The SECRET life of Harvey E. Gale  
Wollongong's Inter-war Health and Building Inspector

There is, perhaps, more to Harvey Ennis Gale than meets the eye. He was the son of Arthur Percy Gale and May Elizabeth Ennis. His father, A P Gale, was the son of Christopher Parrah Gale (born Cornwall c. 1826) and Mary Hamlyn. At the time of his marriage he was a "joiner" (carpenter) by trade and his bride was the child of a joiner. Father and son-in-law may have worked together. C P Gale married Mary Clark at Manchester in England on 17/4/1852. They emigrated to Australia in the Golden Era in 1855 and C P Gale kept a diary of the voyage which is extant. John Gale, a brother of C P Gale, was already in Australia - having arrived on 24th May 1854 as a Methodist Minister. He then left the Ministry and became a journalist and later a politician while living in Queanbeyan. Three other of the Gale brothers also came to Australia - one of whom also became a farmer on the Clarence.
The family of C P Gale (including Mary and two daughters) first went to Braidwood and then to the Queanbeyan area before moving to the North Coast of N.S.W - where C P Gale died (aged 49) in the wreck of the “Helen McGregor”, as it tried to negotiate the notorious Clarence River Bar during a gale on the 12/3/1875. Eight children including A P Gale (born 1867) survived him. A P Gale, the only surviving son of the late C P Gale, took over the farm known as “Galesville”, at South Arm, Woodford Island, on the Clarence River in Northern NSW. Both C P Gale and Mary Clark could read and write when they arrived in Australia. She was an Anglican; he a Methodist. After the drowning of her husband in 1875, Mary Clark Gale married William Lyon/Lyons, also a farmer of South Arm, Woodford Island. She did so, it has been claimed, in order to ‘preserve respectability’ and because ‘she needed someone to work the farm until A P Gale was old enough to take over his dead father’s farm.

"Fated to working on the family farm, Harvey Ennis Gale’s life, I suspect, would have been a most common one - if the First World War hadn’t intervened to give him the opportunity to at least play truant from the milking. Australia’s great poet, big Les Murray, reckons the only reason so many Australians stupidly enlisted in World War I was to escape the tedium of life on god forsaken near-subsistence back-blocks dairy farms. And I reckon he was probably right. Most such volunteers quickly and rather bitterly learnt that there were unsuspected joys in the boring life of a cow cocky – quiet joys which were infinitely preferable to the mud, disease, pubic lice and horrifying injuries inflicted on them in the trenches of Flanders Field. If they were lucky enough to survive, most young cow cockies shut up about the horrors they had endured in France - only occasionally letting the memories flood back years later over a beer down at the local RSL. Instead, Harvey E. Gale immediately wrote back to his local newspaper, The Daily Examiner (published by Carol Herben IHS Bulletin, July-August 2005 pp. 40-42), declaring that going over the top was “a most thrilling experience – one I shall never forget my whole life.” He sustained serious wounds.

Nonetheless his progress through the ranks was pretty impressive. From enlisting as a Private on October 13, 1915, this thin, small young man was discharged from war service in 1919 holding the rank of Probationary Lieutenant by 1/7/1921 - at least according to his nephew. Some mystery about his exact ranking and how he maintained his military ranking after discharge has proved difficult to disentangle.

One of his abiding interests after World War I, however, seems to have been what is quaintly termed “citizen soldiery”. Harvey E. Gale must surely
have also had a patron. Someone he met (possibly during World War One), it would seem to me, recruited him for higher things than simple soldiery. While he was away at war, his father sold the family farm and set up as a motor mechanic ("Gale and Sons, Maclean Motor Garage") by August 1916. By early 1918, A P Gale was also an auctioneer, commission and land and stock agent of River Street Maclean as well as an Alderman on Maclean Municipal Council. By the 1st October 1918 A P Gale had also purchased the bakery, small goods, confectionery and refreshment rooms of J B Calder. A P Gale was certainly providing his sons with plenty of opportunities to succeed in life. By February 1919, A P Gale had been elected Mayor of Maclean but decided to resign in July 1920 due to the "pressure of private business." During this period he also found time to be President of the Lower Clarence Agricultural Society. During this successful time AP Gale had also been an active Freemason. He is initiated into Masonic Lodge Livingstone No 71 on 23/2/1910 and installed on 9/5/1917. His son Harvey Ennis Gale was initiated into the same Lodge on 8/10/1919. A P Gale was a very handsome man and, according to his nephew, there is a photo of him wearing his fob chain, which holds the Masonic jewel of Past Master of Lodge Livingstone in 1920. Throughout this time, A P Gale was also an ardent worker for the Methodist Church.

His son Harvey managed to marry very well - to Lillian, the youngest daughter of late Dr and Mrs Walter of Brisbane. The wedding was solemnised in the Anglican cathedral at Brisbane by none less than the Bishop of New Guinea. The bridegroom’s gift to the bride was a silver jewel case (Daily Examiner, 28 June 1921). The newspaper report suggests "The future home of Mr and Mrs Gale will be at Maclean." Why then does H E Gale and his wife Lillian and their child, Vesta Elaine, turn up in Wollongong in the early 1920s? Carol Herben, using the comments in the Wollongong obituary of H E Gale, which contains the comment by Mr R B Bell administrator of the City Electricity Department and former Wollongong City Town Clerk, that "the late Harvey Gale came to the Wollongong Council in 1923 as a young man of 27 years with his family."

I suspect, however, Harvey Ennis Gale arrived in early 1922 and I tried to check this through the surviving Council Health Inspector's minute record Books. Sadly the issues for 1922 and 1923 do not seem to exist but by 1924 he is signing each minute record as "Your Obedient Servant, H. E. Gale" "Obedient" he might have been, but Harvey appears to have possessed no formal qualifications for such an elevated and prestigious - and powerful - position as Health (sanitary) and Building Inspector with Wollongong Municipal Council. How then did he get the job? Well if I was writing his
resume, I would have tried to play up the fact that as I’d spent a lot of time cleaning Dad’s Bakery premises in Maclean I certainly knew how to inspect the cleanliness of shops that served foodstuffs. More likely, however, it was either Harvey’s war experience, his Masonic membership, his Dad’s local Government connections, or someone associated with Wollongong Council whom he met during World War I that might have swung the position his way. There were surprisingly large numbers of practising Masons on Wollongong Council during this period and Mayor Norman Smith was, after all, a distinguished returned serviceman who had his position as Mayor kept “open” for the duration of his war service. And Harvey Gale would surely have told the interview panel (if such things then existed) that he was secretary of the “Maclean Welcome Home Committee” for returning soldiers during 1919. At any rate, he scored the job as health Inspector and should then settle into a long period of relative obscurity in the Gong. He decorously waits until 10/8/1926 to affiliate with Masonic Lodge Illawarra No 59 before becoming fully “installed” as a member in 1932. As yet I’ve got not much detail on Harvey Gale after his arrival in the Gong until the day he curiously stops signing himself “Your Obedient Servant” and settles for simply “H E GALE” in his minute books on the 27/8/1929 – near the eve of the Wall Street Crash which would change Wollongong forever.

As Health Inspector, Harvey Gale was responsible for authorizing processions, demonstrations and other celebrations in Wollongong. The minute books show that he would spend most of the early 1930s prosecuting members of the Unemployed Workers Movement for holding non-authorised political demonstrations. Health Inspectors had exceptional powers over ordinary people. They had the power to close down businesses and to prevent people marching up and down the streets and interrupting traffic. With the emergence of the New Guard in Wollongong, unemployed demonstrations became somewhat violent affairs with punch-ups in the street occurring regularly. H E Gale was very conscientious in taking legal action against those who wished to make the hunger and poverty of the unemployed a very visible phenomenon in the streets of Wollongong. And he was not always into just arresting the organisers. On one occasion on the 2/5/1932 he ordered the police to arrest and prosecute 22 individuals including one W. Davies MLA. He did so on the grounds those 22 persons “took part in unauthorised procession in a public street within this municipality and that the said procession did cause interruption to the traffic”. Normally, however, Harvey Gale confined his prosecutions to the usual suspects but even this wasn’t easy and he at one time laments, “I would certainly recommend prosecution if the fines and costs would stand up. But it appears as if we will be put to heavy expenses for little or no result. The problem with
regularly arresting communists like “P [Pat] McHenry and L. [en] Tracey” each week was that there was no way they could the pay fines because they were unemployed and perpetually impecunious.

I had the good fortune as a young man to sit listening to Len Tracey [alias Len Boardman: he’s had to change his name because he’d been blacklisted under the name Tracey] talking politics with my father in Thirroul. Len was the nearest contact I’ve ever had with a militant Industrial Workers of the World (or "Wobbly" as they were nicknamed). I’ve never met anyone with a more passionate hatred of capitalism and who genuinely believed that it was simply immoral for anyone to make a profit out of the labour of others. He once said to me, “Boy, when you’re working for the boss, always remember what Tom Barker used to say: “Fast Workers Die Young”.

And indeed, my own father appeared to have mastered the art of the “smoko” for precisely this purpose. As a serious chain smoker, he had perfected the technique of sitting down to talk as he very patiently rolled a cigarette. This meant that his most intensive work sequence lasted no more than 5 minutes without a break and was followed by a similar 5 minute interval of rolling the next cigarette. As Len Boardman, the old wobbly told me, this effectively reduced working hours by 50%. “No trade union will ever win that for you, boy!”

Today, I always smile when I see large congregations of office workers standing around outside buildings smoking because that carcinogenic practice is not allowed inside. I guess they are probably completely oblivious to the fact that they have been influenced by IWW propaganda. Anyway, I digress, for so busy and visible was Harvey E Gale arresting Len Tracey at the unemployment demos in central Wollongong in the early 1930s that he was regularly seen talking to police and advising them who to arrest. The Sydney Morning Herald mistakenly [perhaps?] refers to him as Detective Inspector Gale on the number of occasions when they report on the actions of the unemployed in Wollongong. And indeed, that little journalistic slip may be the key to H E Gale’s Wollongong career.

Before our security services had been entirely formalised into the state apparatus in the 1940s, certain individuals with military connections acted as a sort of secret police force and provided “intelligence” to the authorities regarding the potential for particular individuals to upset the status quo. To date I have not yet been able to uncover any hard documentary evidence of this possible field of employment for H E Gale. But he has all the hallmarks of such a person. His Masonic membership, his membership of Wollongong Rotary from 1926, his involvement with policing social discontent in Wollongong, the fact that his father A P Gale worked for AMP Head Office in Sydney until 1930
after leaving the Clarence in the early 1920s. Here he could have been in contact with Major Jack Scott who was a very big player in counter-revolutionary espionage and in the New Guard. Accept for identifying, Dr Noel Kirkwood as Locality Commander of the Wollongong New Guard, and occasional mentions of Dr H H Lee and Mr J P Caddy from MM, the Wollongong Branch of the organization is very poorly documented in surviving records. The Thirroul/Austinmer Branch was much more indiscreet and outed themselves fully when every member signed a letter of congratulation to Captain De Groot. But it is certainly not impossible that H E Gale was a member of the Wollongong Branch of the New Guard during the life of the movement in this district. It was of great interest to see that one L. Gale [phone number MG 288] was Deputy Intelligence Officer with the B3 Division of the New Guard under C N Wood, when I inspected the De Groot Papers (Volume 8) at the Mitchell Library – for Harvey E Gale did have a brother named Leslie Herbert Robert Gale, who seemed to have divided his time between Barraba and Sydney but I am not yet certain that Leslie Gale was the “L. Gale” mentioned in the New Guard archive.

But despite the very strong possibility of a darker side to the political activities of this humble Wollongong Health and Building Inspector, he seems to have also possessed a genuine commitment to good works and the creation of public facilities. On the more parochial level he donated three polished maple choir screens to the new extension of Wollongong Methodist Church in Crown Street in memory of his late father A P Gale. He also, as Carol Herben suggests, appears to have designed the beautiful and distinctive stone-walling which once graced the picturesque Wollongong Rest Park (yet another treasured public space destroyed) and still forms part of the Picnic Shelters in Lang Park. These later items have been lately under threat because the rich who live in the glass castles nearby don’t like the amount of sex and drugs which apparently take place within the shelters. But H E Gale’s lasting monument and memorial to his belief in grand public facilities for the masses – rather than private swimming pools for the rich - is the monumental North Beach Bathers pavilion. It is a tribute to people like Ben Meek, Genelle Thomson, Carol Herben, Anne Wood, Jim Piper, Trevor Mott, Meredith Hutton and Paul Matters that the building has been allowed to survive long enough to be listed as State Significant. For me, however, it is not just a monument to beach culture, but to a seemingly unqualified conservative local official who, although the unemployed saw him as a local fascist and a fitting accomplice to the Mussolini of the South Coast, Mayor W L Howarth (1930-1932) was someone who was probably not fully enamoured with the antics of the conservative but hot headed right-wingers in the Wollongong New Guard in the early 1930s. He seems to me a representative of those more decorous Old Guard patriotic conservatives who were concerned
to make sure that should there be a crisis of law and order within Australia then, waiting in the background, would at the very least be a body of public men with the military and organisational skills to keep the masses calm and ensure that the trains still ran on time. Harvey Gale’s North beach Pavilion is a potent reminder that there was a time when even the conservative right believed in the intrinsic good of Monumental Public Works - structures which had been skilfully and attractively designed to provide public amenity rather than private profit. Such works were the oil which once greased the rough edges of social cohesion throughout Australia. But sadly, Harvey Gale’s patriotic love of King and Country, despite getting him an MBE for his organization of the Wollongong’s sesquicentenary celebrations in 1938, got the better of him in the end.

He rose to high rank during the Second World War and was posted to Japan in March 1947 as Lieutenant-Colonel Administrator for the families and dependents of Australian service members of the 36 units and services in Etajima under Lt General H C H Robertson. I am of the view that there is perhaps not only more to Harvey Gale’s life than meets the eye in the historic record left in Wollongong, but that even his death in Japan seems extremely mysterious. Double barrel shot guns do not often discharge at close range by simple accident. Even when out hunting, the weapon is usually “cracked open” and the official verdict that “There is no evidence Lt. Col. Gale met his death other than by accident” with its final sentence - “there is no evidence of negligence by any person” - sounds, to the conspiratorial at least, suspiciously like secret service code. If so, it’s a sad ending for a public spirited man. If so, perhaps the Mayor of Etajima - a humble local Government man himself - deserves the last words on Harvey E. Gale: “We grieve deeply at the sad loss of Colonel Gale, a tragedy so unexpected by all. Whenever I met him, or had an interview with him, he was a gentleman amiable in spirit, kindly, understanding and refreshing... On every occasion when I requested his assistance on behalf of the citizens of Etajima, he never once failed to be considerate and generous... It was with the Colonel’s support that the present Etajima Middle School was completed... I can even now feel vividly in my own hands the warmth of his handshake, which he invariably bestowed, and in my own ideas, the understanding and compassion in his. Here in this tribute I, as representative of the people of Etajima, record our words of condolence and sympathy. Muratani Guchi Mayor of Etajama 2nd March 1948.

And so ended the life of Harvey Ennis Gale. But was it the death of an early Australian exponent of counter-espionage or simply that of a Local Government man to the very end? Joseph Davis.