

# **VALE DAVID MACMILLAN (1925-1987)**

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David Neil Stirling Macmillan, foundation University of Sydney Archivist, was born in Lanarkshire, Scotland, on 9 October 1925. He was educated at Marr College, at Glasgow University, where he graduated B.A. and M.A., and at the University of Sydney, where he graduated Ph.D. in 1965.

Macmillan had a varied career, and this undoubtedly helped to create the colourful character that he was. He served with the Royal Navy from 1944 to 1947, spending part of that time in the highly dangerous North Russian route. During 1949-1950 he was Assistant Keeper of the Scottish Record Office, working on documents dating from the 12th to the 19th century. He lectured regularly to students at the University of Edinburgh. From 1950 to 1954, he was engaged in research for his M.A., but in addition, worked for the National Register of Archives Committee (Scotland) and was a Further Education Lecturer in Local History.

In September 1954, Macmillan arrived in Sydney, having been appointed Archivist at the University of Sydney. This was the first professional appointment of an archivist at an Australian university. Indeed, it has been argued that Macmillan was one of the very few people who could legitimately style themselves as a professional archivist in Australia at that time. He had received a thorough training in archival methodology, and was described as the finest pupil in paleography the Scottish Record Office had ever had. He was already acknowledged as having a wide knowledge of Scottish history, and had combined archival training with a capacity for historical research. At this time, he was specialising in arranging and describing large collections of private papers. He did not have any library training, and in this he differed from many of his Australian colleagues in the 1950s.

These qualities were recognised by the University of Sydney. The committee charged with the responsibility for the appointment of the first Archivist was very well aware of the differing nature and emphases of the work of archivists, librarians and historians, and carefully listed all applicants according to their background and training. It is interesting to note that there were no Australian applicants who could call themselves professional archivists in 1954. Macmillan was appointed at a commencing salary of £1,100 per year, and with the equivalent rank of Lecturer, although he was quite firmly, and properly, part of the Administration, being in the Registrar's Office.

Macmillan was an archivist with a crusading zeal for the profession. He was at times a little tactless, as in a difference of opinion with the then University Librarian, E. V. Steel, over the treatment of manuscripts. He became more and more a spokesman for the then fledgling profession of archives, particularly in the late 1950s. He must be given some credit for the eventual *Archives Act* (1960), together with Professor Marjorie Jacobs. R. F. Doust, in his M.Lib. thesis, implies that he probably wrote, or drafted, an editorial in the *Sydney Morning Herald* of 2 August 1957, calling for an Archives Act.

During 1960-61, Macmillan was promoted to Senior Lecturer equivalent, and took a year's sabbatical leave in the United Kingdom, where he was "to carry out research into archival and records management procedures in British Universities and in British Records relating to early University Development in Australia". Between 1954 and 1959, he published six books and twenty-seven journal articles, with one book and five articles in preparation. These publications were concerned with both historical and records matters. This was a prodigious effort. In addition, he was involved in advisory work to the Commonwealth government, several State governments, the Western Pacific High Commission, and the Government of Fiji.

Between 1960 and 1965, Macmillan completed a Ph.D. within the University of Sydney with the title of "The Scottish Connection with Australia: Emigration, Commerce and Investment, 1800-1846". The thesis was described as being "A substantial and original contribution to knowledge of Scottish/Australian history . . .". In those years also, he became prominent in the Business Archives Council, conducted "summer schools" in records management, and even acted as an archival consultant to, for example, the Colonial Sugar Refining Company.

From 1966 to 1968, a shortage of lecturing staff in the Department of History in the University of Sydney led to Macmillan becoming involved in a formal teaching programme, and he delivered twenty-eight lectures, and took eighteen tutorials in that Department in 1967. He also commenced research, on behalf of the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee, for a proposed book on Australian Universities, subsequently published in

1968 under that title. He became a Fellow of the Royal Australian Historical Society in 1968.

David Macmillan resigned from the University of Sydney as from April 1968, to take up a position as Associate Professor of History at Trent University, Ontario, Canada. It is unfortunate that little is known of his career there, but he did become a full Professor of History at Trent, where he died on 4 September 1987. A comment in the *Trent Fortnightly* is worth reproducing:

“John Gilchrist, a friend and fellow historian, said Prof. Macmillan will be remembered as a great raconteur, with an actor’s ability to move an audience deeply with his spellbinding eloquence. In particular, Prof. Gilchrist said, many local people recall his remarks at the armouries on the anniversary of the Battle of Culloden as one of the best talks they have ever heard. Prof. Macmillan was also legendary among students for his unconventional and entertaining lectures on Catherine the Great and Ivan the Terrible.

‘Right to the end of his life, David was still studying, writing and talking about his research plans. He was never petty, he was always more concerned with his own grand visions’, Prof. Gilchrist said.”

He undoubtedly had “grand visions” also in matters archival, and will be remembered as a pioneer archivist in Sydney.