

JAMES GEORGE GILLESPIE, M.B.E., Hon. F.I.S. Aus, F.R.I.C.S.

James Gillespie, M.B.E. was a remarkable man with a record of amazing services to his technical profession, to areas of education, to business management, to community services in hospitals and charities, and to his church. His long life was filled full as he fulfilled his Christian faith and energy in multi-service to God and mankind. To C H has a motto: "SERVICE IS THE RENT WE PAY FOR OUR ROOM ON EARTH". Unlike many people today who live mainly for self, Jim Gillespie paid untold rent in selfless service of staggering proportions. He was a good man! He was a GREAT Australian!

EARLY LIFE

Born in 1894 he spent his boyhood in a stately home in St Kilda Road (on the corner of Armadale Place), a residential area of three blocks which included a green-house and a cow-shed! Just across Fawkner Park was the South Yarra Presbyterian Church where his father was an Elder and to where the family walked to worship every Sunday .. his father in top hat and his mother in ruffles! - their best clothes for Sunday and for God! In later years when his widowed mother lived in Lyndoch Avenue, East St Kilda, she walked all the way from there to here at St Stephen's Church, Caulfield each Sunday even to the age of 94! His deep sense of pride in his parents and their examples inspired him all through his life. Such was the spiritual heritage which made public worship a fundamental part of Jim's whole lifestyle and which saw him regularly at St Stephen's until recently. His church life with his implicit faith and values was the base from which stemmed his service to God and the community.

He was educated at Melbourne Grammar School and Scotch College. In 1913 he was articled to commence his surveying career: and in 1916 was licensed as a surveyor. But in the meantime World War I broke out, and soon after that a bombshell happened across the Gillespie meal-table when Jim's elder brother Mac announced to the family that he had joined the military forces. Mac was killed in action on the first day of The Landing at Gallipoli - "Anzac Day". His brother's death created a lasting response in Jim's life to make up for a life laid down. Eighteen months later at the age of 22 and surveyor qualifications completed, he himself enlisted in the A.I.F.

Back in Melbourne after the war, he entered into private practice and shortly afterwards acquired and consolidated several well-known practices. For over 30 years he conducted a sound professional business.

He married Mary Mack on "Australia Day", 26th January 1922. What a team they have been for over 65 years as each in their own way has ministered to good causes and been community leaders of eminence - vital, generous, given to hospitality, initiators, entertainers, and (most of all) gracious Christians. We honour the quality of their marriage and homelife.

PROFESSIONAL CAREER

As a comparatively young man James Gillespie became active in the affairs of the Victorian Institute of Surveyors. He was the first returned serviceman to be elected to the Council, and in 1927 was elevated to President.

At that time the thought foremost in the minds of surveyors throughout Australia was Federation of their profession. With this in view delegates from each State Institute met in Melbourne in 1927 and Mr Gillespie was elected Chairman of that historic conference. For his service to the profession he was elevated to Fellow of the Institute in 1929. By 1930 Australia was in the grip of a world-wide economic depression. By 1937 he was elected Colonial Fellow of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors, United Kingdom.

The country emerged slowly from the recession of the early Thirties only to be confronted by another World War in which he was to play his part. Then, after the War, the surveying profession was federated and he became its Foundation President in 1952. On his retirement from the office of President in 1955, he was honoured with the highest grade of membership - Honorary Fellow of the Institute of Surveyors, Australia. In 1958 he was elected to the Fellowship of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors, U.K. for his work on national mapping for the Commonwealth Government.

He was the Institution of Surveyor's Australia representative of the Commonwealth Advisory Committee on mapping from 1954 to 1968, and in 1967 was awarded the only Gold Medal of the Institution of Surveyors to be struck in its first 30 years for outstanding service and technical achievement reflecting credit on the Surveying Profession in Australia. In turn, Mr Gillespie made this Award available for an annual scholarship Award. A plaque which hangs in the Surveying Department of R.M.I.T. honours his professional record.

HONORARY COMMUNITY SERVICE

At the age of 56 (in 1951) Mr Gillespie found that community service was making such a demand on his time that he decided to retire from active practice as a surveyor and to devote himself wholly to public service. The length and diversity of his service to public hospitals, educational bodies, Legacy, and the like aggregated at least 350 years - a mind-boggling record!

R.M.I.T.: From 1938-69 he was member of the R.M.I.T. Council and served as President in 1946: also Honorary Treasurer from 1951-68. In recognition of his work and the Council's appreciation of it, a wing of the new buildings opened in 1972 was named "The Gillespie Wing". In 1983 the J.G.Gillespie Gold Medal Prize was launched to recognise outstanding surveyors, open to R.M.I.T. graduates of at least two years' post-graduate experience. Only three days before his death he was presented with R.M.I.T.'s "Centenary Medal".

ROYAL WOMEN'S HOSPITAL: For 33 years he was on The Board of Management, chaired its Building Committee for 20 years, and it was claimed that "the re-building of the hospital on its present site was due to him". His service to the hospital was recognised by naming the "Brookes-Gillespie" Nurses Home in 1960.

From 1952-63 he served on The Hospitals and Charities Commission through its Advisory Committee and Medical Salaries Committee. For his service in this regard coupled with his service to the profession he was awarded the M.B.E. on 1st January 1967. He was a Council Member of The Nurses Memorial Centre from 1953-78, served as President for 5 years, and was the only person to be appointed as Patron of the Centre.

Similarly from 1955-78 he was on the Board of Management of Greenvale Geriatric Centre, its Treasurer for 22 years, and Chairman of its Building Committee during the period of modernising the buildings and improving the services.

When the Mayfield Centre became Australia's first centre for training and development of Hospital Staff, he helped to pioneer its work: from 1963-77 was on its Committee of Management and, at times, acted as Chairman and as Treasurer.

As if such public service was not enough he was involved in a spate of Trusts, Business Boards, and Professional Services. These included Land Valuation and Appeal Boards, Company Directorships, mapping for the Defence Forces and the Antarctic Division. He was also an Elder of his congregation.

MILITARY AND LEGACY LIFE

At the funeral ceremony The Legacy Service was led by Bruce Wilson, Esq (President of Melbourne Legacy) and the following tribute given by Wing-Commander Ron Austin ;-

After qualifying as a surveyor, Jim Gillespie enlisted in the A.I.F. He really should have been rejected as he only had vision in one eye, the other having been damaged at school. However, Jim made sure he would pass medically by committing to memory the letters on the board of The Eye-Sight Test! He even managed to satisfy his instructors in refle-firing practise. He was drafted to the 46th Battery, 12th Artillery Brigade as a gunner. This will please many Legatees. He served in France and Belgium, attaining the rank of Sergeant. He was in Paris on the day that The Armistice was signed.

Before returning to Melbourne and being discharged in October 1919, he attended a School of Survey at Southampton and also a Town Planning Course at London University. On return to Melbourne he entered into private practice.

When World War II broke out there was an immediate demand for military maps of Australia and the adjacent areas of Islands and the South Pacific. Jim was called up in 1939 and, with his expertise in surveying, was appointed Deputy Assistant-Director of Survey, Southern Command with the rank of Major, and was subsequently appointed Assistant-Director of Survey, Australian Army Headquarters with the rank of Lieut-Colonel. The work carried out for the Australian and United States Military Forces was outstanding and for which a rightful share of the credit was given to Lt. Colonel James G. Gillespie.

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June 1928 is a date of great importance to Legacy for that was when (on the nomination of Legatee Frank Doolan and Legatee Harold Peters) J. G. Gillespie was inducted into Melbourne Legacy.

One of Jim's early postings was to the Finance Committee where his business experience was most valuable. Jim filled many posts. 1929-30 he was on committees of Children's Welfare, Boys Physical Training, and Demonstration Classes where he shpwed great understanding of the children. In 1933 he was posted to the Board of Management where he exercised wise counsel contributing much to the formation and forward planning of policy.

The years of 1937 and 1938 were important ones as Jim was appointed Vice-President in 1937 and elected President in 1938. His far-sighted planning and analytical brain produced many sound policies. Even during the War Years (committed as he was to his military appointments) he endeavoured to fulfil postings on the Personnel, Liason, and Extension of Legacy committees whenever he was in Melbourne. He filled an important post in 1952 as Chairman of Co-ordinating Council of which he was a member for 3 years.

The establishment of The Sir Stanley Savige Memorial Trust took place at a meeting called by Legatee Jim Gillespie at his home in 1957. Jim remained a Trustee until the funds were exhausted in 1977.

As years passed Jim remained very active. In 1960 his wise counsel was most valuable on the Senior Widows Accommodation and the Advisory Tradition and History committees.

In March 1968 the Caulfield/St Kilda Branch was formed and Jim played a major part as a Foundation Member in setting up the guidelines of the Branch's function. For many years the members benefitted from his wise counsel. On occasions of conflicting debate when discussions seemed to be getting nowhere, the Chairman would turn to Jim and ask, "What is your opinion, Jim?". Jim would quickly sum up and solve the matter under discussion. He had an uncanny knack of getting to the root of the problem and produce the solution.

Behind every great man is a great woman. Jim's wife Mary gave wonderful support to him in his Legacy-life. She gave support too in her own right with her constant support of the Legacy Wives Association and her considerable fund-raising contributions. We say, "Thank you, Mary, for allowing us in Legacy to share with you this "Wonderful - Magnificent - Quiet Achiever".

Mr. J. G. Gillespie died on 21st May 1987. The funeral service on 25th May at St Stephen's Uniting Church, Caulfield was an Act of Thanksgiving for his life and work. The two addresses printed above were given by Rev. Vere Heazlewood (Parish Minister) and Wing-Commander Ron Austin.