ideas of general management was finally agreed, signed and sealed as midnight approached, I got to ring the secret number at No 10 and say I was on my way in the taxi to deliver it by hand.

No big security gates at the entrance to Downing Street in those days, so I walked up the street to the big black door which swung wide and I handed in the letter for the PM.

Sadly Mrs Thatcher was not there in the hall anticipating my arrival, but the rest is history.

Just a few years later I was appointed by Norman Fowler to Wandsworth District Health Authority as one of the new breed of non executives and saw at first hand the management muddle that Griffiths was concerned about and which was still going on.

Almost 25 years of NHS involvement convinces me that Griffiths was right then and the report is still relevant to the present situation.

It's wry that the Griffiths report text is available on the Socialist Health Association website but scarcely elsewhere except on [Geoffrey Rivett's NHS history site](#).

*It is not something that deserves obscurity.*