The ADB and the local Canberra historical community

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In this year of Canberra's centenary it is interesting to reflect upon the long and continuing relationship that the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* has had with the local Canberra historical community.

One of the *ADB*’s founders, Laurie Fitzhardinge, was a librarian at the Commonwealth National Library (National Library of Australia) from 1934 to 1946. A classicist by training, in 1951 he was appointed reader in the sources of Australian History in the history department of the Research School of Social Sciences at the ANU. Three years later he began compiling a Biographical Register, a basic card index of Australian lives, as a first stage in the creation of the *ADB*.

Patience Tillyard (later Wardle), another employee of the Commonwealth National Library, was employed by Fitzhardinge to build up the Register. By 2011, when it was replaced by Obituaries Australia, the Register consisted of 300,000 citations on index cards and a further 32,000 in an inhouse database.

Jim Gibbney was another recruit from the Commonwealth National Library. He worked in its archives division before joining the ADB in 1965. As well as writing over 80 *ADB* entries, and editing countless others, Gibbney maintained the Biographical Register and was largely responsible for the publication of the two-volume *A Biographical Register 1788–1939: Notes from the Name Index of the Australian Dictionary of Biography* (1987). Following his retirement in 1984 he published *Canberra: 1913–1953* (1988), one of three commissioned bicentennial volumes on Canberra.

Fitzhardinge, Tillyard and Gibbney were all members of the Canberra & District Historical Society as was Nan Phillips, the ADB’s first administrator. Many members of the society have also served on the ADB’s Commonwealth Working Party and have helped choose Canberra entries for the ADB.

Most recently ADB staff have been involved in two projects in which Fitzhardinge, Tillyard and Gibbney feature. Following a conference in 2009, a history of the *ADB* has been prepared which is being launched on 4 December at the ANU. We have also begun to add thematic essays to our websites. Of particular interest to Canberra readers is the recent essay by Dr Karen Fox, ‘A City and its People: Canberra in the *ADB*’, which highlights the many people in the *ADB* with a connection to the nation’s capital. We hope that one day we may have the resources to greatly expand the number of entries on Canberrans to create a full-scale *Dictionary of Canberra*.

*The ANU E Press is publishing Melanie Nolan and Christine Fernon (eds.), *The ADB’s Story* as part of ANU.Lives series in biography. Karen Fox’s article can be found at [http://adb.anu.edu.au/essay/7](http://adb.anu.edu.au/essay/7)*