



Speech at the Newcastle Regional Art Gallery
An Inner View of Newcastle by Joseph Lycett

18 February 2010

Sharon Grierson MP

It is a pleasure to be asked to speak at this reception to welcome back this very special work. I acknowledge the Lord Mayor, Councillors and past councillors present with us and thank Newcastle City Council for their continued and long-standing support of the Newcastle Regional Art Gallery.

It seems appropriate to have this first more intimate welcome – because there is a special reverence that attaches to this work by Joseph Lycett and it's wonderful to share that this evening.

For Novocastrians, supporters of the Newcastle Region Art Gallery and for Australian art historians, this work commands great respect. When I saw it recently in the Director's office I was amazed at its renewed radiance and moved by affection for this work that portrays this wonderful city. I'm pleased that it will feature in the special exhibition "Curious Colony" in July and that many more people will be able to enjoy it.

I pay special tribute to David Wise, conservator for his work in restoring Joseph Lycett's "An Inner View of Newcastle" and am looking forward to his presentation this evening and finding out more about the craft, the magic and witchery of art conservation.

As the Federal Member for Newcastle I am pleased to be able to acknowledge the wonderful contribution by our very own Australian National Gallery in allowing David and his conservation team to work on this painting.

To say it was a conspiracy by the 'two Rons' of the Australian art world - Ron Radford and Ron Ramsey - might have an element of truth in it but could sell short the power and worth of this nationally significant painting.

When the draft media release for tonight's reception was sent to me I was amused to see that my suggested comment drew attention to Joseph Lycett's 'colourful past'. How apt.

Yes there is definitely something very romantic to a working class girl from the Labor side of politics to talk about a talented rascal who succeeds in leaving a wonderful legacy in spite of his humble beginnings and convict status. The fledgling origins of the egalitarian spirit that we strive to protect and prosper, flourish in the Lycett story.

And yes as Member for Newcastle – I love the fact that this painting depicts together our city's aboriginal and convict past within a personal inner view or vision of the commander, Captain James Wallis, thought originally to have been the artist. But the real artist Joseph Lycett was no stranger to detail, order, form and beauty – all elements of his repertoire as a very accomplished forger.

You, like me, might also feel some mirth that Lycett managed to upset his Sydney masters by flooding the city with hundreds of forged 5 shilling bills that he had skilfully executed on a small copper-plate press and was punished by being sent to Newcastle. The sort of punishment we her would approve off. And in my experience Newcastle still pays little heed to its Sydney masters.

And if you have ever received any correspondence from me you will know that Nobbys – a symbol of our aboriginal, convict and maritime history, features prominently in my graphics. Just as does appear with centre stage prominence in Lycett's work.

I like too that Lycett's painting links the vision that Lachlan Macquarie –the Father of Australia according to his headstone, had for NSW cities –a vision of not just places of harsh penal servitude but places of form and dignity with landmark buildings for civil order but also of beauty to inspire the soul. Just where is Lachlan Macquarie when you need him!

But perhaps Lycett's painting , now back in the bosom of this city, can inspire us all to share our inner views of Newcastle and to bring to life all the elements depicted in this painting that cause us to feel special affection and pride for our place, our nation and our past.

Tonight someone mentioned to me that we were lucky to have this magnificent work. Well we are indeed fortunate but I'm sure a great deal more than luck is responsible and that there are many people who contributed to our very special fortune. I thank the Director, Ron Ramsey, his staff, foundation and society members and everyone involved in tonight's celebration to welcome back Joseph Lycett's " An Inner View of Newcastle".

It is an occasion that makes me feel particularly fortunate.