

Canberra history illustrated for children

By Naomi Fallon

A DESIRE to engage children in history led a local storyteller to produce two books about Canberra.

Elizabeth Burness used an ACT Heritage grant to research, write and illustrate two volumes of *Pages of Early Canberra History*, which were launched yesterday at the Hall School Museum.

The books, which contain 20 local

stories, will be delivered to all ACT government primary and secondary school libraries in the lead up to the Centenary of Canberra.

As a former teacher, Ms Burness said she was passionate about sharing the past with children.

"I just knew kids were interested in history, but you can't give them too much," she said.

"I think it's getting harder to engage them and convince them that the past

was interesting. These stories have been deliberately written to make history interesting."

Ms Burness used Canberra pioneer Julia Webb – or Judy the Great – as inspiration for her stories.

All of the tales detailing the early days of Canberra are written from the perspective of Ms Webb.

"I wrote it in her voice because I tried to get across to the children what life was like then," Ms Burness said.

"So many of these kids don't have grannies to tell them stories, so Judy the Great has really turned into everyone's granny."

Ms Burness said she intentionally made the stories "a bit gritty" in an attempt to appeal to the children of today.

"One of the stories is about the banshee and how frightening it was hearing weird things in the night," she said.

"I've also got one on child labour, what kids did for fun and one about the Aboriginal people who were in the area at the time."

Member for Ginninderra Mary Porter said the books were fascinating.

"These books come at an important time for Canberra as we advance towards our centenary ... knowing and understanding our past helps us mark out our future," she said.



Elizabeth Burness has produced two books about Canberra's history titled *Pages of Early Canberra History*. She is pictured at the old Hall Public School, which features in the books. Picture: Elesa Lee