

The Journey of Lyall L Gillespie

I begin today by acknowledging the Ngambri and Ngunnawal people, Traditional Custodians of the land on which we meet today, and pay my respects to their Elders past and present. I extend that respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples here today.

So, to Lyall Gillespie, man and historian, the subject of this fine exhibition, and a brief biography. Lyall Leslie Gillespie was born on 23 July 1919 to William and Lilian Gillespie, members of a pioneering family in the Canberra region who first came here in the 1840s. John and Mary Gillespie became the first free selectors in the Ginninderra district, where a stone cottage and other buildings were erected on what became 'Horse Park'. One of the couple's six children, James, built Elm Grove cottage in 1862 and also wrote for local newspapers as The Wizard.

Lyall Gillespie was born to James Gillespie's shearer and station manager son William (Bill) and his wife Lilian Reid, in Queanbeyan. The family moved around from Hall to Queanbeyan to Wells Station, then to 'Fairy Bower' at Loftus Street. Bill Gillespie also managed his wife's property, 'Reidsdale'.

Lyall attended Hall School from 1926 until heading to Telopea Park High School – on his bicycle - for secondary schooling, receiving his Leaving Certificate, and entering the Commonwealth Public Service in 1937. There he stayed until his retirement in 1982, a career broken only by military service from 1942-1946, when he joined the RAAF. After training in radar and radio communications, in 1943 he was posted to north Western Australia to set up a radar station; followed by postings to Yanchep, De Grey River, New Guinea and the Admiralty Islands.

Lyall studied Accountancy by correspondence, qualifying as an accountant in 1952. Over his career Lyall was posted out of Canberra to the Northern Territory, where he was Assistant Administrator and Chairman of the Northern Territory Tourism Board from 1960 to 1963. His professional association with the Northern Territory did not end there: back in Canberra from 1964 he was Assistant Secretary of the Department of the Interior with responsibility, among other things, for the administration of the Northern Territory. In this capacity he assisted in overseeing the

work of surveying parties in Arnhem Land, leading eventually to the creation of Kakadu National Park.

Lyall Gillespie's Canberra career was a fitting one for a man so steeped in the region's history. He remained with the Department of the Interior until 1972 and became the Director, Commonwealth Brickworks Canberra from 1968 to 1972; then in 1978 was appointed City Manager for Canberra in the Department of the Capital Territory until 1982. He was honoured for his 45-year career with the award of the Imperial Service Medal on his retirement. He was also awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia.

Other life events along the way, depicted in the exhibition, were his marriage to Norma Bogg in September 1941, and the births of the couple's four children, Wendy, Gail, Neil and Grant. Lyall Gillespie passed away in 2006 in his late eighties.

Many of you here today will have known Lyall, and indeed are family members, including his and Norma's son Neil, with whom I have just had the privilege of unveiling the plaque for the Gillespie Building. I also knew Lyall Gillespie, and worked with him as an editor on two of his important works of Canberra history: *Canberra 1820-1913*, and *Ginninderra: Forerunner to Canberra*.

I first met Lyall in the late 1980s when he was working on the manuscript of what became *Canberra 1820-1913*, the first chronological volume of a trilogy telling the story of Canberra, published by the Australian Government Publishing Service to mark the bicentenary of European settlement. The book, illustrated with many historical photos of life in the Canberra region before it became the national capital, drew on Lyall's vast knowledge of its history and on documentary sources. Some of these sources were created by his own grandfather, journalist James Gillespie, 'The Wizard', who wrote a fortnightly column in the *Goulburn Evening Penny Post* until 1914, thus neatly completing the story of early Canberra before the national capital era. You can see copies of both these books in the exhibition.

I soon discovered that Lyall was, as his voluminous index of over 40,000 handwritten cards held in the Gillespie Collection here testifies, a meticulous researcher who rejected speculation and even personal experience in favour of pinning every recorded fact to a written reference from the vast hoard of information on the history of the Canberra district that he had accumulated over his lifetime.

Canberra 1820-1913 was published in 1991, and in 1992 the second book on which I worked with Lyall, *Ginninderra: Forerunner to Canberra* (regarded as the 'bible' for Hall Heritage Centre) was published under The Wizard imprint in honour of Lyall's grandfather. I was very privileged to have been involved, even if in a minor role, in the production of both these books, as they are the richest possible source for anyone wanting to know about the region in which we live.

A major focus of this exhibition though is Lyall Gillespie's astonishing and eclectic collection, held here in Hall Heritage Centre, which I investigated for a significance assessment from late 2018 to early 2019. A lifelong collector, Lyall Gillespie has left a rich legacy of material culture that ranges from geology to malacology to numismatics to philately to significant collections of stone tools and other items from First Nations communities. These were sourced both locally and from further afield. There are also objects from New Guinea and other Pacific Islands, farm tools, objects of local history, photographs, and books, books, and more books.

I had known of Lyall's authorship of the well-regarded book, *Aborigines of the Canberra Region*, and the opening chapters of both the books on which I worked with Lyall had featured the accounts of First Nations occupation and images from the First Nations stone tool collection now held at Hall Heritage Centre. But I was not prepared for other aspects of the collection and their diversity: the boxes of geological specimens, the delicate shells, the Pacific Islands artefacts, and the fine examples of Indigenous bark painting.

Many of you will have read Tim the Yowie Man's story in the Canberra Times last week, on Lyall Gillespie and the anecdote about him collecting stone tools on Black Mountain Peninsula in 1973, whilst on a family picnic there on Christmas Day. He ultimately discovered over 500 items as a result of that visit, now part of a collection of over 8200 First Nations artefacts. Tim continued: 'Gillespie found the vast majority (over 7000) in a 10-year period from 1964 on Reidsdale, his family's property located on the Spring Range between Gundaroo and Hall.'

Tim particularly mentioned Lyall's painstaking documentation of his finds: 'Having spent time in the Northern Territory where he gained a deep appreciation for Aboriginal artefacts, he had the foresight to meticulously label the location of every single find, big or small. This detailed labelling means that the scientific value of his

collection is high, and it is possible to identify the Aboriginal people to whom they are most culturally significant.'

A particularly rich aspect of the Gillespie Collection, in addition to the local stone tools gathered from 'Reidsdale' and other locations in the Canberra region, is a diverse range of other First Nations material. This includes black and white images of Indigenous people in the Northern Territory in the 1940s, albums full of beautiful coloured photographs of rock art, and artworks and artefacts, some of them dating from Lyall's first foray into Indigenous culture and collected during visits to outstations during his wartime service in the Northern Territory. These include a boomerang and a lizard carving given to Lyall by Paddy Roe from Broome, a great figure in the history of the western Kimberley who played a leading role in reconciliation between Indigenous people and new settlers. Other significant items collected by Lyall in the Northern Territory include a boomerang carved by Andy from Liveringa Station in the Kimberley in 1943; and a fine example of a bark painting by Deaf Tommy Mungatopi, an outstanding Tiwi Islands artist. These items are now on display in the exhibition.

The fine collection of First Nations material culture amassed over many decades is complemented by publications in Lyall's extensive library held in Hall Heritage Centre. Classic texts on First Nations people are included: A W Howitt's *The Native Tribes of South-East Australia* from 1904, and books by Bill Neidjie, C P Mountford, Douglas Lockwood, Ainslie Roberts, John Mulvaney, Johan Kamminga, Isabel McBryde and Nicholas Peterson. Lyall Gillespie was respected by fellow scholars such as Josephine Flood, to whom Lyall had loaned a large number of Indigenous artefacts from his collection, allowing her to establish an artefactual base for her doctoral research and her path-breaking 1980 book, *The Moth Hunters* (on display in the exhibition).

The Gillespie collection also includes offprints of articles in academic journals by Bob Edwards, John Mulvaney, Norman Tindale and Nicholas Peterson. It is easy today to circulate one's academic work by sending a PDF of an article, or loading it up to sites such as Academia to provide unfettered access to scholars. In Lyall's time, academic authors were given a limited number of offprints of journal articles for distribution to their academic peers. The inclusion of these offprints in Lyall's collection testifies to

his engagement with the academic world and his familiarity – and friendship - with leading scholars of First Nations history and culture. He accompanied archaeologists such as John Mulvaney on visits to rock art sites in Western Australia and the Northern Territory, taking the photographs of rock art that are such a feature of his collection.

Among many achievements in recent years by the dedicated volunteers here - informative exhibitions such as the one you are about to see, cataloguing of thousands of photographs and publications, amassing of genealogical resources and the creation of a website to make these accessible - has been the relationship that has been forged between Hall Heritage Centre and a wide range of local First Nations elders and representatives. The Canberra region stone tool collection gathered and so thoroughly documented by Lyall Gillespie has been a major focus for engagement and cooperation with representatives of our First Nations communities.

Lyall's time as City Manager from 1978 to 1982 is also represented by pamphlets and booklets in the collection on trees and gardens in the national capital, and invitations, event programs and photographs, including those of royal visits and visits by British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in 1979 and 1981. Under the theme of 'Serving Australia' a photograph of Lyall with Margaret Thatcher – who he admired immensely as a national leader – is on display and, I have been told, documents one of his proudest moments, when he showed Mrs Thatcher around the federal capital.

Collecting is one of those things that often begin in youth and last a lifetime. We have already seen how Lyall Gillespie, as a young man on military service, collected items of Indigenous culture, sparking a lifetime interest and expertise in the field. Collectors also keep things from closer to home: in Lyall's case, books given as school prizes, photograph albums, tools, games and other items that mark specific eras in his life and the life of the region. His life as a collector also included natural history including fossils and a huge shell collection – Neil told us that Lyall had examples of every form of cowrie shell species, among many others. The collection also contains stamps, coins and medals. There are also rare books – my particular favourite is a book on crochet designs which you can see in the 'Collector' section of the exhibition, along with a set of steel quoits used for regional competitions in the

1930s. There is also a handmade headlight cover for a car to use to meet blackout conditions in World War II. Lyall built valve radios, and several of these are on display. A keen gardener with particular expertise in growing daffodils, his success in shows held by the Horticultural Society of Canberra is documented by award certificates and ribbons from the 1950s and 1960s.

And Lyall Gillespie's personal story is also on display, from his early years to his marriage, life as father of a family, and as a member of the Canberra community.

Hall Heritage Centre, the Canberra community, and indeed the whole Australian community, is indebted to Lyall Gillespie both for capturing essential elements of our history and culture, and for his meticulous documentation that has opened the door to collaboration and relationship building with First Nations communities. We are also indebted to Neil Gillespie, who understood how significant his father's collection was to our understanding of both First Nations and settler cultures, and for his action in donating the collection to Hall Heritage Centre, in the place where it all began.

Please take the time when you view the exhibition to see and read about all the diverse components of this nationally significant collection.

It gives me great pleasure to declare the exhibition open.
