

CUNNINGHAM COLLECTION

Finding Aid – Container List

COLLECTION SUMMARY

Collection title: Cunningham Collection

Dates: 1913 – circa 1990

Creator/Collector: Kenneth Stewart Cunningham and Lesley Cunningham.

Acquisition information: Gift of Lesley Cunningham, 2012-13.

Accruals: No accruals are expected.

Biographical Information

Dr Kenneth Stewart Cunningham (1890 – 1976) was a leading Australian educationalist and educational researcher who was instrumental in the creation and development of the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER). Cunningham initially wanted to study medicine, but due to the prohibitive cost, he undertook studies in teaching instead. His first employment as a school teacher came after only six months' training, when he became responsible for five remote Victorian primary schools in 1909. In 1912, he won a studentship to study at the Melbourne Training College (MTC) – known as the Melbourne Teachers' College from 1913. Under the influence and guidance of the principal, Dr John Smyth, Cunningham transferred to secondary teaching in his second year at MTC.

In August 1915, Cunningham enlisted in the army, the Australian Imperial Force. His interest in medicine led to him applying to be trained with the Australian Army Medical Corps. In April 1916, they left for the Western Front where he served as a stretcher-bearer with the 5th Field Ambulance. His wartime diaries, in which he expresses his belief in the futility of war, are a valuable record of conditions in the trenches. Cunningham was commissioned on 23 November 1918, and he returned to Australia the following May.

Cunningham resumed his studies, completing a Bachelor degree (1919), Masters degree and Diploma of Education with first class honours (1922) at Melbourne University. During this period, Cunningham also married a fellow schoolteacher, Ella Myrtle Tuck, in 1920 (they eventually had three children – Marjorie, Lesley, and Kenneth). Smyth offered Cunningham a lectureship at both the college and the university, where he was able to teach courses in educational psychology and experimental education. During the 1920s, Cunningham directed the work of a 'psychological laboratory' at MTC, where he devised intelligence tests which could be used in local schools and conducted clinical work with children considered to have a low aptitude for academic study.

After being awarded a Macy's scholarship, Cunningham undertook continuing studies at the Teacher's college, Columbia University, New York from 1925-27, where he wrote his doctoral thesis (1926) – published as *The Measurement of Early Levels of Intelligence* (New York, 1927). He took advantage of his time in New York to network and gain support for the establishment of an Australian educational research organisation. Consequently, the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) was founded in 1930 with a grant from the philanthropic Carnegie Corporation, New York. Dr Cunningham became the ACER's first Executive Officer, later to be known as the Director. He continued in the role until his retirement in 1954, whilst also serving on various committees and boards. The ACER has since grown into one of the world's leading educational research bodies, with offices in Dubai, Jakarta, Kuala Lumpur, London, New Delhi, as well as Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide, Perth and Brisbane.

After his retirement, Dr Cunningham took on a role with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as a consultant on teacher-training in Indonesia in 1955-56, and lived there for a few years with his wife, Ella. He continued to publish widely, and in 1965 Monash University had named a chair of education after him. Dr Cunningham remained in good health until a stroke left him partially paralysed in 1973. He died on 27 June 1976, a little over a year after his wife Ella's death on the 27th of April 1975.

References

- Williams, Brian. (1993). Cunningham, Kenneth Stewart (1890-1976). *Australian Dictionary of Biography*. <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/cunningham-kenneth-stewart-9878>
- The Ryerson Index. (n.d.). The Ryerson Index to death notices and obituaries in Australian newspapers. Search for Notices. <http://ryersonindex.org/search.php>

Custodial history: After his death in 1976, Dr Cunningham's daughter, Lesley Cunningham, became the custodian of her father's personal papers. The National Archives of Australia acquired selected papers of Dr Cunningham's. The remainder of the material remained in his daughter Lesley's possession. Much of this material was donated to the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) by Lesley Cunningham a few years before her death. The donation was offered to Lance Deveson, ACER Library Manager, during a telephone conversation. Deveson had been visiting Lesley Cunningham regularly, which led to helping her sort out her massive collection of personal effects. Following the donation offer, Deveson was accompanied by ACER's Records Manager, Simon Fraser, to pick up the material which was accepted through a verbal agreement. A formal donation agreement was never drawn up.

Language: Most collection materials are in English; a few items, from Dr Cunningham's time working for UNESCO in Indonesia, include some words in Indonesian.

Repository: Cunningham Library, the Australian Council for Educational Research, Camberwell, Victoria, Australia.

Processed by: Christiane M J Hennequin, 2018 - 2020.

Scope: The collection contains papers, documents, photographs, films, and ephemera pertaining to Dr Cunningham's personal and professional life, as well as a few items from his wife, Ella, and daughter, Lesley. The collections items range from personal and professional correspondence and records (such as memberships to various organisations), a large album of French photographic postcards from the WWI period, several passports (including one United Nations diplomatic passport), a selection of pocket diaries, travel diaries, address books, notebooks, notes/memos, some publications (including Dr Cunningham's Columbia University thesis), a few photographs and birthday cards, ten reels of 16mm film, and various miscellaneous ephemera.

Arrangement: The collection was donated to ACER representatives over a period of time, with most items being placed into envelopes, manila folders, and boxes in an ad hoc manner. Consequently, original order has probably been disturbed in most instances, and to varying degrees. Occasional photographs were found amongst correspondence and/or ephemera.

Conservation notes: Two of the passports exhibit a sticky but immovable substance on their covers. Conservation treated is required.

Additional notes: The archival storage boxes are of a low grade 'acid-free' quality, suitable for records management and not for preservation of heritage materials. Transfer to acid-free, preservation-grade archival storage boxes and inert polypropylene plastic sleeves is recommended, and may be possible in due course. The large album of photographic postcards has been partially burnt, and therefore requires careful handling.

RIGHTS AND ACCESS

General notes: At the time of preparing this finding aid, access is by request, and use of material is subject to existing copyright status.

Access: Collection is open for research onsite, by appointment, at the Cunningham Library.

Physical access: Access to the 16mm films requires environmental controls due to the presence of vinegar syndrome (chemical deterioration of the film base). As this is an OH&S issue, and for preservation reasons, it is recommended that the digitised copies of the films are accessed.

Technical access: Original 16mm films will require a projector and screen for playback. Digitised 16mm films (MP4 files USB memory stick) will require a computer for playback.

Publication rights: Copyright restrictions apply. In the absence of a formal donation agreement, the Australian Council for Educational Research does not hold copyright on this collection.

COLLECTION INVENTORY

Container

Box 9506 – Notebooks, professional and personal correspondence, memos and notes, published works, photographs, birth and marriage certificates.