

Lesley Muir OAM

Written by Carol Liston, and published in September 2012 edition of History

Lesley Muir was an active member of the Affiliated Societies network from the early 1980s, serving on its Affiliated Societies Committee from 1985-2022, and chairing it from 2002 until her death. She was a councillor of the RAHS from 2002-2012. Shortly before her death, she was honoured by the Society with its highest accolade, being made a Fellow of the RAHS.

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Lesley worked as a librarian at the State Library of NSW, Sydney Teachers College and the University of Sydney, where she retired as the Branch Librarian for the Faculty of Nursing in 2007. As a mature age student she studied Geography at the University of Sydney, graduating with her BA in 1969. Local history became her passion, resulting in her MA Hons Thesis, *A Wild and Godless Place: Canterbury 1788-1895*. This was followed in 1994 with the award of Doctor of Philosophy in Historical Geography for her thesis *Shady Acres: Politicians, Developers and the Design of Sydney's Public Transport System 1873-1895*.

From the 1980s she worked with Canterbury and District Historical Society to research, write and public booklets on aspects of the district's history. Her largest community project involved researching and editing *Canterbury's Boys: World War 1 and Sydney's Suburban Fringe* a volume that documented almost 2000 local volunteers who joined the First AIF. In 2007 she was awarded the Order of Australia Medal for her contribution to recording history, particularly of Canterbury.

Place was at the heart of her work, and Lesley was an enthusiastic traveller, leading historical tours in Australia and overseas to inspect battlefields and buildings, especially those of the architect John Horbury Hunt and his contemporaries.

It was natural that her interests in architecture, geography and local history should lead her to work as a professional historian documenting the heritage of Canterbury in a stream of heritage studies, usually in partnership with her husband Brian Madden.

Her detailed knowledge of the network personal, financial and political links in late 19th century New South Wales informed her contribution as a co-author of *The People's Choice. Electoral Politics in Colonial New South Wales* (2007).

Lesley's enthusiasm for local history architecture and geography was catching and over the years she was a tireless contributor to many local historical societies, her weekends and week nights frequently taken over by talks, walks and tours on topics from historical political intrigues to gardens and architecture. Only weeks before her death she was giving a rural workshop on researching land title records. Passionate about ensuring that her research was based on solid historical sources, Lesley had an eye for the unusual and interesting snippets of the past that always delighted her audiences and left them asking questions about their past.

Always modest about her own achievements, Lesley could never have imagined the impact the her work had on others in local historical societies around the state – nor that her death would be noted in the NSW parliament, where her name would join those about whom she had written in Hansard.

As was her wish, and befitting an historian of Sydney's railway history and heritage, Lesley was buried near the Mortuary Railway Platform at Rookwood Cemetery.

Carol Liston.