

Leslie John Hetherington (1955–2018)

Philippa Hetherington

Les Hetherington MA (University of Sydney), B. Litt (Australian National University) was a scholar of Australian social and migration history. In particular, he examined the history of the French community in Australia, as well as Australian history of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries more broadly. He was particularly committed to biographical approaches to the past, authoring a number of articles for the Australian Dictionary of Biography. When he died, he was on the verge of finishing a PhD thesis, entitled ‘Vaillante Soeur: Marie Caroline Niau and her family in France, England and Australia 1820–1956’. This thesis was a biography of the Niau family, French migrants who moved to Australia in the late nineteenth century in the wake of the Paris Commune. It focused in particular on the female members of the family, left to fend for themselves as mothers, wives and sisters in colonial Australia. This PhD was supervised by Melanie Nolan of ANU. He published numerous articles related to his research in *The French Australian Review*. These included ‘The Adventurous Life of Juliette Lopès-Rastoul-Henry’ (with Yannick Lageat, n° 63, 2017–2018), ‘The Sydney French Club, 1885–1893’ (n° 58, 2015), and ‘An Emigrant, not a Traveller: Adolphe Prosper Duprez’ (n° 54, 2013).

Before embarking on his PhD, Les was a public servant in Sydney and Canberra for thirty-five years. His career was a model of the complementarity of academic and non-academic labour. First, his passion for the study of history animated his free time throughout his career. As well as completing an MA and B. Litt in history while a public servant, he served as the Editor

of the *Murrumbidgee Ancestor*, the journal of the Wagga Wagga and District Family History Society, for thirteen years (the longest serving editor) and conducted extensive research on the local history of the Riverina region. Throughout this period he was an active scholar; for example, in 2004 he published 'The sacking of Albany: the image of the Boer War veteran in Australia' in *Sabertache*, the journal of the Australian Military History Society, and in 2009 he published 'The Bluebirds in France' in *Wartime*, the journal of the Australian War Memorial. Second, his work in the public service directly influenced his historical commitments. For several years he worked at the Department of Multicultural Affairs and, while there, he actively contributed to the fostering of social inclusion and diversity through a better appreciation of Australia's multicultural past. This led him to research a number of his own ancestors, including his great-uncle George Yan, son of a Chinese gold-miner, and Sahib Dad, second husband of another ancestor who had come to Australia from British India in the nineteenth century. It also led him to research a number of non-Anglo migrant families in nineteenth century, including the Italian-Australian Palazzi family, who also had ties to his hometown of Wagga Wagga, and most importantly the Niaus, the subject of his PhD thesis. Through this work, he expanded our understanding of the rich connections between Australia and the world in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, connections forged through the paths of migrants from corners as far-flung as France, Italy, China and Pakistan.

Les had an insatiable curiosity for history and as a result, he was involved in a number of side projects while completing his PhD. For example, he was a researcher for the ongoing project 'Australian Bluebird Nurses of World War I,' led by Dr. Irene Rogers, which was linked to his article on this topic for *The French Australian Review*. This project examines the group of Australian nurses who travelled to France during World War I to help with the war effort. The Bluebird research team called Les their 'super-sleuth,' a reflection of his detailed and precise research skills. The project will be the subject of an exhibition opening in September 2019, which will include a plaque commemorating Les and his work for the project. Les's colleagues at the National Centre for Biography also noted his excellent research management skills, something that made him a highly valued asset at the Centre. He authored a number of new biographical entries for the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, including on Ronald Cox and Helen Lempriere, and he had more entries in progress when he died.

Above all, Les was an open and kind scholar. His colleagues at ANU have reflected that he was a warm, sunny and positive presence around the corridors of the university. As one of his co-supervisors wrote, everyone admired ‘his remarkable generosity with other students, and his genuine intellectual curiosity across a wide range of fields’. He was a model of the collaborative scholar, co-writing articles with colleagues, including two with Yannick Lageat for *The French Australian Review*. His passing is a loss to scholarship, particularly on the French community in Australia, and also to the historical community as a whole. He will be deeply missed.

University College London



Leslie John Hetherington.