

Changing of the Guard

Museums Australia
National
Conference,
Melbourne
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Stewart Reed



*The evolving
relationship between the
Director and the Trustees
at the Art Gallery of New
South Wales in the 1940s
& 1950s*

Acknowledgements

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And to Hal Missingham (Director, 1945 to 1971)
especially for his book *'They Kill You in the End'*

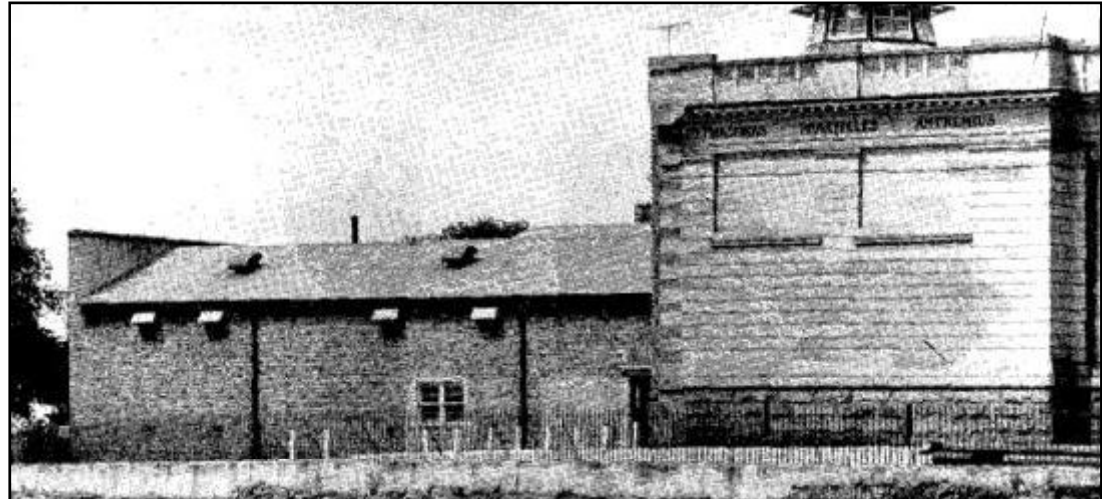
Portrait of Hal Missingham, 1967-1968
William Dobell, Gift of the Art Gallery
Society of NSW 1980, Collection:
Art Gallery of New South Wales
© Courtesy Sir William Dobell Art Foundation

Contents

- Hal Missingham became Director of the Art Gallery of New South Wales in 1945
- From almost day one there were battles between Missingham and the Trustees
- Major issues are described
- How Missingham eventually solved these issues
- Lessons for today's museums and galleries
 - especially smaller organisations
- An action plan for success
 - Trustees/Board members
 - Staff
 - Volunteers

The Gallery in 1945

- *National Art Gallery of New South Wales*
- No lighting in galleries
- No air conditioning
- Building - *'leaked like a sieve'*
- Few staff - set in their ways
- Toilets - *'wouldn't passed muster in a third class country railway station'*
- Merchandise sold by Chief Attendant
- Art Gallery Road - *'not good enough for buses'* (1947)
- Offshoot of the NSW Education Department



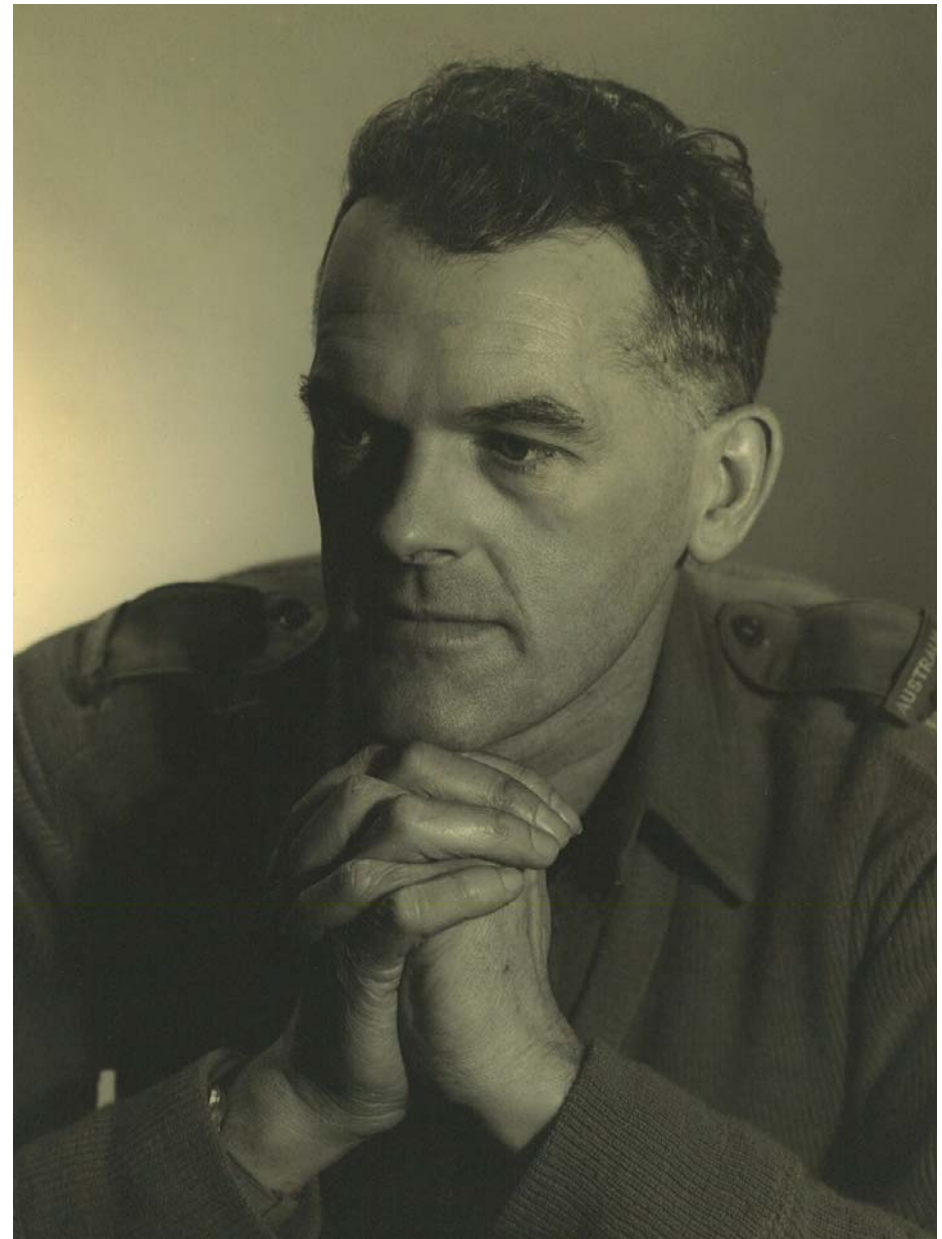
Art Gallery of New South Wales, North façade, late 1960s

The Trustees

- Appointed for life under the 1899 Library and Art Gallery Act
 - Only reason for removal is absence from Trustees' meetings for six months without leave
- Little restriction on their actions
- Had become a 'club'
- Very establishment
- Some treated the Gallery as their *private property*

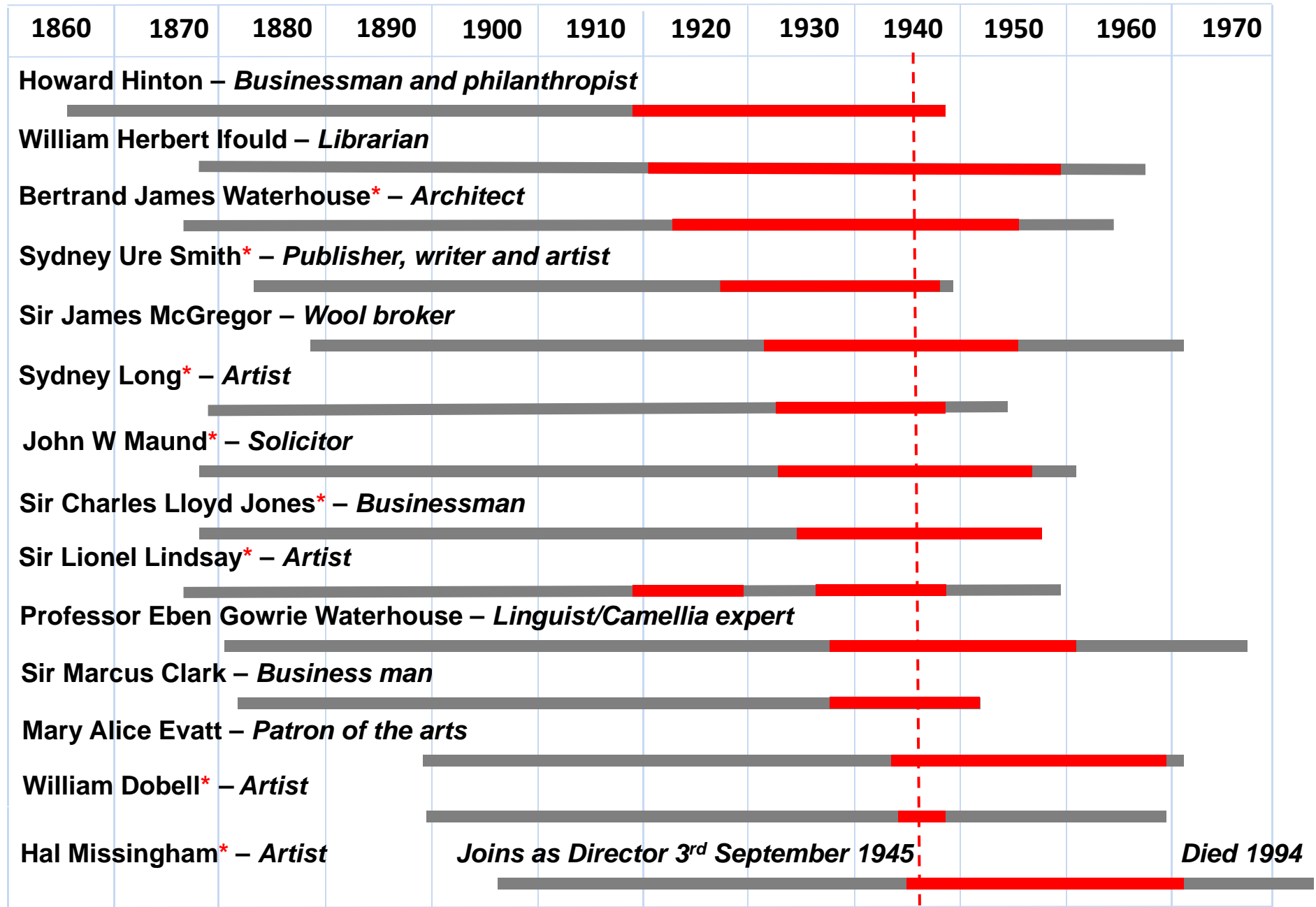
The new Director

- Encouraged by Trustee, *Sydney Ure Smith*, to apply
- Interviewed on 28 Feb 1945
- Still in the Army
 - was a war artist
- 39 years old
- Previous permanent Director left in April 1944 – three Acting Director in 16 months
- Joined 3 Sep 1945



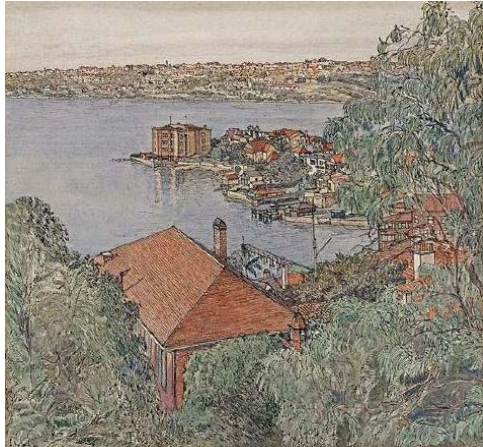
Hal Missingham, 1945
Olive Cotton, Photograph
Courtesy Art Gallery of NSW Archives

The Trustees and the new Director



The Trustees' works in the Art Gallery of New South Wales

Sydney Ure Smith



Woollahra Point

Marshall Bequest Fund 1941

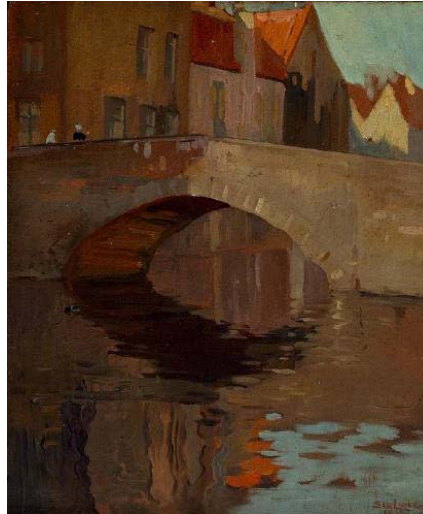
Bertrand James Waterhouse



Pont Marechale, Bruges

Purchased 1940

Sydney Long



Bruges bridge, Purchased 1941

John W Maund



Near Spencer, Hawkesbury

Gift of John Maund 1951

Sir Lionel Lindsay



Titian's Place, Venice Purchased 1943

Sir Charles Lloyd Jones



Afternoon light

Marshall Bequest Fund 1941

Images courtesy of the Art Gallery of New South Wales

Trustees' meetings

Monthly meetings

- Last Friday of the month
- Director not mentioned as attendee

Special meetings

- Held at art exhibitions - especially Royal Art Society, Society of Artists and Australian Watercolour Institute
- Trustees would chose and vote on purchases

Minutes were hand written - until 23 November 1945

Buying works of art

Missingham's first meeting - 21 September 1945

- Two trustees gave notice of motion for the next meeting to empower the director to (a) purchase and (b) vote on works offered to Trustees. *Note: Mr Maund was absent*

Second meeting - 26 October 1945

- Mr J R McGregor moved ... the Director be empowered to purchase ... for a period of six months, at exhibitions which the Trustees are unable to attend, and also at auction sales. Seconded and carried.
- Mr Maund objected: *“The Trustees have no knowledge of whether the Director is capable of buying or not. No business man and not one of the Trustees in his own business would give an employee of a few weeks standing with who him was not thoroughly acquainted for a considerable period of time an unlimited authority to buy”.*

Buying works of art

- Start of a fight which lasted until 1954
- However, Missingham was able to buy some works
- as a temporary measure
- Fight amongst the Trustees about Missingham's power to buy
- This also reflected fight between advocates of modern works and the traditionalists
- Both Trustees and Missingham sought legal advice
- although Missingham was reprimanded for this
- Eventually Missingham was granted permission to buy
- Trustees remained legally responsible for purchases

Hanging

- Trustees would go to the galley at weekend and have the attendants rehang the pictures
- Missingham told attendants to refer this to him
 - not well received by Trustees
- 1946 - McGregor objected to 'single line hanging'
 - didn't allow enough pictures to be shown
- 1948 - Picture hanging:
 - *'The Trustees decided that a committee to advise and assist the Director should be formed.'*

Other issues

- Trustees believed that contact with the press was dangerous
- Missingham believed otherwise but got into trouble talking to them
- Staff - Trustees didn't always support Missingham's attempts to get more staff
- 1947 - Trustees, Missingham (and the Education Department) accused of being Communists

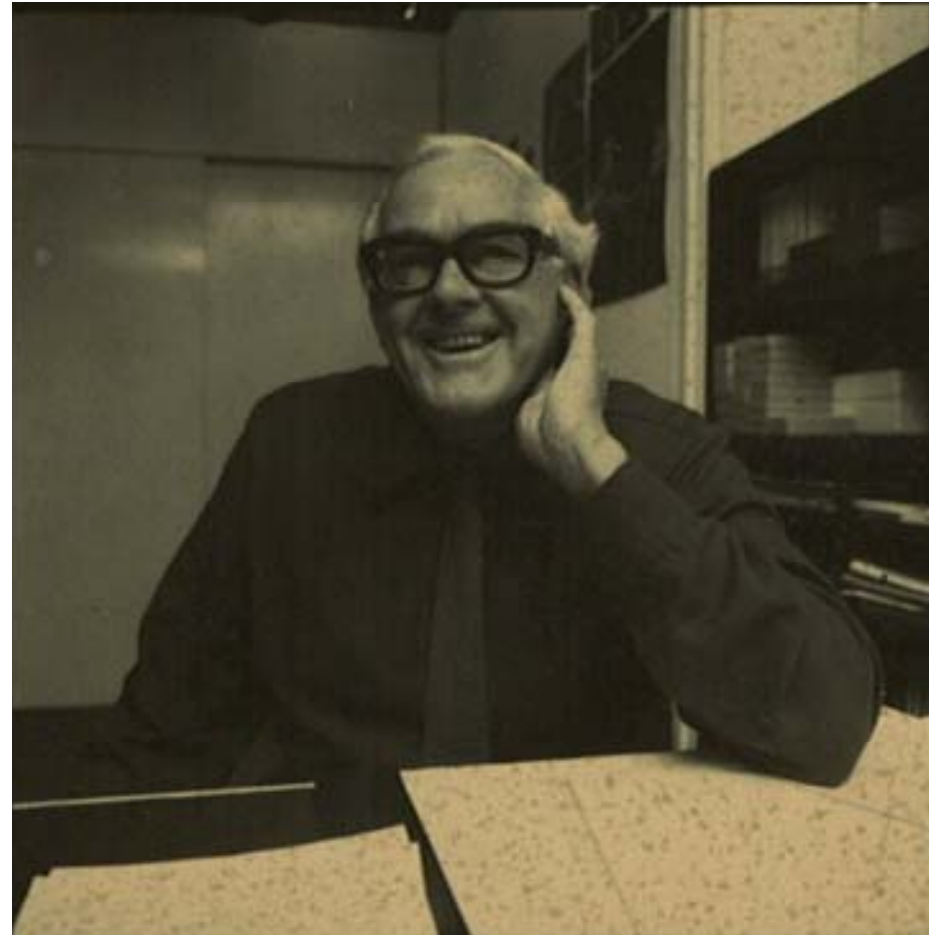
Action - Missingham had to resign from
'committees and membership of all Art Societies'

Problems

- Quality of interview
- No job description
- Trustees unlikely to have agreed responsibilities with Missingham
- Trustees unable to distinguish between policy and operations
- Generational differences
- Trustees unwilling to give up their '*rights*'
- Trustees' views on art

Solutions

- Perseverance – had to ask again and again
- Lobbying
- Time
- Change of Trustees
- Not easy changing from below
- General change in society
- New Art Gallery Act in 1958



Hal Missingham, c. 1970

Unknown, Photograph

Courtesy Art Gallery of NSW Archives

Art Gallery of New South Wales Act 1958

- Removed '*National*' from the Gallery's name
- Trustees appointed for a period of four years
- but '*eligible for reappointment*'
- Included Director-General of Education or deputy
- Not less than two Trustees '*shall be knowledgeable and experienced in the visual arts*'
- A Trustee vacates their office if: *dies, resigns, becomes insane, absent from three consecutive meetings, removed by Governor*
- Trustees are responsible for:
'control and management of the Gallery'
'maintenance and administration'
- No mention of Director in the Act but 1980 act states the Director is '*the chief executive officer*' and is '*responsible for the administration and management of the Art Gallery*'

Lessons for today

- These issues have been solved in the large institutions
- But still can be issues in many smaller museums/galleries
- Issues can occur at all levels:
 - Trustees or Board members
 - Staff
 - Volunteers (not an issue in 1945)
- Not insoluble but you still need:
 - *Perseverance*
 - *Lobbying*
 - *Time*

Action plan for success

- Identify your issues – every organisation has a set of issues shared with others and a set of unique issues
- Write them down
- Check your history
- Look for solutions – at all levels
- Involve all stakeholders
- Remember *‘What’s in it for me’*
- Remove personalities
- Communicate your plans
- Ask for feedback
- Re-communicate
- Don’t become a *‘talk fest’*

BE PATIENT

Action plan for success

- Get help – MA membership, standards programs, etc.
- Get help – other museums/galleries, university contacts, friends, the web, etc.
 - but beware *‘organisational isomorphism’*
- Apply to **all** groups in your organisation
 - *in an appropriate fashion*
- Don't forget gentle persuasion
- Persevere and don't rush
- Remember you're not the only one with the answers

GOOD LUCK



Questions?

*Hal Missingham at Bowen Island,
1947, Unknown, Photograph
Courtesy Art Gallery of NSW Archives*