



3 Minute Constituency Statement

Main Committee

23 February 2010

Sharon Grierson MP

Sharon Grierson (Newcastle) (4:28pm) – I would like to share with the House a very special event that took place in the Newcastle electorate last week. I had the great pleasure of speaking at a reception to welcome back to the Newcastle Region Art Gallery the newly restored, nationally significant artwork *Inner View of Newcastle* by convict artist Joseph Lycett. This landscape dates back to 1818 and depicts early Newcastle. The reception was not a grand occasion, but an intimate gathering of members of the Art Gallery Society and the Gallery Foundation, as well as representatives from Newcastle City Council, to allow us to have first viewing of the Lycett painting. However, the painting will feature in a special exhibition, *Curious Colony*, in July so that many more people will be able to enjoy it.

For Novocastrians, supporters of the Newcastle Region Art Gallery and Australian art historians, this work commands a special reverence and respect. There are few Australian landscapes of this age, scale and importance amongst our nation's art treasures. To Novocastrians, this portrayal of early Newcastle—which shows a fledgling city with urban form and design; our iconic headland, Nobbys, in its original state; a kangaroo hunt with Indigenous people and white settlers together; and the original church, now the city's landmark cathedral—is a very special work. It now has a renewed radiance, thanks to David Wise, the head conservator of the National Gallery of Australia, and his skilled team who worked on this painting for almost two years. Having now heard David speak about the challenges involved, I have great appreciation and respect for, and pay tribute to, the art conservation team for their craft, magic and witchery that restored this beautiful work of art.

As the federal member for Newcastle, I am also pleased to be able to acknowledge the wonderful contribution that the National Gallery of Australia made by allowing their conservation team to work on this painting. It is an unusual thing to occur. At the welcoming I said it was a conspiracy by the two Rons of the Australian art world to whom I am very grateful. The two Rons I refer to are the Director of the National Gallery, Ron Radford, and the Director of the Newcastle Region Art Gallery, Ron Ramsey. They obviously understood that this painting deserved their very special professional attention. For that we are grateful.

Joseph Lycett's life was a colourful one. He was an artist turned forger, convicted of forgery in 1811 and sentenced to transportation for 14 years. He was not satisfied with that. He managed to upset his Sydney masters by flooding the city with

hundreds of forged five-shilling bills that he skilfully executed on a small copperplate press. He was punished by being sent to Newcastle. But Lycett's misfortune was our good fortune. That is the sort of punishment that most of us in Newcastle would approve of. In my experience, Newcastle still pays little heed to its Sydney masters. I must also pay great tribute to Newcastle City Council, which, many years ago, in 1961, had the foresight to acquire this painting, with the help of the National Art Collection Fund in London.