



History of The Australian Association of Gerontology

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Celebrating 40 Years of the AAG

The AAG was formed 40 years ago on 10 June 1964 in Canberra at the Australian National University. Sir John Eccles, a Noble Prize winner, gave the inaugural address on the Physiology of Ageing. There were 47 founder members present, including myself. Many of these have passed on, or have disappeared from public view. However, two of them: David Wallace and Dick Gibson have their names remembered in addresses at the AAG. National Conferences. Dick Gibson also lends his name to a Travelling Fellowship for invited speakers and to Research Grants for students of gerontology.

The Contribution of David Wallace

David Wallace, a physician from Goulburn in NSW is usually credited with founding the AAG. It took him 7 years to achieve this goal. David attended the 4th International Congress of Gerontology in Italy in 1957. Following discussions with the President, Dr Sheldon, he returned to Australia with the aim of setting up an Australian society of gerontology. After extensive investigation, David concluded that there were only 6 people in the whole of Australia who had a significant interest in gerontology. David wrote to me in 1959, when I was working in London, asking me to help him set up a gerontological society in Australia.

Meeting with Professor Korenchevsky, the Father of Gerontology

Gerontological Societies were formed in Europe during the 1940s and 1950s largely as a result of the efforts of Prof Korenchevsky, who is regarded as the Father of Gerontology. While doing ageing research at Kings College, University of London, I met Prof Korenchevsky at a conference of the British Society for Research on Ageing, Prof Korenchevsky and I had done similar research on ageing rats and had a lot in common. He suggested that I should do something to stimulate interest in gerontology in Australia and to form an Australian society of gerontology.

Formation of the Gerontological Society of NSW

After my return to Sydney I arranged a meeting in November 1960 with Dr Geoffrey Hughes, the medical superintendent at Lidcombe State Hospital. Also present at this meeting were Dr Harry Kramer and Dr Frank Ofner. Dr Hughes successfully established the Gerontological Society of NSW on 5 July 1962. There were 33 founder members. Geoff Hughes was elected President and I became Secretary/Treasurer. Members of this society included David Wallace, and later Tony Broe and Gary Andrews, who were then working at the Lidcombe State Hospital. Because of the difficulty of establishing this society, Geoff Hughes decided to limit the society to NSW.

Formation and Function of the Australian Association of Gerontology

David Wallace continued his efforts to form a national society. With the help of Sir Giles Chippendall (President of the National Old Peoples Welfare Council), David Wallace successfully established the Australian Association of Gerontology in Canberra on 10 June 1964. There were 47 Founder Members. Four of these became presidents of the AAG, namely Sid Sax the first president, then Dick Gibson, David Wallace and later Dick Lefroy.

The AAG was a multidisciplinary society right from the beginning. However, medical gerontology, was the dominant theme as most members were medical doctors and nurses. During the first 20 years all presidents were medicos. By the 1980s ladies were becoming presidents of the AAG .starting with Glenda Powell a physician from Brisbane, followed by Bes McRae and Anna Howe from Melbourne and Barbara Squires from Sydney, thereby shifting the emphasis somewhat. Another lady Dr Laurie Buys, who is Director of the Centre for Social Change Research in Brisbane, will take over in 2006 from Tony Broe as our next President. Ruth Inall, one of the Founder Members was Honorary Secretary of the AAG for about 20 years, from 1967 to 1985. In the mid 1980s she moved her administrative skills to the newly formed Asia/Oceania Regional Association of Gerontology and is still working in that capacity. Marion Shaw succeeded Ruth Inall as secretary from 1986 to 1994 and then Dianne Langridge, Centre for Ageing Studies, followed until November 2005.

International Gerontological Associations

In the 1970s Dick Gibson and Gary Andrews with the help of Asian colleagues set up the Asia/Oceania Regional Association. The First Regional Congress was held in Melbourne in November 1978, and then moved around Asian countries at 4 year intervals.. For many years Australia had been offering to host the International Congress. Dick LeFroy and Gary Andrews finally succeeded in bringing the 16th Congress to Adelaide in 1997, and then Gary achieved the great honour of becoming President of the International Association of Gerontology.

During the 40 years existence of the Australian Association of Gerontology since the mid 1960s there has been a continuing increase in the numbers of the elderly due largely to the successful treatment and prevention of cardiovascular and other killer diseases. The AAG has witnessed this revolution in longevity of the elderly and has contributed .to improvements in their quality of life, by disseminating new information at conferences and by promoting research into ageing.