

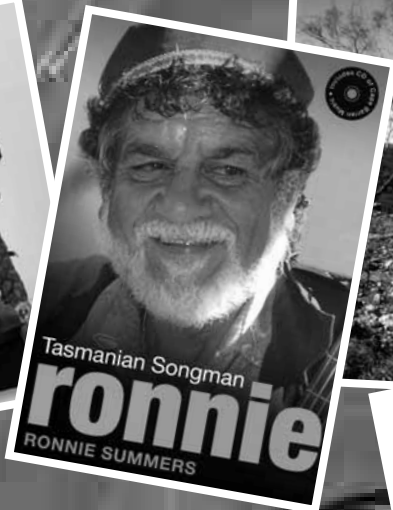
Islands of Memory *Revisited*

Oral History Association of Australia



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Oral History Association of Australia Journal

Number 32, 2010

Islands of Memory - Revisited

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Cover & content design, layout: Clare Bradley @
Charlie Bravo Design

Printed by Monotone Art Printers, Hobart.

ISSN: 0158 7366

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Front cover images: Courtesy of Fabri Blacklock, Magabala Books, Margaret Leask, Judy Lovell, Christine Guster

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OHAA Journal:

The OHAA Journal is published annually. It is a part refereed Journal. Its content reflects the diversity and vitality of oral history practice in Australia, and includes contributions from overseas.

The editor of the Journal welcomes submissions for possible publication in the 2011 issue, No. 33.

Deadlines: refereed articles 31 December 2010, non-refereed submissions 1 April 2011.

The call for papers is published on the OHAA website: <http://www.ohaa.net.au/>

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Oral History Association of Australia

Journal Number 32, 2010

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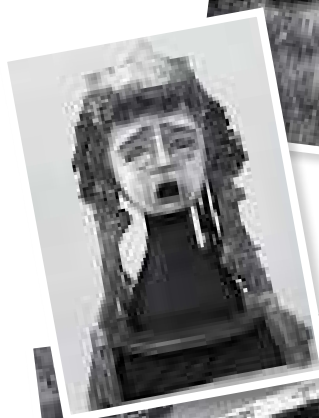
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Editor's notes

In the second issue of the Oral History of Australia Journal entitled '*Islands of Memory*', I have added '*Revisited*' to the title, not just as an afterthought, but to reflect the gift the contributions in this issue have given us by making it possible to revisit, not just a great conference (thanks again, Jill and team, and the hospitable city of Launceston), but those diverse islands of memory the contributors to this issue have carefully mapped for us.

Editing this journal has been a voyage of discovery: as the contributions arrived in my letterbox or email inbox each one was eagerly opened and pored over: new parts of the universe of experience, thought, feeling and memory were revealed to me, and those with which I was familiar were further illuminated, often in surprising ways. I hope that this will be your experience, as you read this issue of the Journal. I marvel at the range of areas and topics covered, from theoretical considerations of the review process (two peer-reviewed articles are among the contributions) and the uses of oral history in fiction to the memories of a first love, from the divide between official and personal memories of war to the embedding in the public record of the lives and achievements, memories and views of architects, actors, indigenous families, foresters, soldiers, singers, educators and unemployed youth. We dip into the history of the Brisbane Ekka, of the Remote Indigenous Media Association, the Oral History Archives of NIDA and explore the roles of senior public servants, through the *Queensland Speaks* project. A range of recently published books and a radio program are reviewed, news of branch activities shared and Jill Cassidy, our president, reports recent OHAA initiatives and achievements.

This issue also celebrates the bestowing of life memberships upon Bill Bunbury, Janis Wilton and Suzanne Mulligan, and the awarding of the Hazel de Berg Award to Janis Wilton: all tireless and respected oral historians of considerable standing and achievement. Sadly it bids adieu to Molly Lukis and Jenny Hudson whose contributions to the field of oral history are appreciated.

There have been times during the editing process when I was not certain I would ever successfully complete the task, involved as I was simultaneously in navigating severe health crises in our family and holding down

a full time job, but I kept my eye on the goal posts and kept on, sometimes burning the midnight oil, sometimes frustrated at the thousand and one details that needed to be checked and rechecked, but always with the calm and supportive presence of our stalwart president to encourage me. I thank Jill for filling in details for me, and offering constant assistance. I thank Jan Gothard for answering my numerous queries and Francis Good for his excellent support, and I thank my husband David for painstakingly checking obscure spelling and a million other details when I had run out of time, and, occasionally, standing in for me and contacting contributors on my behalf, to clarify issues with them. I thank OHAA members for waiting so patiently to receive this volume of the Journal.

I came to oral history in its academic setting late in my career: my previous experience of formal history had consisted of the usual romp through the Tudors and Stuarts in High School in the early sixties, plus a year of Greek and Roman history in University, relinquished in favour of philosophy and medieval literature, but as a writer I have been collecting and transcribing life histories and recording (either electronically or in my imagination) the human voice for decades. Most of my published work has been oral history based and radio remains my preferred medium: I wrote in the preface to my first collection of poetry, "I am in love with the rhythms of speech." Oral history, more than many other branches of the discipline, is able to celebrate the diversity of human experience in such an immediate and captivating way. 'No man is an island' John Donne wrote, and as we visit and revisit these islands of memory, discovering shared or singular experiences, pondering unanswered questions, rehearsing doubts, difficulties and issues of epistemology and historiography, of craft and intention, we are enriched by the labours of our fellow historians. I hope you enjoy reading Volume 32 of the Oral History Association of Australia as much as I have enjoyed editing it.

Dr Terry Whitebeach
Orielton, Tasmania
September 2010

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Permission to speak, sir – official history, whose reality?

Ben Morris

Introduction

The issue of soldiers' recollections differing from what has become the 'official history' of war is an issue which keeps surfacing within the veteran community. When Paul Ham's book, *Vietnam: the Australian War*,¹ appeared in the bookshops, one of my platoon rang me saying that the author had the story of one of our platoon members wrong. My informant's recollections, oral histories from his mates, and other documents disagreed with Ham's account. This soldier wanted the error corrected - he wanted the record set straight.²

Are the differences between soldiers' stories of their Vietnam service and what is written in the official histories significant?

I am collecting the oral histories of a platoon of soldiers with whom I served in the war in Vietnam in 1967. A number of issues for oral historians have presented themselves during the course of my research. They are:

- the role and reliability of memory
- potential barriers to remembering and discussing traumatic events
- the part played by the participant interviewer

Most nations weave myths and legends around their warriors. It is my thesis that many events and experiences which do not support the legend are ignored or sanitised in the official military histories because they are written through this heroic lens. In Australia, war veterans see themselves as part of the ANZAC tradition.³ (ANZAC stands for Australian and New Zealand Army Corps.) Australia and New Zealand have close defence ties and have frequently fought together in wars throughout the last century. The ANZAC legend portrays patriotic soldiers marching off to war, fighting heroically (whether the battle is won or lost) then returning to a hero's welcome and living happily ever afterwards, unscarred by their battlefield experiences.

1. Memory

As one of my interviewees has put it: 'Thirty-seven years. All of that should be fading, you know. I can't remember what bars I drank in in Australia thirty-seven years ago but I remember what I'd done in November 1967 and other times because that's why probably we're on TPI, because all of those memories keep coming back'.⁴ (A TPI is a military pension for totally and permanently incapacitated veterans.) 'They're not allowed to fade, like a lot of the other memories. The pictures keep coming back, maybe in some people maybe once a week; some people maybe once a month. But quite regularly, so they don't fade. They don't get dim'.⁵ But after 37 years – I aah... I still remember the pit, the shape of that track, the contour of it. It went round like that, like a kind of a question mark, and to there, there was another little entry there too. There was two entries into that track. Just minute things'.⁶

1a. Memory for history. Does it work?

Memory is the foundation stone of oral history - without memory there is no oral history. Theories about memory open up debate among historians, many of whom are wary of it⁷ and prefer the primacy of archival research and documentary sources.⁸ As Alessandro Portelli has put it, they accept the dominant prejudice which sees factual credibility as the monopoly of written documents,⁹ refusing even to countenance that documents, like oral histories, are 'sometimes incomplete, inaccurate and deceiving'.¹⁰

Medical experts claim that memory deteriorates very quickly, and, in a very short timeframe, we have only thirty percent of memory left.¹¹ Nonetheless, research shows that after age thirty while we struggle to manage the storage of short-term memory, it seems as though long-term memory is enhanced.¹² The soldier whose voice we have just heard claims that he can remember some events from over forty years ago very clearly.¹³ Other eyewitnesses to the same events corroborate his narrative. There have been papers

written about how traumatic memory is ‘special’,¹⁴ and oral historians talk about memory being ‘composed’.¹⁵ Memory involves viewing past events with today’s prejudices, beliefs and knowledge¹⁶ and the human need to justify one’s place in history.¹⁷ Veterans tend to use the following filters:

- rules and regulations;
- rituals;
- traditions;
- story telling.¹⁸

When taking oral histories, the interviewer has to be alert to the possibility of the interviewee reconstructing events¹⁹ with the benefit of hindsight, as it could involve them in explaining events rather than describing them.²⁰ In this case, it would mean interviewees reconstructing their personal history to justify their opinion of the Vietnam war, either now or in the past.

Alistair Thomson, in his work on memory, suggests that veterans’ memories are composed and that they vary for different audiences.²¹ He believes that the construction of memory revolves around the interaction of interviewer and interviewee, public legend and individual memories, past and present, and memory and identity.²²

When veterans describe their battlefield experiences they are dealing with traumatic memories. I believe that traumatic memories are etched rather than composed. I say this because the words of their narratives are authentic, simple, descriptive and not embellished. It is as if the adrenalin around the event has etched the details on the soul rather than it being composed of remembered events that have been rummaged through to fit a current world-view or audience.

As one of my soldiers commented: ‘But there’s other things you remember, and they can be minute detail where no one else would remember, but to you they’re actually in your memory and you’ll take them to the grave with you. Then there might be something else that someone else thinks is quite important and you’ve completely forgotten about it. That can happen. It’s unpredictable’.²³

Individuals exposed to the same traumatic event do not necessarily assign the same meanings to it.²⁴ This soldier acknowledges that what is important to him may not have been important to others.²⁵ I have taken thirty oral histories and the one thing of which I am sure is that traumatic memory causes pain. I have sat through the long silences where I could see the narrator struggling with his memory. The crux of the matter is that there are too many facts to deal with

and the individual veteran sheds information which is not necessary to him. This is why there are variations between oral histories and why there is a difference between veterans’ stories and the official histories.

1b. Traumatic memory markers

My studies suggest that there are several major reasons why events such as the five which take up a large part of my oral histories are imprinted on the soldiers’ memories:

- They were in danger of dying;
- Their good comrade died;
- Their actions offended a principle they had been taught at home or school or in Army training;
- They did something that offended their belief system;
- An injustice occurred.

All of these factors may have affected the soldier’s memory; a number of them may have worked in concert, or one in isolation.

1c. Traumatic events

The five incidents which resonated with my interviewees were:

1. An ambush of some bamboo pickers, resulting in the wounding and the death of civilians;
2. A suicide attempt by a platoon member;
3. A mine incident resulting in the death of two soldiers;
4. The claymore ambush death of two soldiers and wounding of seven soldiers;
5. The shooting of a friendly sentry.

I will examine one incident that presents a flavour of the issues that arose.

1d. Relating memory markers to a traumatic event

An ambush of some Bamboo Pickers.

On the 23rd October 1967, a number of civilians going about their daily business walked into an ambush.²⁶ This incident played havoc with those who were in the group, which fired on and killed the unfortunate civilians when they entered the target area.²⁷ Analysing the oral histories of the soldiers involved in this incident, there are elements of three of the Traumatic Memory Markers mentioned above. Their Army training did not help their actions; it failed them at this point. This incident offended their belief system that you do not kill children and you do not kill civilians. One soldier is certain that he killed two young girls that day, as he claims their wounds were consistent with the ballistics of his weapon.²⁸ He did not need a pathologist’s report, he said, he was so sure of the results.

The man who triggered the ambush and opened fire on the civilians had died before I could interview him.

I was able to speak to his widow who gave details of this incident. When I asked her if her husband had told her about it, she replied that she had learned about what happened by listening to him talking in his sleep. Her knowledge of the incident was accurate and quite detailed.

One veteran told me that after the incident the scene had been tidied up - that our Air Force had dumped the bodies in the South China Sea.²⁹ Whilst I cannot now disprove this story, it is contrary to what I believed had happened. It may have been the start of a myth, which I think this soldier needed to believe to put a tidy end to a nasty part of his life on the battlefield.

One soldier who was not present at the ambush talked at length about why the civilians should not have entered the area, and suggested that their presence meant they were obviously enemy.³⁰ The platoon had done the right thing, he declared, and it was merely an unfortunate accident. His belief that the platoon had done the right thing has not, however, removed from this veteran's memory the whimpering of the women and children who were caught in the ambush.

This incident does not appear in the official history or the battalion history, but is mentioned in two books, which talked about the enormous disruption to the economy and lives of the local people caused by the Australian Army's presence in the area.³¹ Whilst these books do not identify the platoon involved, the author of these books has made contact with one of the platoon and suggested to him that this incident was a war crime, which might be part of the reason members of the platoon have agreed to give their version of events – to set the record straight.³²

2. Barriers to remembering and discussing traumatic events

To the soldier who made the comments above and many like him, his memories take him to real places, where he re-experiences real events, emotions and sensations from his past, in the present day.³³ During my research, I have come to believe that under certain circumstances permission needs to be granted for the narrator to access these memories – particularly memories that do not accord with the popular memory of the war.³⁴ These events generate terrible pain and guilt and are suppressed until permission is granted for them to be explored.³⁵ Military institutions by their nature groom soldiers not to discuss their feelings or negative experiences, so when it comes to talking about 'family secrets' that may damage the legends built around the country's warriors, veterans need to grant or be granted permission to bypass this grooming.³⁶

Before starting my interviews, interviewees often asked what I wanted to know, so some pre-interview time was spent clarifying the fact that I wanted their

version of events, not what they thought would correlate with mine.³⁷ Here I had to make it clear that they had permission to tell their stories, warts and all, that I was conducting research, not a witch-hunt of past events. It was as though we had dropped back into our relationship on the battlefield where I was the boss and a representative of the Army's authority. I had to get past the grooming that the Army did in its training, with its implicit sanction around talking about certain issues, feelings and personal observations. I also had to revisit the consent form and its purpose to be sure that interviewees understood that it gave the Australian War Memorial and interested researchers access to their taped interviews. Again, as a participant interviewer I have to ask how much of their story became mine, or mine theirs.

Before each interview, I alerted the interviewee to the fact that the interview might give rise to feelings that could require professional help.³⁸ There was also a need to reassure wives and partners, because they each knew the angst that talking about Vietnam sometimes caused their partners.

The chronological approach was used to work through the veteran's memory of his Army service.³⁹ This allowed him to walk slowly through the events of the past rather than going straight to his time in Vietnam. This approach gives the interviewer and the narrator time to accept each other before discussing traumatic events. It created a safe environment for the men once they realized that I was no longer a representative of the Army, but someone interested in their story and that of the platoon.

3. Participant interviewer

My dual role as participant in the events and taker of the oral histories has to be acknowledged and questions asked as to whether my position vis-à-vis the interviewees, both in Vietnam (where I was an officer, a non-drinker, and their boss) and now (where I am closer to some of them than to my siblings) has affected the process.⁴⁰ This dual role suggests that I may not be an unbiased investigator. As Alessandro Portelli says, 'oral history is not just a collection of stories, but also their interpretation and representation'.⁴¹ On the other hand, perhaps a narrative recorded by a participant in the events may produce a more accurate interpretation than the official, battalion, or a popular history of those times because of his knowledge of the events. The participant interviewer can also signify to a veteran that he has permission to talk about the events of the battlefield because of his previous position, his questions and his demeanour. His questions signify that a particular subject is on the table for discussion. This relationship, which still exists between me and each

of the men I have interviewed, may influence their remembering.⁴² Some of them thought I saw things which I did not or that I had certain knowledge which I did not. It is useful to understand that in my platoon I was expected to know what my men were doing and was punished if I did not, so I created the illusion that I was on top of everything that was occurring. These men had ideas about me, I had opinions about them, and possibly, about both the collection process and other interviewees' participation. In collecting data the relationship, perceived attitude, bearing and questions I asked have, I am sure, affected the final result.

In my research, I have found that the differences between the official history and the veterans' oral histories are not errors in memory or deceptions.⁴³ Rather, they are the result of the historian's starting point. By starting with the official history and triangulating back to the commander's diary and the war archives, one story emerges; whilst starting with the veterans' oral histories and comparing them with the commander's diary and the war archives reveals a different account of the same events.

Conclusion

These oral histories, whilst in the most part agreeing with the facts recorded in the documents on which the official history of this war are based, provide a 'flesh and blood' recollection of life in a war zone, and recount a number of incidents which have been left out completely, incompletely recorded, or wrongly recorded in the official history. They have led me to surmise that the official version of events may have omitted soldiers' experience that could be seen as tarnishing the image of the glorious warriors of our national myths.

Veterans need to have permission to talk about what they saw on the battlefield. Often the official histories and the popular memory, along with their Army training, deny them this permission.

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³ *Ibid.*, pp. 7-8 describes how the First World War veterans saw themselves part of the legend.

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²⁴ Robert Grant, *The Way of the Wound: A Spirituality of Trauma and Transformation*, Robert Grant, PO Box 18761, Oakland, California 94619, 1996, p. 22.

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²⁸ Name withheld, interview by author, tape and transcript held by author, 18/04/07.

²⁹ Name withheld, interview by author, tape and transcript held by author, 26/04/07.

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³² Paul King, interview by author, tape and transcript held by author, 26/04/07.

³³ Refers to audio above: see endnotes 4, 5, 6, & 13.

³⁴ Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (eds), *The Oral History Reader*, p 212; and Alessandro Portelli, *The Battle of Valle Giulia: Oral History and the Art of Dialogue*, University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, Wisconsin, pp.10-11.

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³⁶ Mike Towers, *A Jungle Circus: Memories of Vietnam*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, NSW., 1999, p. 32.

³⁷ Alistair Thomson, *ANZAC Memories*, p. 236; see also Alessandro Portelli, *The Battle of Valle Giulia*, p. 9.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.237: the therapeutic nature of veterans' oral histories is discussed. My research has required ethics clearance before commencement. Consent and medical support was discussed with each interviewee.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 239.

⁴⁰ Alessandro Portelli, *The Battle of Valle Giulia*, p.9.

⁴¹ Alessandro Portelli, *The order has been carried out: History, Memory and Meaning of a Nazi Massacre in Rome*, Palgrave MacMillan, Hampshire, England RG21 6XS, 2007, p. 19.

⁴² Alistair Thomson, *ANZAC Memories*: Appendix 1 goes into oral relationship in some depth, pp. 229-234.

⁴³ Paul Thompson, *Voice of the Past*, 2nd ed., Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1988, p. 273.

Remote Indigenous Media Association (RIMA) Oral History Project

Christine Guster

Abstract

From the early days of remote community radio, in the late 1970s, Australia's remote Indigenous communities, personnel from government bodies and the audio-visual media industries, have come together to embrace satellite technology. While this new technology facilitates much-needed communications into the most remote regions of Australia, it also presents an ongoing challenge to Indigenous communities in their efforts to retain and promote their cultural traditions, languages and methods of storytelling.

The Remote Indigenous Media Association Oral History Project is a project within the National Film and Sound Archive's (NFSA) Oral History Program. In collaboration with the work of the NFSA's Indigenous Collections Branch, the focus of the project is to record the stories and historical voices of the people and pioneers associated with the history of Indigenous media in the remote regions of Australia.

Key to media associations:

CAAMA - Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association, Alice Springs, Northern Territory.

WMA - Warlpiri Media Association, Yuendumu, Northern Territory.

EVTV - Ernabella Video Television, Ernabella, South Australia.

PY MEDIA - (previously EVTV), Ernabella, South Australia.

TEABBA – Top End Aboriginal Bush Broadcasters Association, Darwin, Northern Territory.

NGAANYATJARRA MEDIA, Gibson and Great Victorian Deserts, Western Australia.

PAKAM - Pilbara and Kimberley Aboriginal Media Association, Broome, Western Australia.

Papunya, situated 250 kilometres north west of Alice Springs in Central Australia, was a federal government settlement¹ for the Indigenous people of Australia's central western desert region. The settlement was established in 1959 and administered by non-Indigenous government personnel. The aerial

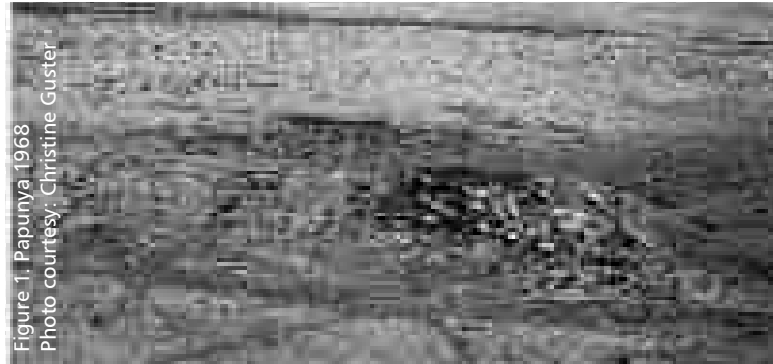


Figure 1. Papunya 1968
Photo courtesy: Christine Guster

photograph (Figure 1) was taken while I was living and working as a nurse there in 1968. At that time, the local Aboriginal population lived in traditional humpy² shelters, and followed their ancient laws, culture, languages, and traditions. Other than visits by the Royal Flying Doctor Service, the weekly mail plane and a supply truck, all of which turned up only when the weather or the condition of dirt roads permitted, desert communities like Papunya received few visits from non-Indigenous people.

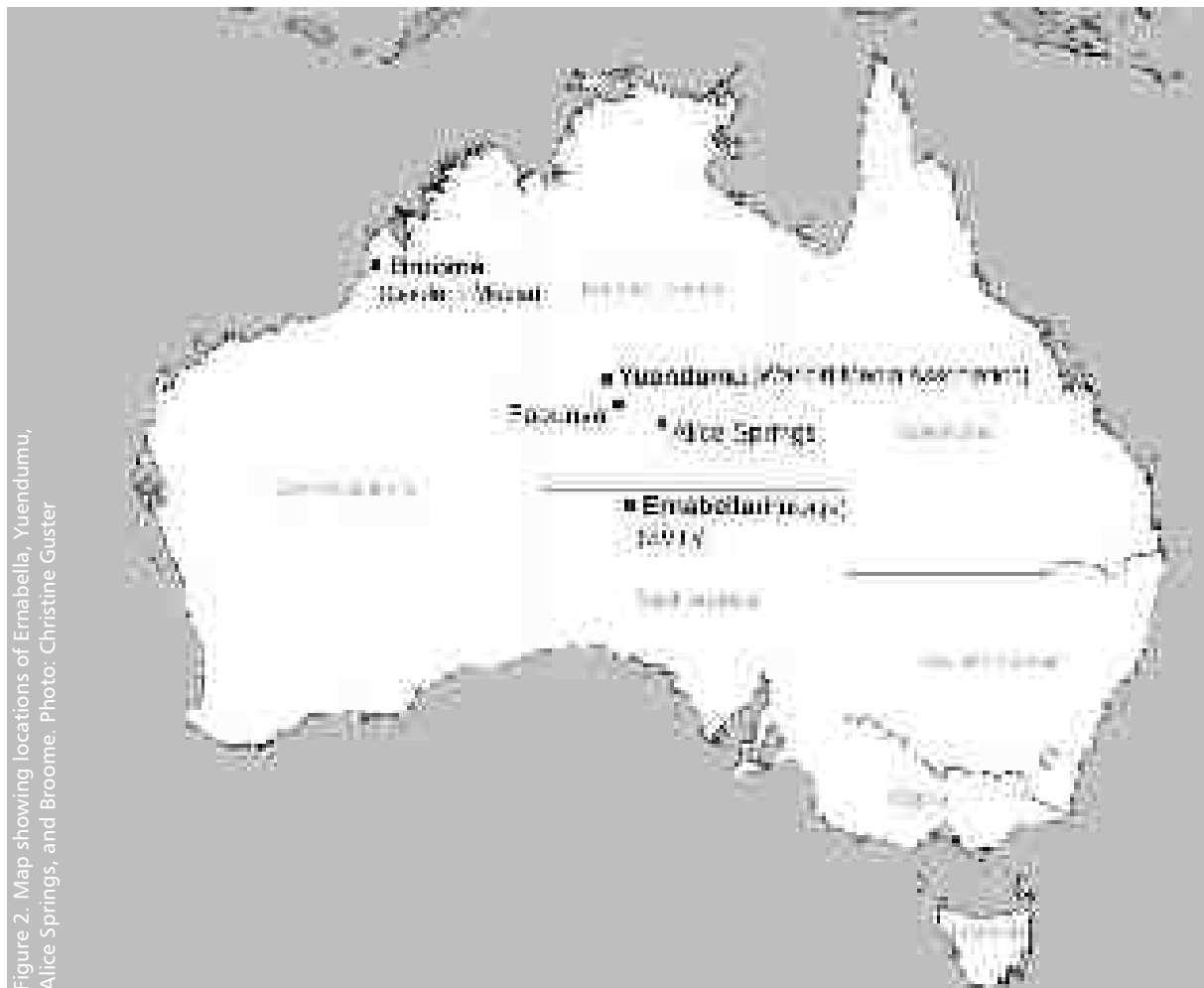
Talk of something called a 'satellite'

The idea of satellite technology was introduced to such areas in the late 1970s, albeit in a rather crude form. In an oral history interview conducted by author Dr. Wendy Bell in 2008, Philip Batty,³ a teacher at Papunya, who later went on to become a pioneer of remote Indigenous media in central Australia, made the following observation about a visit to the settlement by government officials in 1978.

I heard about the development of a domestic satellite probably --- In fact it was before I had anything to do with CAAMA [Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association].

I remember when I was at Papunya in about 1978-79, a delegation from the federal government, the Department of Communication I think it was, came out to Papunya on a fact finding tour as they called it, through remote communities in Australia... [they] were asking people about their views on a national satellite and what sort of things they wanted from

Figure 2. Map showing locations of Ernabella, Yuendumu, Alice Springs, and Broome. Photo: Christine Guster



it. And I remember strolling up to this meeting that was being held under a gum tree in Papunya with Aboriginal people sitting around with very little understanding of what was going on. Very little English for a start. And these bureaucrats from Canberra blabbing on with all this technical jargon about a national satellite...I mean most of the white people could barely understand what it was about, let alone the Aboriginal people. I remember thinking then what a complete absurd situation. They were asking Aboriginal people what they wanted out of this satellite service.⁴

For the people living in communities such as Papunya there was a very real fear about the 'coming of the satellite,' as told by Dr. Wendy Bell in her 2008 publication: *A Remote Possibility: The Battle for Imparja*:

The satellite threatened the very isolation that had helped to preserve what remained of traditional language and culture.... There were even fears that the satellite might be a threat to Aboriginal Law with the 'possibility, however remote, that satellite cameras could spy on men's business in the remote desert', watch initiations or zone in on sacred sites.⁵

There was also a major concern in these communities about the sort of western style programming the new satellite technology would bring, such as soap operas, dramas, sitcoms, violent movies and of course

advertising. Such programs would present a way of storytelling very different from that handed down by Indigenous elders throughout the generations. What impact could these new images and storylines have on people in these remote communities?

During 1982 - 83 (six years after Philip Batty's observations at Papunya), the Indigenous communities in Central Australia, namely Ernabella in remote South Australia and Yuendumu in the Northern Territory (see map above), set up their individual television production units using domestic video equipment to record footage of their individual community daily activities and events. The footage, shot mostly in local language by Indigenous school children and adults, was copied onto VHS tapes and stored in cupboards and kept for screening to community residents on the production unit's television monitor.

The Yuendumu Video Unit, led by American anthropologist and researcher Dr. Eric Michaels,⁶ called itself the 'Warlpiri Media Association' (WMA). The Ernabella Video Unit, which became 'EVTV', was pioneered and led by local schoolteachers Rex Guthrie⁷ and Neil Turner.⁸ Rex and Neil worked purely as technical advisers, assisting in helping the community to record and tell its own stories as it wished, as Neil Turner outlines in an interview I

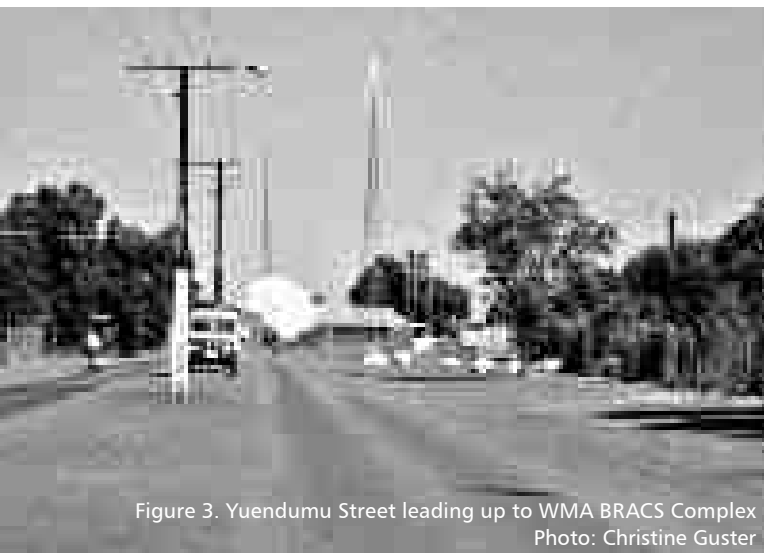


Figure 3. Yuendumu Street leading up to WMA BRACS Complex
Photo: Christine Guster

conducted with him in 2009:

...it wasn't just the video crew who would run the service for the community, but the school, the health, the police, the church, the footballers, everyone would get involved in contributing to the community programming, and the video production crew could go and record things with them if they didn't have their own cameras...⁹

Both Yuendumu and Ernabella video units were carrying out groundbreaking work and it was new and exciting for Indigenous people to see and hear themselves and their stories portrayed for the first time on a television screen. Initially, the EVTV unit planned to use its equipment as a communication and educational tool to assist schoolteachers in the classroom to better communicate with their pupils, and to break down the barriers between Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures. But the video technology and the programs produced proved to be an entertaining, communication and educational tool for all community residents.

Indigenous elders seek local control

In light of the fears Indigenous elders held about the coming of the satellite technology and the impact it would have on their culture, community leaders from the central desert decided that they would like to follow the lead of, and expand on, the work done by video units at Yuendumu (WMA) and Ernabella (EVTV). They voiced their concerns to the federal government, explaining their desire to take some control over what programs they and their children would watch in order to retain their own identity, traditions, and languages.

During 1983-84, as the launch of the satellite drew closer, and as a result of concerns voiced by Indigenous leaders, the federal government appointed a special task force, led by Eric Willmot,¹⁰ to look at the possible effects that satellite television technology and western-

style programming could have on people in these remote communities.

The government's review, and the 1984 *Out of the Silent Land* Report that followed,

led to the development of a scheme that would empower Indigenous people in the communities across the country to produce and broadcast their own individual community television and radio programs. The scheme was named the Broadcasting for Remote Aboriginal Community Scheme, which became known as 'BRACS'.¹¹

The scheme involved placing a BRACS production unit into a community. Each unit contained equipment for the users to produce and transmit, under special class licence, their own semi-professional local video and radio programs to homes within their community. To qualify for a unit the only requirement stipulated by government was that a community must have more than 200 residents and provide a secure and lockable air-conditioned hut to house the unit. In the first roll-out of the equipment in 1987, 74 communities received units. By 1991, this number had increased to 150.

The scheme was not without its problems. The sheer distances between communities meant that non-Indigenous manpower was not always available to train local people in use of the equipment, or to provide technical and general maintenance support.



Figure 4. Cupboard located in WMA BRACS Complex
Photo: Christine Guster

Figure 5. Original Imparja TV Station building, 14 Leichhardt St., Alice Springs
Photo: Christine Guster

Figure 6. ICTV Logo, Reproduced with their permission



Resident training programs were introduced at Batchelor College in Darwin and James Cook University in Queensland for BRACS operators, who were then encouraged to take their skills back to their community and train other community members. This worked well on the whole, but it was (and still is) difficult for government trained tutors to maintain the ongoing support and mentorship when the course participants returned to their communities.

In 1999, while I was working as the NFSA's Television Acquisition Officer in Canberra, a friend contacted me from the WMA at Yuendumu, suggesting I might be interested in what was happening there, as indeed I was. I visited Yuendumu in 2000 and was able to see for myself the BRACS system in action.

Inside the BRACS complex (Figure 3), I came across a cupboard full of VHS tapes available for screening within the community (Figure 4). The contents of the cupboard represented just a small part of the collection WMA had produced. The footage (mostly in local language) included content such as local community news; traditional song and dance ceremonies; school outings; community meetings; bush food and medicine collecting trips by women and children; local music band performances; and craft workshops. Video tapes containing restricted footage were stored separately. Access to them was controlled by community elders.

Commercial programs versus community programs

Running parallel with, and in contrast to, the federal government's 1980s and early 1990s roll-out of the BRACS equipment, was another important local initiative. In late 1983, the Alice Springs independent Indigenous community radio network,

later known as CAAMA, responded to a Department of Communications advertisement in the local Alice Springs newspaper the *Centralian Advocate*. The advertisement called for interested parties to place a submission to the federal government for a Remote Commercial Television Service Licence (RCTS). The service was to be linked directly to the new AUSSAT Satellite to be launched in 1985. According to Philip Batty, the radio station's main interest in the Licence at that time was to 'extend CAAMA's [radio] broadcast range outside the fairly restricted area in Central Australia... the only way to do that was using the satellite'. As Batty pointed out, his interest was 'not so much in the television side, but in possibly using the satellite to distribute CAAMA radio to all these communities throughout the [Northern] Territory'.¹²

Philip Batty and the board of CAAMA soon learned that the Licence bid meant much more than just expanding their radio broadcasting capability. The complex submission process covering commercial television broadcasting was to last just over four years. Their bid was successful and the new Alice Springs Television Network named 'Imparja'¹³ was set up. The new television station located on Leichhardt Terrace overlooking the Todd River (Figure 5) went to air in 1988, three years after the satellite was launched, and ten years after the government's visit to Papunya, where officials had sat down under a gum tree to ask a group of elders what they wanted out of a satellite service.

Under the new licence, Imparja was required to broadcast commercial television programming, and began to select its programs from the free-to-air commercial Seven and Nine networks down south.



Figure 7. Goolarri Radio Shack. Broome
Photo: Christine Guste

Satellite receiving dishes were installed into the remote communities that had BRACS transmission equipment and, virtually overnight, commercial and non-commercial (ABC TV) programs that the Indigenous elders had expressed concerns about a few years earlier became available. A new and different culture arrived via the television screen – that of western style television programs.

A whole new world opened up to the Indigenous people, and life in the remote communities changed forever.

After receiving its RCTS Licence, Imparja made an informal social commitment to include Indigenous content on the network. It is not clear what percentage was finally agreed upon. Apart from the very popular magazine style television series titled *Nganampa Anwerkenhe*¹⁴ produced by CAAMA and broadcast on Imparja, very few other CAAMA produced television programs eventuated, due to a lack of resources.

BRACS programs reach far and wide

In 2000, Imparja's Chief Engineer, Tim Mason,¹⁵ began exploring the possibility of splitting Imparja's allocated satellite space and creating a second and separate narrowcast community satellite channel (Channel 31). In Mason's words, taken from his oral history interview conducted in 2008:

...I always had this vision right from the start that we could squeeze two TV pictures in the space where we had one. By using digital technology we could carry a main Imparja picture and a channel on the side which could become an Indigenous TV [community]

channel...dividing up [satellite] transponder [space] so you can carry more than one TV picture at a time... the benefit to the communities was enormous.¹⁶

By 2004, after a lengthy testing phase as an information channel, the second narrowcast channel was officially up and running and it became known as the Indigenous Community Television Service (ICTV) (Figure 6). Imparja provided the transmission technology for the new channel and the media associations took ownership of the content that went to air.

For the communities, this new channel meant that their locally made programs (radio and television) could be broadcast across the country to all of the 150 BRACS communities on a regular basis. For Imparja, this meant that the network could at last meet its original social obligations to broadcast Indigenous content, which it had been doing very little of since its inception in 1988.

With the introduction of ICTV, life became even busier for staff at Imparja - as Tim Mason put it, 'like Topsy, it just grewed'. There were five main remote media associations, namely PY Media, WMA, CAAMA, TEABBA and NGAANYATJARRA MEDIA each representing BRACS communities in their respective regions. The associations provided local radio and television programs to Imparja for broadcast via the new second narrowcast channel. For example, PY Media¹⁷ (previously EVTV) took on the role of collecting and collating programs from BRACS communities across the APY Lands of South Australia's central desert regions.

Imparja accepted all programs offered and broadcast them unedited, irrespective of the level of technical quality or video format supplied. The programs were all considered as local community content to be shared.

Media associations from as far afield as Broome in Western Australia and later Queensland and Torres Strait also sent programs to Imparja for broadcast on ICTV. In addition to sending copies of video productions, Goolarri Media Association in Broome produced and contributed radio programs (Figure 7) via PAKAM to outlying communities in the Kimberley region (Figure 8), as explained by Robert Lee,¹⁸ Manager of Goolarri Media, in an interview conducted in 2009:

They send a signal... from here via telephone all the way to Alice Springs ... through Alice through Imparja ... to satellite [to] towns such as Fitzroy [Crossing], Halls Creek sometimes Kununurra, then all the communities: Beagle Bay, Lombadina, Djarindjin, Looma right through...¹⁹

A new era begins for Indigenous media

Although running on a limited budget for most the time the ICTV channel was, from its inception, working well for both Imparja and the communities. However, in 2006, things changed dramatically for ICTV. The federal government announced that the service was to be closed down and replaced by a National Indigenous Television Service (NITV). As described by Dr. Wendy Bell:

the 'caterpillar' suddenly had a new and exciting opportunity to become the 'butterfly' ... In 2006 Imparja made a deal to play a major role in the [federal government] planned National Indigenous Television (NITV) service from mid-2007. NITV was designed to build upon the existing Indigenous Community TV initiative transmitted on Imparja's second satellite channel 31 narrowcasting service (Channel 31) using the Imparja uplink facility in Alice Springs.²⁰

On Friday 13 July 2007, the ICTV service ceased to be. It was replaced by the new NITV service being broadcast from Imparja and controlled by a board established and administered in Sydney. Program content would be selected by a committee in Sydney, and the ICTV community content in its raw form would need to go through a program selection process before being accepted for broadcast on the new service.

Neil Turner, in his interview, referred to the last day ICTV was broadcast as 'Black Friday'. He went on to explain:

...ICTV kept broadcasting right up to the switch over date. And yes, there has been a lot of concern expressed, especially by language speaking groups and

Central Australian Ngaanyatjarra Media, and so on, who saw a very different style of television [on NITV], you know. Some of them can quote, 'These are all sad stories'. You know, town people sure, there are issues, sure, Stolen Generation, and other sorts of issues, but it wasn't at all the joyful community celebratory style of ICTV... just the fact that there was no language suddenly, from 70 to 80 per cent and Ngaanyatjarra and Pitjantjatjara people and Warlpiri people, and seeing people speaking language on their television, then suddenly total cut-off...²¹

From Imparja's point of view, the change was a positive one for the future of Indigenous television, and for future program production material created in the communities. Tim Mason commented that 'it was sad to lose contact with the community groups', and acknowledged that 'without the hard work of the Indigenous media associations there would never have been an ICTV or an NITV'. In his opinion, the move to NITV:

could be regarded as a good thing or a bad thing, it was bad in that it took over some existing infrastructure and removed the outlet for those communities' TV services, but it legitimised and gave authority to what I would call a professional broadcast organisation to operate a fully professional national Indigenous television channel... a professional broadcasting system which would schedule material at the right time, would take on the rights management, would commission new material, would run the service as a full-time professional service... and in my discussions with community groups they are now being commissioned to produce programming for the national Indigenous service ...²²

Mason went on to add:

ICTV probably had reached the limit of its capability as an Indigenous cooperative, unfunded, running by the seat of its pants, and in all honesty NITV was the next logical step on from the ICTV operation...

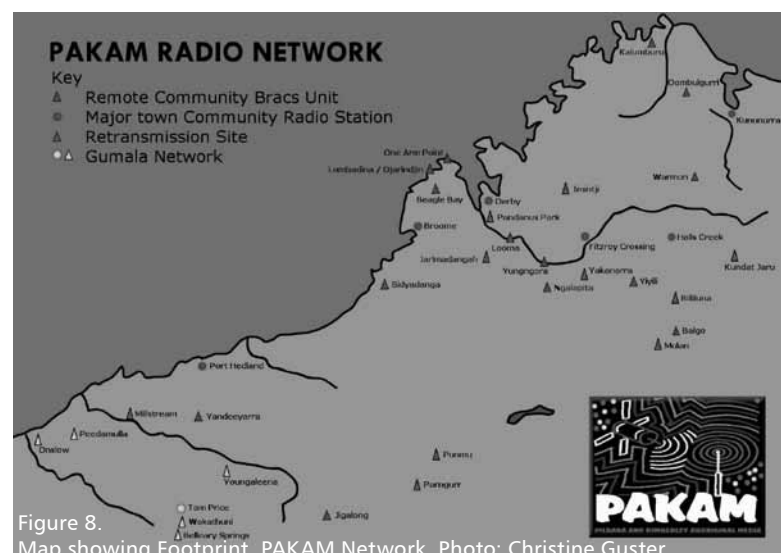




Figure 9. New Imparja TV Station building, 18 Leichardt St., Alice Springs
Photo: Christine Guster

Conclusion

Remote Indigenous Media has come a long way since the board of CAAMA responded to the advertisement in the *Centralian Advocate* in late 1983, twenty-six years prior to the launch of NITV.

In 2008, in preparation for the present Federal Government's conversion to digital technology in 2013, the Imparja network moved down the road to a new, purpose-built, more efficient facility (Figure 9) that could meet the demands associated with advanced technological changes. According to Tim Mason in his 2008 interview, 'the network [Imparja] has become the largest single station market in the world, with one signal across six states and territories and five different time zones'.

But what of the grass roots Indigenous community programs? Where and how will they be broadcast in the future? There are many video-tapes still housed by some of the communities that may not meet the 'professional standard' of production required by NITV. What will happen to these locally produced programs now that commercial and National Indigenous media television networks have the upper hand?

At the time of writing, ICTV staff are experimenting with streaming their television and radio material on the internet via a website titled *Indigitube*²³ (Figure 10) so that BRACS community viewers can watch community footage and listen to radio programs on-line. But, for all contributors to the ICTV channel, this is merely a stop-gap measure until a better solution can be found for ICTV material. The aim is to regain

what was lost, and strive to again have their own dedicated satellite television channel to broadcast their community productions Australia-wide.

It will be interesting to see what the future holds for Indigenous community television material as the Federal Government's National Broadband Network²⁴ rolls out, with the possibility of more television channels becoming available. The ongoing challenge will increasingly be one of maintaining a balance between community and commercial needs, especially when the lure of new media draws children away from traditional face-to-face models of community storytelling.

There is, however, an exciting potential for both radio and television media to complement traditional ways of storytelling, and introduce new ways of passing on, and retaining community traditions and languages in program formats that meet the needs of their Indigenous audiences.

The history of the introduction and the development of western media into the remote regions of Australia is an important one to tell. The NFSA's RIMA Oral History Project has just begun to focus on recording and preserving the stories of the work carried out by Indigenous media associations in Alice Springs, the Central Desert and Broome in North West Australia. The oral history interviews quoted throughout this paper help in the telling of this story, but they reflect only a few of the many more voices and experiences belonging to the people who contributed to, or have taken part in creating, this very important period in our media history.



Figure 10. Indigitube Website page

Note

This paper is based on a presentation given by Christine Guster at the Oral History Association of Australia 16th National Conference, *Islands of Memory: Navigating Personal and Public History*, held on 17-20th September 2009 in Launceston, Tasmania.

For more details about this project please contact the Oral History Program at the National Film and Sound Archive on 02 6248 2022 or visit our website: www.nfsa.gov.au

Endnotes

¹ The Federal and Northern Territory governments established Papunya settlement in 1959, as a place for Aboriginal people who had moved in from the desert. For the vast majority of the people who arrived at Papunya it was their first contact with non-Indigenous Australians. See: www.nma.gov.au/collections-papunya.

² A humpy is a small, temporary shelter made from bark and tree branches, with a standing tree usually used as the main support. The shelter was traditionally used by Indigenous Australians. See: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Humpy>

³ Philip Batty went on to become a co-founder and Deputy Director of the Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association (CAAMA), which was established in Alice Springs in 1980, with the radio network broadcasting as 8 KIN FM. Batty is currently a Senior Curator with the Museum of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia.

⁴ Philip Batty, interviewed by Wendy Bell, 10 December 2008 - 19 February 2009. Audio and Transcription held by National Film and Sound Archive (NFSA). Title No: 774192, p. 43 of transcription.

⁵ Dr. Wendy Bell, *A Remote Possibility: The Battle for Imparja Television*, IAD Press, Alice Springs. Northern Territory, 2008, pp. 41, 48.

⁶ Eric Michaels was assigned to Yuendumu as part of a three-year anthropological research project for the then Australian Institute for Aboriginal Studies, to research the 'impact and implications of the introduction of television on remote Aboriginal communities'. See: <http://www.mcc.murdoch.edu.au/ReadingRoom/3.2/Ruby.html>

⁷ From 1980 to 1985, Rex Guthrie lived and worked at the Aboriginal Community of Ernabella during which time he created the innovative Community Project called EVTV - 'Ernabella Video Television' (now PY Media).

⁸ Neil Turner, Manager, PAKAM Radio Network, Broome and previously Manager, (EVTV) Television Unit, Ernabella. S.A. Turner took over managing the EVTV Unit when Rex Guthrie left in 1986 to return to Adelaide, S.A.

⁹ Neil Turner, interviewed by author, 3 August 2009 - 7 August 2009. Audio and transcription held by NFSA. Title No: 791707, p. 68 of transcription.

¹⁰ Dr. Wendy Bell, *A Remote Possibility: The Battle for Imparja Television*, p. 100.

¹¹ Department of Aboriginal Affairs, *Out of the Silent Land*, Report of the Task Force on Aboriginal and Islander Broadcasting and Communications, AGPS, Canberra, August 1984.

¹² Philip Batty, interviewed by Wendy Bell, NFSA Title No: 774192, p. 44 of transcript.

¹³ Imparja (pronounced IM-PAR-JA) is the anglicized spelling and pronunciation of the word Impatye, meaning tracks or footprints in the Arrrente language. See <http://www.imparja.com> - *About Us*.

¹⁴ 'The primary aim of Nganampa Anwerkenhe is the maintenance of Aboriginal languages and culture...' See: <http://caama.com.au/category/productions>.

¹⁵ Tim Mason was appointed Chief Engineer at Imparja in 1997 to manage digital satellite conversion; Studio upgrade; amalgamation of licence area with Queensland; and the design of a new digital studio facility. Creating a second narrowcast satellite channel (Ch.31) was not part of his official brief.

¹⁶ Tim Mason, interviewed by author, 17 December 2008. Audio held by NFSA. Title No: 770543.

¹⁷ In 1987 members of the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands decided that it was necessary to develop the same services provided by EVTV in all communities across the APY Lands. PY Media was incorporated as the regional body to assist communities to develop their own community media centres. In the mid 1990s PY Media moved out of Ernabella to Umuwa to set up a regional office that enabled fair representation for all communities on the APY Lands. See: <http://www.waru.org/organisations/pymedia/admin.php>

¹⁸ Robert Lee began his career with Goolarri Media in 1992. He has held the positions of Broadcast Journalist, Radio Station Manager, Operations Manager and Producer and Presenter of various radio and television programs for Goolarri Media Enterprises.

¹⁹ Robert Lee, interviewed by author, 6 August 2009. Audio held by National Film and Sound Archive. Title No: 791941.

²⁰ Dr. Wendy Bell, *A Remote Possibility: The Battle for Imparja Television*, p. 328.

²¹ Neil Turner, interviewed by author, NFSA Title No: 791707. p. 263 of transcript.

²² Tim Mason, interviewed by author, NFSA Title No: 770543.

²³ See: <http://www.indigitube.com.au>

²⁴ http://www.dbcde.gov.au/broadband/national_broadband_network

The remembrance of love

Emma Hewitt

Abstract

This paper is the outcome of a conversation I had with Hal Sutton about his first love, one afternoon in December 2006. Hal had been married for sixty years, his wife had recently died, but the story he chose to tell me was one of another woman, the first woman he had loved. Hal's story led me to think about the way that love is remembered and the way that love shapes who we think we are. Stories of love are imagined and re-imagined over time, becoming the base line for what we perceive to be our identity. Loves are remembered in ways that invest them with meaning outside of objective truth, that is, they take on the truth the rememberer wishes to subscribe to them. They are then, perhaps, the most personal of truths, the ones that we use to make sense of ourselves. This complicates the relationship between the story, the storyteller, and the listener to the story, whereby layers of meaning and memory seem only to exist in the moment of the story.

This paper works outwards from an encounter with an old man's story of his first love to explore ideas of love and the way it is remembered. It recounts my attempts to make sense of the complicated way that stories of love are articulated and ultimately what that reveals about 'truth' and narrative in oral history.

This story begins on a Sunday afternoon in December 2006. I sat with brother and sister Hal and Joan Sutton on Hal's balcony overlooking the Swan River. It was a beautiful day; the river was dotted with reflections of light and the masts of boats sailing on it. I had driven to Hal's apartment to ask him about the house he and Joan had lived in as children for a brief period in the 1920s. Now, Joan lived in Fremantle and was suffering from the early stages of dementia, Hal lived in South Perth. Before stepping on to the balcony, in the midst of the Sutton family's Sunday lunch, Joan's daughter warned me that Hal may not want to talk much or for long as his wife of more than sixty years had recently passed away and he was not his usual self.

The Suttons in 1912 had moved into the house I was researching; Joan was born in 1915 and Hal in 1917. The family lived there until 1925 and despite being only eight when they left, Hal's memory of the place was astounding – pinpointing the location of trees and water tanks in the yard, that the shingle roof had been replaced with corrugated iron circa 1924, that canvas blinds shielded the children who slept on the verandah.

After a while, the conversation shifted away from the house. Hal started testing his sister's memory, quizzing her on elements and characters of their shared past. Together, they pored over a series of photos from their youth, faces that she mostly could not make out or remember. At some point, Hal handed me a photograph, a hand-retouched sepia portrait held in a dark frame. It was of a woman in her late teens or early twenties, wearing a white dress decorated with flowers at the neck, looking into the camera and blurred out at the edges. Turning the picture over I found her name, the date of her birth and the date of her death, written in an old man's handwriting on the backing of the frame. Underneath were the words *My First Love*.

Hal told me the story of his first love as I held the photograph. Soon after, I finished my cup of tea, left the house and drove home along the river. I remember feeling buoyant, feeling filled up with joy at having met these people and heard their stories. I remember feeling particularly struck by the story of this woman, by the gentle way Hal handled the frame as he handed it to me, like a gift. I thought about how I might remember love in the future, how I might hand a woman a frame and recount stories filled with the first flutter of heartstrings and the nostalgia of a long-distant youth.

Days later I was still thinking about Hal and the story of his first love. He had been married for sixty years but had not mentioned his wife and I left having no idea at all about that relationship. The story that he chose to tell me was of another woman, a woman he may have

never really known, a woman that then, in my mind, became central to his life story. This prompted me to think about the way that stories of love are imagined and re-imagined over time and the importance of love in shaping who we think we are.

Love exists as an intense moment in people's lives. No passion seems to have the power of love, yet no other seems so fragile.¹ Love occupies an exalted position in western culture and is seen as intrinsically bound up with ideas of happiness and human fulfillment. Because of this, love has the potential to reveal a great deal about the way people think about themselves and the way they construct their identities. Love is a theme that underwrites our lives, shaping, at least in part, our identity. The remembrance of love therefore has the capacity to also reveal the most personal of truths, making visible the most intimate parts of ourselves.

What I loved so much about Hal's story was that it was a love story. I was fascinated with the longevity of his love for this woman and the preciousness he awarded it. It is telling, however, that I don't remember anything of the story of the woman herself. I don't remember her name, and I remember that I forgot it almost immediately after our conversation. I also remember that the following day I made up a name for her in something I wrote about the experience, calling her Nell. It is from this paragraph that I found the details of the photograph, but they are completely erased from my own memory.

On reflection, my fascination with Hal's story revealed far more about me than it did about Hal. It was a manifestation of my fascination for love and more specifically for grand narratives of love. While concepts of love are acknowledged to be completely over-determined,² they are also deeply entwined with the popular culture from which they emerge. This is doubly true for 'romantic' love, which is posited as the fulfillment of individual existence, an expression of the intensification and exaltation of life.³ In the words of Ann Swidler '...love in our culture is both an experience and an ideal, richly arrayed in symbol and

myth...'.⁴ Archetypal couples of romantic love have proliferated in western culture to the point that to think of love abstracted from such images is a virtual impossibility. This means, as pointed out by Richard White, that while we may regard Romeo and Juliet and their brethren as excessive romantic projections, '...we must also accept that they are the expressions of an ideal that has helped condition much of our thinking and even our experience...'.⁵

Love cannot be separated from what Richard White has called the image of love.⁶ While love is highly personal, it is also an emotional state awash with popular conceptions, illusions and myths that are sprung from and embraced by a long historical canon of popular culture. While we may be able to think of love without thinking of Plato's Symposium, or of Shakespeare's sonnets, they are influential components that inform conceptions of love. The way that Hal loved, the way that he remembered loving and the way that I heard the story were all influenced by such popular conceptions of love. My interpretation of Hal's story and his remembrance of it both drew on romantic ideals that exist around love, that were inseparably interwoven into Hal's narrative. As explained by Swidler, while '...love in real life is not like love in literature or in the movies, our culture's images of love provide a background, a language, and a set of symbols within which people enact their own lives'.⁷

Despite the status awarded love in western culture, its definition remains elusive. In the words of Martha Nussbaum, '...the claim to have a general understanding of love is a contradiction in terms...a philosophical tautology...'.⁸ Even as individuals, we have limited capacity to express what love means to us. This may be in part because when we speak of love as a concept, we are merging a plethora of different forms of love into a single entity. Friendship, romantic love, altruism, love for one's parents and one's children all have their own particular histories, ideologies and constructions within western culture

but are seemingly embedded with a unifying sameness through the use of the term 'love'.

For Alain de Botton love is a social ritual in which the keynote phrases have been wearied with overuse.⁹ In loving, we engage with the tradition of love, because the tradition cannot be pulled out of the process. Saying 'I love you' is somehow both the most personal and impersonal of phrases entirely because it forms a part of the image of love. While we may want to believe that our loves are unique and original and insurmountable, in saying 'I love you' we are loving as we have always loved, and as everyone has loved before us.

The intertwining influence of images of love in loving mean that in the story of love, we require fiction. Love in 'real life' may not be like love we read about in books, but the way in which we understand love is often underpinned by literary themes. Martha Nussbaum's conception of love draws on the primacy of stories, proposing a literary framework to investigate the way that love is understood. She suggests that knowledge of love exists as a story that is written in the act of loving, that the knowledge of love is a love story.¹⁰ The narrative of love, for her, is necessarily underwritten by an openness to engaging with that narrative, what she conceives of as a willingness to fall. For Nussbaum, love is akin to the process of reading a story – it requires us to defer disbelief, to invest faith and suspend doubt.

A recent email exchange with my friend Jenny on the topic of this paper draws on these ideas. In response to my questions about love and memory, Jenny said that rather than remembering her past loves as individuals, she had remembered them for the feelings they created in her. It was these feelings, rather than the men as individuals, that she had loved, that she remembered and grew nostalgic for. She concluded the email with the statement: 'Each person that we truly love becomes the co-author and illustrator of a story we live.'

So if we understand love as a story written by lovers in the act of loving, then what is to keep us from fictionalizing the story? Nussbaum suggests self-deception is an element of love, and asks '...which stories about the condition of the heart are the reliable ones and which are the self-deceiving fictions?'¹¹ We may tell ourselves we love someone but what part of this impulse is manufactured by the image of love we aspire to? It is widely acknowledged that as lovers we are blinded by our own desires, creating an image of the beloved that is oftentimes removed from the individual themselves. According to Stendhal, '...in love, realities obligingly rearrange themselves to conform with desire...'.¹² The lover's gaze transforms

and enhances the specific qualities of the beloved and, in doing so, transforms them into the object of love, which, by virtue of the process, is something different from the original self.

The stories of love that we construct in our lives are not fixed but are imagined and re-imagined over time. The role they play in the way we think of ourselves is similarly fluid. In loving, we write ourselves into both the narrative and imagery of love, allowing ourselves to in part experience the myths around which love is constructed. It is only in memory, as pointed out by de Botton, that experience has the capacity to gain perfection and through remembrance that we gain the ability to forget all the imperfect elements of experience.¹³ In the words of Annie Dillard, '...all rememberers decide what to put in and what to leave out...'.¹⁴ While memory shapes who we are, we also manipulate our memories of past experiences to match our current sense of self.¹⁵ This is articulated by Abercrombie as '...the need to make a plausible history of ourselves which recounts our past in such a way as to confirm our identity...'.¹⁶

According to psychologists Singer and Buck¹⁷, the stories we create about ourselves '...rely on vivid imagery, familiar plot structures and archetypal characters and are often linked to predominant cultural themes or conflicts'. To this end, memory requires a degree of fiction. In remembering, we lack the capacity to check our memories against what 'really happened' or, moreover, previous contexts in which we have remembered the 'same' memory. In one telling, Hal's love may have used a different turn of phrase, the colour of her dress may have been blue instead of green, they might have met in 1941 instead of 1942. In one memory, they danced on the bridge and in another in the parking lot. The point here is that as listeners, we have no means of checking the veracity of these memories. And neither does the rememberer.

So what does it mean to remember love? John Wylie talks about remembering love as an act of love in itself.¹⁸ Drawing on the work of Derrida, Wylie suggests remembrance creates a bridge between presence and absence and is a means of keeping past experience living in the present. To remember love is to continue to love, to create connections between a past loving self and a present self. Hal's story, as a memory made vocal and shared, was in this framework an attempt to bring that experience into the present, to keep not only the memory of love alive, but also keep the love itself alive. To continue to love. In remembering his first love and in remembering himself in love with her, in that moment Hal was in love with her.

The stories that we tell about the past, the things we

think of as our memories, are impacted and perhaps even determined by the context in which we tell them. According to Susan Engel, 'why a person recalls what he or she does is shaped by the setting in which the person recalls. It is also true that the way in which past and present selves are connected is shaped by the context of remembering as well'.¹⁹ For the most part, people tell stories of themselves in conversation with others. We remember things when we are alone, but it is in the telling that memories take shape. We use memories to tell ourselves who we are, but we also use them to tell others about us, both what we have done and who we are. According to Engel, the forces of context and interaction powerfully influence memories that emerge in conversation. Hal told me his story on a sunny afternoon in December. Would his story have been different if it was June? What if the day had been overcast, or raining, or it had been dusk instead of the heat of the day? Was Hal's memory triggered because I reminded him of his first love? What if I had had blonde hair? Or if I had been a forty-year-old man? Would he have then told the story at all?

We continually choose and re-choose to love, knowing, in the words of Hall, that '...the relation of love is ours to enter, ours to refuse, ours to dissolve; or, what is the same thing, that the relation of love is ours'.²⁰ As love is ours in the loving, it is also ours in the remembering, which is, as Wylie has said, an act of love in itself.

The subjectivity of memories of love and the fictions that underlie them reveal complex relationships between stories, story-tellers and listeners. Memories are not without context, and the stories we tell of our lives are invested with layers of meaning that can only exist in the moment of the story. This in part makes working with oral history more precious; as each story becomes not an attempt to gather the 'truth' of a person's life but rather an embrace of the conversation that exists between two people, and the narratives that emerge therein. Let us then extend the notion of remembering as an act of love to consider the idea that perhaps, in listening, we are loving too.

Endnotes

¹ Ronald L Hall, *The Human Embrace: The Love of Philosophy and the Philosophy of Love* - Kierkegaard, Cavell, Nussbaum, The Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park, Pennsylvania, 2000, p. 218.

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³ See inter alia White 2001; Hall 2000; Ann Swidler, 'Love and Adulthood in American Culture', in Neil J. Smelser and Erik Homburger Erikson (eds), *Themes of Love and Work in Adulthood*, Harvard University Press, Harvard, Maryland, 1990, pp. 120 – 149.

⁴ Swidler, 'Love and Adulthood in American Culture', p. 120.

⁵ White, *Love's Philosophy*, p. 48.

⁶ White, *Love's Philosophy*, p. 48.

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⁸ Martha Craven Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1990.

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¹⁰ Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge*, p. 281.

¹¹ Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge*, p. 261.

¹² Stendhal as cited in White, *Love's Philosophy*, p. 51.

¹³ de Botton, *On Love*, p. 160.

¹⁴ Dillard cited in Susan Engel, *Context is Everything: the nature of memory*, W. H. Freeman & Company, New York, 1995, p. 101.

¹⁵ Engel, p. 81.

¹⁶ Nicholas Abercrombie, Stephen Hill and Bryan S. Turner, *Sovereign Individuals of Capitalism*, Taylor and Francis, Oxford, 1986, p. 33.

¹⁷ Singer and Buck, cited in Engel, p. 92.

¹⁸ John Wylie, 'Landscape, absence and the geographies of love', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, vol. 34, no. 3, 2009, pp. 275 – 289.

¹⁹ Engel, p. 22.

²⁰ Hall, *The Human Embrace*, p. 227.

The diversity of Indigenous oral history

Fabri Blacklock

Abstract

History has largely been written by non-Indigenous historians and unique perspectives of Indigenous historians are still only emerging. This paper discusses some of the research projects I have worked on over the past ten years as an Indigenous curator, artist and oral historian. I will discuss some of the methodological approaches I have employed when working with Indigenous communities on exhibitions and oral history recordings. The research projects discussed aim to have a multi-method approach to sharing traditional Indigenous culture and knowledge whilst utilising modern methods and technologies to tell our stories.

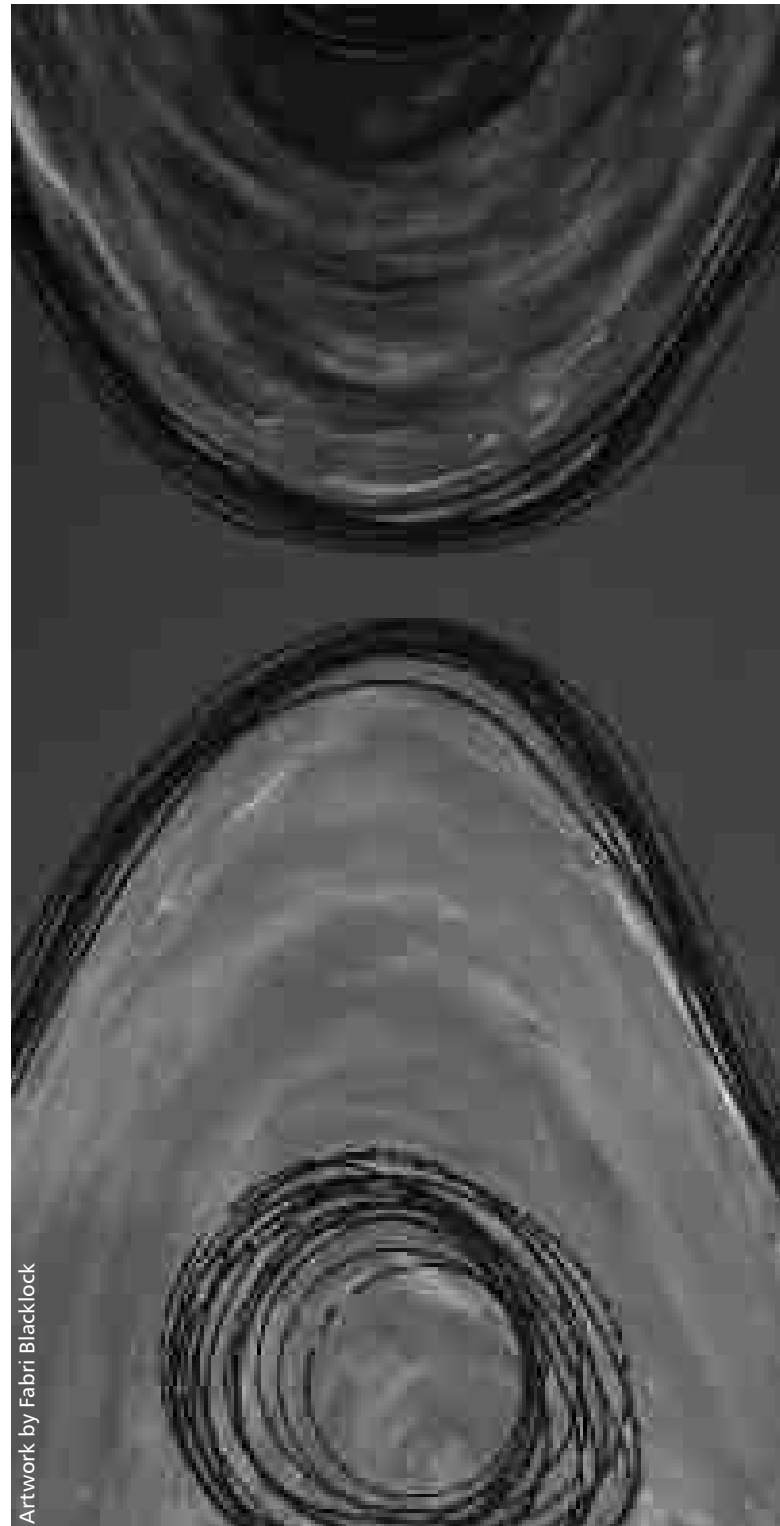
Introduction

This paper outlines some of the projects I have worked on including exhibitions at the Powerhouse Museum where I worked as Assistant Curator of Koori History and Culture for eight years. The exhibitions utilised a combination of audio-visual oral histories, artistic interpretations, traditional cultural knowledge, three-dimensional objects and visual imagery to tell stories of Indigenous cultural knowledge. The other project I will discuss is my PhD. research project which includes documenting a combination of oral histories I have recorded with my Elders and a visual art component that I have developed in response to the oral history recordings.

Developing an exhibition

With the development of every exhibition I curate I always have an Indigenous advisory committee that consists of different Indigenous people who are experts in the field that relates to the exhibition. These experts will guide and inform the development of the exhibition from beginning to end. Initially I write an exhibition brief and then meet with the advisory committee to discuss the content of the exhibition. The advisory committee then provides feedback on the content and makes suggestions for further development of the exhibition content according to their knowledge.

Through my work at the Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, I curated over ten exhibitions on Indigenous

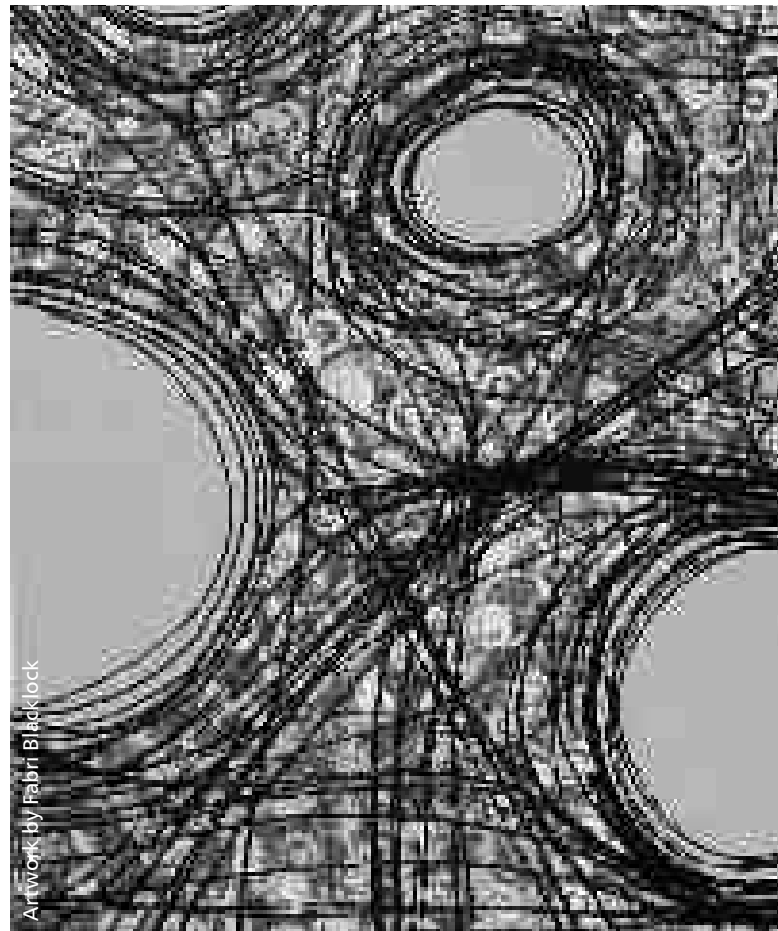


Artwork by Fabri Blacklock

history and culture. Many of these exhibitions had an audio-visual oral history component which included Indigenous people discussing aspects of their lives and sharing cultural knowledge. In 2001, I curated an Indigenous section of an exhibition titled *Births of a nation: women, childbirth, and federation*. The information I was researching was women's business and thus there was certain knowledge that could not be revealed within the exhibition as men would be viewing this and that would be inappropriate as it was sacred information that only women could know about. Bundjalung Elder Uncle Charles Moran states that 'the whole structure of our culture could easily have been broken down by any breakdown in the secrecy laws. These laws held the people together by keeping a balance between male and female'.¹ It is important for Indigenous protocols to be followed when working with Indigenous communities so that our knowledge system is not disturbed or broken down.

The women I interviewed for this exhibition and the Indigenous advisory committee which included an Indigenous midwife were instrumental in guiding control over what was said and how this was presented in the final cut of the audio-visual oral history. The women I interviewed were very careful to only reveal information that could be publicly displayed and which men would see and hear about. After some initial research and contact with a number of Indigenous communities across Australia it was decided that we would interview members of the Jerringa community on the south coast of NSW. We met with an Elder from this community and she was happy to participate and contribute her cultural knowledge to the project. We decided that we would interview her and her daughter at their community. Before the interviews we asked the participants to sign release forms which stated their willingness to participate in the exhibition and contribute their cultural knowledge about Indigenous women's birthing experiences through audio-visual oral history interviews. The interviews were conducted by me as the interviewer and a team from the Powerhouse Museum's audio-visual department which included a camera operator and a sound recorder. The women I interviewed for this exhibition only revealed information that could be displayed within the public domain. The audio-visual oral histories were displayed alongside three-dimensional objects that related to Indigenous women's birthing experiences. This exhibition successfully toured regional NSW for two years.

The most recent exhibition I curated which showcased audio-visual oral histories was titled *Yinalung yenu: women's journey* in 2008. This exhibition currently



on display at the Powerhouse Museum consists of six audio-visual oral histories with six NSW Indigenous women who shared their stories, revealing how Indigenous traditions are finding new forms of expression today. Each oral history was based around a theme that related to traditional cultural knowledge and experiences of Indigenous women.

Artist Bronwyn Bancroft was featured in the Creating and Nurturing section which focussed on how traditionally Indigenous women were skilled at moving across country, collecting foods and making the most of natural resources. Indigenous Elder Aunty Sue Blacklock was featured in the Teaching and Community section which highlighted how Indigenous women are vital in maintaining communities and family ties and are the first and foremost educators of children. The Family and Health section featured twin sisters Dr Marilyn Clarke, Australia's first Indigenous obstetrician, and Dr Marlene Kong, a general practitioner. This section focussed on how Indigenous women were healers in our communities. The sisters state: 'I remember mum coming home from work – really cranky, going on about doctors. She'd say, "If you do really well at school you become a doctor and you get in there and you change things, make things better"'.² The Lore and Law section featured Indigenous lawyer Professor Larissa Behrendt, who contended: 'I often feel like I'm apologising for working within a system that

really doesn't do the right thing by my own people ... but unless we really understand Australian institutions like laws ... we're much less able to change them'.³ The final section Food Gathering and Preparation featured Auntie Beryl Carmichael, a respected Elder of the Ngiyaampaa people in western NSW. She talked about the culture camps she runs teaching children about traditional Indigenous knowledge.

As is standard practice all women were asked to sign release forms and we then visited them in their homes and communities to record the oral histories with my team from the audio-visual department. Each woman was also asked to lend several objects that related to their connection to country, an object that reflected an achievement in their life and an object that related to their profession and experiences as Indigenous women. Some of the objects included artworks, newspaper articles, handmade jewellery, cultural objects from their country and personal clothing including a barrister's wig and gown from Larissa Behrendt. Their audio-visual oral histories were projected onto screens alongside their objects to tell the story they had shared with us.

The Yinalung yenu: women's journey and the Births of a nation: women, childbirth and federation exhibitions represent new approaches to how Indigenous oral histories can be recorded through audio-visual means and used as displays within a cultural museum context. The combination of three-dimensional objects together with audio-visual recordings demonstrates how traditional Indigenous cultural knowledge through the format of oral histories combined with modern technologies is being used as a means of sharing our culture with the wider community whilst utilising our traditional oral communication methods.

Oral history and art making

I am currently researching and writing my PhD. thesis, titled *Beyond Fabrication of Australia's History: A Documentation and Multi-Method Critical Analysis of Ngarabal and Biripi Elders' Perspectives and Experiences of Australian History*, which consists of recorded oral histories with Elders from the Ngarabal people of Tingha and Glen Innes in north western NSW and the Biripi people of Dingo Creek near Taree, NSW. The project is the history of my people and all the participants are my Elders. The oral history interviews have been conducted over the last four years. Each interview will form a case study with an edited version of the oral history recording, a family tree, photographs, maps and historical images displayed alongside the oral histories. There will also be a written analysis of the oral histories to provide a context to the interviews and a wider perspective of Indigenous oral history.

I am also creating a series of twenty-five artworks of my interpretation of the oral histories I have recorded with my Elders. The artworks provide a continuity of traditional cultural practice through the combination of oral history and art which is how our culture has been passed down to each new generation. Each artwork is my interpretation of stories and themes from the oral histories I have recorded with my Elders. Each artwork will have a written analysis and feature text from the oral history transcripts which relate to the artwork. These two methods of oral history and art are part of a continuity: they show how our traditional culture was passed down to each new generation for many thousands of years. This multi-method approach will add a new Indigenous oral history methodology by an Indigenous researcher to the field and continue to tell our stories through traditional methodology.

Insider research

This research project involves me as an insider researcher and the relationship that I have with my Elders will inevitably affect the outcome of this thesis. I am close to all my Elders and have the utmost respect for them but how they view me and their relationship with me will I hope add a new dimension to the oral history interviews. Maori academic Linda Tuhiwai Smith notes that:

Insider research has to be as ethical and respectful, as reflexive and critical, as outsider research. It also needs to be humble. It needs to be humble because the researcher belongs to the community as a member with a different set of roles and relationships, status and position.

My role within the research as an insider means I must conduct myself in the most strictly ethical way, as it is my family's stories that I have been entrusted with to share and tell to the wider community. As an insider my relationship with the participants is important to note in the research context to allow the reader to gain an understanding of how Indigenous family and community networks operate.

'One of the difficult risks insider researchers take is to 'test' their own taken-for-granted views about their community. It is a risk because it can unsettle beliefs, values, relationships and the knowledge of different histories'.⁵ I will need to work closely with my Elders in the development and presentation of their stories so that my personal views do not cloud how their perspectives and experiences are told. I hope to continue to have a good relationship with my Elders and to do justice to the knowledge that they share with me. They will need to have the utmost confidence in me to allow me to record, interpret, and analyse the information they share with me. Pink notes that the

researcher 'ought to consider how their identities are constructed and understood by the people with whom they work. These subjective understandings will have implications for the knowledge that is produced from the 'ethnographic encounter' between researcher and informants'.⁶ My Elders will have certain expectations of me and how I use the knowledge they share with me to write the thesis. Smith notes: 'Each story is powerful. But the point about the stories is not that they simply tell a story, or tell a story simply. These new stories contribute to a collective story in which every indigenous person has a place'.⁷ I want my Elders to feel proud and empowered through the sharing of their personal history with the wider community through traditional oral history methodology.

Being responsible to our communities in the way we conduct and present our research is of utmost importance. Our communities and Elders are sharing their knowledge with us and the wider community and we as Indigenous researchers are accountable to our communities and families in the ways that the research is collected, analysed and presented. My research project involves relational research whereby all the participants are related to me through family kinship. Wilson explains

Indigenous methodology means talking about relational accountability ... you are answering to *all your relations* when you are doing research. You are not answering questions of validity or reliability or making judgements of better or worse. Instead you should be fulfilling your relationships with the world around you. So your methodology has to ask different questions: rather than asking about validity or reliability, you are asking how am I fulfilling my role in this relationship? What are my obligations in this relationship? The axiology or morals need to be an integral part of the methodology so that when I am gaining knowledge, I am not just gaining some abstract pursuit; I am gaining knowledge in order to fulfil my end of the research relationship. This becomes my methodology, an Indigenous methodology, by looking at relational accountability or being accountable to *all my relations*.⁸

Accountability

The research projects I have discussed have involved my being both an insider and outsider researcher. In both instances I am accountable for the way I conduct myself and the final outcome of the projects could be scrutinised by different members of Indigenous communities. I have had to be accountable in the way I have conducted the research and make sure that I have followed Indigenous community protocols in each instance. In each project I have worked closely with my Elders, community representatives, and advisory committees in the development and presentation of

their stories for publication within texts and audio-visual material for exhibitions and publications within the public domain and I have maintained cultural integrity and followed community protocols at all times in the development of each project I have worked on.

Summary

As an Indigenous person I am accountable to my people including both my family and the wider Indigenous communities with whom I work. I am accountable to them first and foremost. It is their stories I am sharing and I need to make sure they are happy with how their stories are told. Being accountable to Indigenous people is an important aspect of Indigenous research and needs to be acknowledged through the methods developed in conducting the research. Many non-Indigenous researchers do not follow Indigenous community protocols and they are not accountable in the same way I am as an Indigenous researcher specialising in oral history.

Endnotes

¹ Charles Moran, *Talk softly, listen well: Profile of Bundjalung Elder, Charles Harold Moran*, as told to Glennys Mora, Southern Cross University Press, Lismore, 2004, pp. 63-64.

² Marilyn Clarke and Marlene Kong, interviewed by Fabri Blacklock, October 2007, tape and transcript held by the Powerhouse Museum, Sydney.

³ Larissa Behrendt, interviewed by Fabri Blacklock, September 2007, tape and transcript held by the Powerhouse Museum, Sydney.

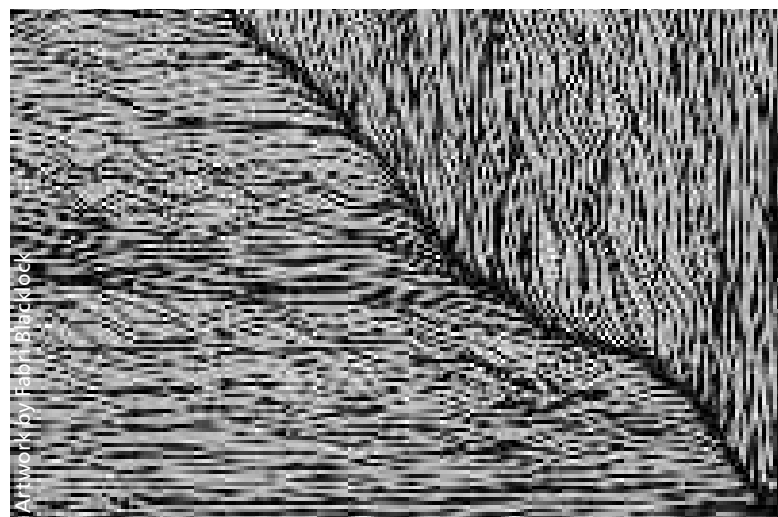
⁴ Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing methodologies: research and indigenous peoples*, University of Otago Press, Dunedin, 2005, p. 139.

⁵ Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing methodologies*, p. 139.

⁶ S. Pink, *Doing Visual Ethnography: Images, Media and Representation in Research*, Sage Publications, London, 2001, p. 20.

⁷ Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing methodologies*, p. 144

⁸ S. Wilson, 'What is an Indigenous Research methodology?' *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, Canada, 2001, p. 177.



Queensland speaks: the case for digital listening¹

Maree Stanley

Abstract

This paper gives an overview of the *Queensland Speaks* oral history project currently being undertaken at the University of Queensland. This paper argues the merit of leaving the *Queensland Speaks* project as an oral record rather than providing a transcription. I examine the current literature and argue the case for audio digital accessibility. The novel aspect of the project is the opportunity to interview both government ministers and the senior public servants who worked for them. The project concentrates on Queensland governance between 1965 and 1999.

Overview of the project

The Centre for the Government of Queensland within the University of Queensland is currently conducting the *Queensland (Qld) Speaks* oral history project as part of several history projects, including the *Queensland Historical Atlas* (with the Queensland Museum), *Queensland Places* and *Queensland's Past Online*. *Qld Speaks* is supported by funding from the Queensland Department of the Premier and Cabinet. The project seeks to record Ministers and senior public servants talking about public policy and political life. The aim of the *Qld Speaks* oral history project is to produce a lasting oral resource of key state and senior public servants involved in Queensland governmental decision-making. The project seeks to capture voices on policy-making and create an oral record of reflections on governance during this time. During the interview the project will be collecting contextual biographical information on Queensland State politicians and senior public servants. This is the first time that a major oral history project has interviewed both politicians and senior public servants about the same events. It is anticipated that the project's audience will include scholars who will use the interviews to analyse political life and decision-making and will also provide interest and information for the general public. The project will interview approximately sixty people and the website will be launched late 2010, with completion of the interviews by the end of 2011.

Research methodology

The project will host semi-structured interviews of approximately one to two hours in length, at a location of the interviewee's choosing. Recording equipment recommended by the National Library has been chosen and the project will adopt their methods for indexing the interviews. While the project will be recording information on the whole of life experiences most questions focus on policy decisions in relation to the political environment within the given time.

Interview briefs

Interviewers have been selected because they have a high level of knowledge and practical experience within the Queensland government. Short briefs are prepared on each interviewee by the research assistant to provide a historical context to guide the semi-structured interview. The preparation of these briefs is made possible by the resources available on the Internet and from *Who's Who*.² The interview briefs provide the interviewer with a list of key historical decisions the interviewee was most likely involved in. As one of the major aims of this project is to identify relationships between ministers and senior public servants, the project is currently developing a relationship map detailing key working relationships that evolved between them.

Ethical considerations

The purpose and usage of the oral interviews is discussed with the interviewees prior to recording and each interviewee is asked to sign a copyright agreement allowing both the interview and interview index to be published on the website. A hard copy and electronic copy of this agreement between the interviewee and the project is kept on file to be referred to when necessary and ensure interviewee specifications are complied with. The oral history material will have a variety of uses for scholars; in particular the interviews can be used to study policy and decision making through the reflections and memories of senior public servants and ministers during this time. The project has ethics clearance through the University of Queensland.

Technological impacts on *Queensland Speaks*

Those familiar with the long standing discourse surrounding transcription will recognise the various arguments used to claim that transcribing the oral interview is necessary to ensure utility of the interview. During the design phase a conscious decision was made for the data to remain an oral resource, or in other terms the project would not transcribe any of the recordings, and in the following paragraphs I provide the rationale for doing so. This rationale will have varying degrees of usefulness to other oral history projects but is included here to extend the debate.

As someone who is relatively new to the oral history field I have been reading the literature on research methodology in order to better understand the project design. Through this reading I have determined that there are three valid reasons researchers give for transcribing the oral history interview in full, the first being access to the data, the second being storage of the data and the third being the opportunity for the interviewee to check the interview.

In *Catching Stories: A Practical Guide to Oral History*, published in 2009, Donna M. DeBlasio³ writes that an interview transcription makes the interviews more accessible to people outside of the project and asserts that a written transcript is easier to access than an oral interview. She also points out that the interviewee can review the transcript and make corrections if needed and a paper copy remains accessible and is not subject to technological change. Although this publication is very recent, DeBlasio strongly asserts that transcribing the interview is a necessity if the oral history project is to be accessed. 'The fact remains, however, that choosing not to transcribe at all is a good way to ensure that relatively few people will use the oral history collection'.⁴ In the last chapter of the book there is a remarkably short section which introduces the Internet, where DeBlasio makes a small concession to technology while assuming the dominant position that a written transcript is superior to an audio recording. 'With other new technologies such as podcasts, oral histories can reach whole new audiences who might

not necessarily read a transcript',⁵ and later, 'making oral history transcripts available online provides a valuable service, especially for researchers'.⁶ So despite a very brief allusion to the possibilities of web technology within the field of oral history, DeBlasio still argues strongly for full transcription of the oral recording.

The practice of legitimising the oral history record as a valid data source by converting the oral record into a written one leads many writers to debate whether the written transcript can be classed as a primary source of information and also casts a shadow on the reliability of the document as a true reflection of what was said and just as importantly how it was said. Many of the authors that I reviewed to write this article discussed this as part of the consideration to transcribe.⁷

DeBlasio acknowledges the debate. 'Indeed, some large oral history archives regard the transcript as the primary document, while others regard the recorded interview as the primary document'.⁸ Further argument to the subjective nature of transcribing: 'good transcribers will determine what is essential to keep and what may possibly be eliminated'.⁹ Many of the objections uncovered during the literature review are negated through the implementation of an interview indexing procedure which provides a summary and enables digital access of the data through a key word search, without taking away from the richness and individuality of the interviewee's account of their life and events in it.

In 2005, Valerie Yow published the second edition of *Recording Oral History: A Guide for the Humanities and Social Sciences*. In the section 'Sharing Stories', Yow discusses in detail how the 'tapes' should be stored in library archives to ensure the material is of use to a broader range of people.¹⁰ While there is brief mention of the online oral history listings index by Alexander Street Press, *Oral History Online*,¹¹ Yow concentrates on ensuring that tapes are archived

correctly. 'By depositing the collection of *tapes* (emphasis added) in a library or in archives, you can make sure your research continues to be useful even though your own work has come to an end'.¹²

In reflecting on the impact technology may have on the oral history world in the future, Donald Ritchie, in 1999,¹³ concluded that the Internet will enable researchers to access information quickly through transcripts posted on the world wide web. What was not envisioned was the emergence of technologies such as multimedia players, which enable quick and efficient access to the audio recording as an alternative to the written transcript. This enables a much greater proportion of people to access oral history interviews from their own homes without the need to drive to a local library or update their home computers at great expense. This of course also removes some of the negative aspects of transcription such as the high cost of transcribing and the possibility of inadvertently changing what was meant by the interviewee. In 2005 Yow writes:

The so-called digital divide still exists; many people still do not have access to computers or networks, especially in rural and sparsely populated regions. For these people, the issue of accessibility...of the oral history is still unresolved.¹⁴

People in remote areas have similar problems with access to transcripts in libraries as described by Valerie Yow who recalls the time saved when libraries sent 'photocopies of the transcripts when I could neither travel miles to listen to the tapes nor afford the cost of having a tape collection duplicated for me'.¹⁵ I argue that Internet access in remote areas is continually improving and has most likely improved in the last five years since Yow's book was published. For much of the population advances in technology mean we no longer need rely on a photocopier, a tape or indeed the post but more and more we are able to listen to audio on home computers or MP3 players with a simple click of a button.

I argue that the advancement of technology such as the use of multimedia (i.e. podcasting) alleviates many of the issues and concerns regarding accessibility, usage and storage of oral history interviews. Technology needs to be embedded into methodological design so that it is at the forefront of design decisions, embedded within the whole of the project.

Technological considerations are supported by writers such as Mazé, Shopes and Eynon, who have written on the possibilities technology may have for oral history projects. In *The Handbook for Oral History*, published in 2006, Mazé¹⁶ writes that 'Many oral historians share with enthusiasm the view expressed

by Linda Shopes and Bret Eynon, among others, concerning the potential of electronic media and the Internet, for restoring orality (sic) to oral history'.¹⁷ In his article, 'Participating in the Past', Paul Arthur writes that digital technology is 'liberating oral history...by bringing it into the everyday world where it can be heard, questioned, freely interpreted and freely shared'.¹⁸ He comments that digital media has removed many of the issues regarding storage of material but warns that technology will have its own issues such as the need for new skills in information technology for oral historians. Through the University of Queensland, the project is fortunate to have access to a wide range of resources including up to date archival and retrieval systems for digital technology.

To further ensure that the *Qld Speaks* oral interviews are accessible to our intended audience we are providing a summary index of the interview, enabling the website visitors to search across all the interview indexes if they are interested in a particular topic. These indexes follow the National Library protocol and give listeners the opportunity to search specific topics of interest and listen to part of the interview if they choose. We imagine these interests to span disciplines and so we have ensured that our keyword list is inclusive of events, themes, people and places. Indexing is described by Gluck as 'the easiest and least expensive method to develop a running summary of each tape'.¹⁹ For our purposes the index of the interview goes beyond this description and ensures quick and efficient access to relevant parts of the oral interviews with the option of easily accessing the interview in full if needed. Mazé acknowledges the technology as beneficial, but writes of the index as an addition to the transcript, rather than a replacement.

Another common addition to oral history transcripts is an index. This may simply (sic) index of names and concepts in the transcript itself, or it may be a list of or include references to timed locations in the audio recording. The latter sort of references are greatly enhanced in digital media, of course; digitization (sic) allows nearly instant linkage between transcript and audio as well as access through the Web, on local networks, on compact disc, or through any number of other digital means.²⁰

The *Qld Speaks* interview indexes provide a searchable list of keywords and a timed breakdown of the recording enabling smaller areas of the recording to be searched and accessed electronically. It is important to note that those indexing the interview in our project need political, historical and geographical knowledge in order to identify accurately what needs to be summarised and included in the keyword list.

Conclusion

The project has had a very positive response to initial requests for interview and began indexing these first interviews in January 2010. The *Old Speaks* website will be launched later in 2010 and the project looks forward to sharing these oral accounts of political and bureaucratic life with the public, where we have been given permission by the interviewees to do so. Members of the project team are currently working on the design of the website to ensure that the information is presented in such a way as to appeal to its intended audience and provide access to oral memories in a manner which is interesting and easy to use. For many new technologies allow quick access to oral history online and through MP3 downloads. This has the additional benefit of cutting costs of full transcription services and alleviating some of the reliability and validity issues associated with written transcripts. Rapid technological change has superseded old ideas about oral history and while some of the recent publications did mention technological advancements, these were mainly given as examples of enhancement of existing oral history practice rather than illuminating the possibilities for innovative project design. The use of technology to enable an oral interview to be utilised as an oral resource is likely to be realised if the use of technology is embedded within the design of the project.

Endnotes

¹ The author would like to thank Professor Peter Spearritt and Dr Marion Stell for their comments on drafts of this article.

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³ Donna M. DeBlasio, 'Transcribing Oral History' in Donna M. DeBlasio, Charles F. Ganzert, David H. Mould, Stephen H. Paschen and Howard L. Sacks, *Catching Stories: A Practical Guide to Oral History*, Swallow Press, Athens, Ohio, 2009, pp. 104-14.

⁴ Donna M. DeBlasio, 'Transcribing Oral History', p. 105.

⁵ Donna M. DeBlasio, 'Transcribing Oral History', p. 208.

⁶ Donna M. DeBlasio, 'Transcribing Oral History', p. 208.

⁷ Valerie Raleigh Yow, *Recording Oral History: A Guide for the Humanities and Social Sciences*, 2nd ed., AltaMira Press, Walnut Creek, California, 2005, p. 330.

⁸ David K. Dunaway and Willa K. Baum (eds), *Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology*, AltaMira Press, Walnut Creek, California, 1996.

⁹ Thomas L. Charlton, Lois E. Myers and Rebecca Sharpless (eds), *Handbook of Oral History*, AltaMira Press, Oxford, UK, 2006.

¹⁰ Donna M. DeBlasio, 'Transcribing Oral History', p. 106.

¹¹ Donna M. DeBlasio, 'Transcribing Oral History', p. 106.

¹² Donna M. DeBlasio, 'Transcribing Oral History', p. 107.

¹³ Valerie Raleigh Yow, *Recording Oral History*, p. 330.

¹⁴ Alexander Street Press, Oral History Online www.alexanderstreet.com, cited in Valerie Raleigh Yow, *Recording Oral History*.

¹⁵ Valerie Raleigh Yow, *Recording Oral History*, p. 330.

¹⁶ Sherna Berger Gluck, Donald A. Ritchie, and Bret Eynon, 'Reflections on Oral History in the New Millennium: Roundtable Comments', *The Oral History Review*, Oxford University Press on behalf of the Oral History Association, Vol. 26, No. 2 (Summer-Fall 1999) pp. 1-27.

¹⁷ Elinor A. Mazé, 'The Uneasy Page: Transcribing and Editing Oral History' in Thomas L. Charlton, Lois E. Myers and Rebecca Sharpless (eds), *Handbook of Oral History*, p. 263.

¹⁸ Valerie Raleigh Yow, *Recording Oral History*, p. 315.

¹⁹ Sherna Berger Gluck, 'What's So Special About Women' in Davis K. Dunaway and Willa K. Baum (eds), *Oral History: Interdisciplinary Anthology*, AltaMira Press, Walnut Creek, California, 1999 p.228.

²⁰ Linda Shopes, 'Making Sense of Oral History', History Matters: The U.S. Survey Course on the Web, <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/mse/oral/online.html>, February 2002, and Bret Eynon 'Reflections on Oral History in the New Millennium: Roundtable Comments' cited in Elinor A. Mazé, 'The Uneasy Page: Transcribing and Editing Oral History' in Thomas L. Charlton, Lois E. Myers and Rebecca Sharpless (eds), *Handbook of Oral History*.

Oral history and a performing arts collection – the National Institute of Dramatic Art Oral History 2005-2009

Dr Margaret Leask

Abstract

This paper outlines the Oral History Project at the National Institute of Dramatic Art between 2005 and 2009. It considers issues related to using items from a performing arts collection as prompts to memory and how this can impact on the approach to interview questions and outcomes. It argues that caution should be used when seeking, through oral history interviews, to illuminate records and materials in a collection. While it is important to bring material to life, it should not be done at the expense of the individual's stories and is most effective when a subject's papers, as opposed to a few individual items, are in the collection.

Oral History and a Performing Arts Collection

The National Institute of Dramatic Art (NIDA), whose graduates include Mel Gibson and Cate Blanchett, is Australia's foremost performing arts training institution. In 2004, in association with the Seaborn, Broughton and Walford Foundation, classification and preservation of the Institute's records began. Previous attempts to do this had ensured preservation but little in the way of classification, making accessibility for research purposes very difficult. These records include material relating to initiatives developed by NIDA including the Old Tote Theatre Company (1963-1978) and the Jane St experimental theatre (1966-1982). NIDA has a substantial history. It turned 50 in 2009, with many of its graduates and former teachers returning to celebrate the Institute's role in the development of their careers.

The aim of the Oral History Project, established in April 2005 with initial support from Lady Vincent Fairfax of \$70,000 for three years, was to record the oral histories of performing arts practitioners with a connection to NIDA; either through their training, teaching or participation in related activities such as the Old Tote and Jane St. As part of the Archive Project, the intention was to help illuminate, through personal accounts, the written and photographic

archive material and three-dimensional stage memorabilia such as costumes, masks, puppets and headwear held in the collection. In this way it was anticipated students, staff and researchers could gain insight and understanding into creative processes through accounts of the experiences of those who have contributed to Australia's theatrical heritage. The resulting interviews, as well as existing in their own right as accounts of individual lives and careers, are intended to be used to complement the material in the collection. At the time of writing in December 2009, the Oral History interview program has been put on hold while the Archive project is being reviewed.

Over the past 50 years NIDA teachers and graduates have included most of the major performers, directors and other practitioners in the performing arts in Australia so there is no shortage of potential interviewees with a strong connection to the records and collection of memorabilia. There is a growing and daunting list of people to interview who are not getting any younger – many of whom, as word spreads of the project, are also interested in finding a safe and hopefully accessible home for their papers – maybe the only tangible reminder of a life in the ephemeral world of the theatre.

I was employed part-time for two days a week, based at the NIDA library, to research and conduct 20 interviews per annum and to administer the project. Interview subjects included actors, directors, playwrights, designers, costume makers, dancers, teachers, puppeteers, technicians, administrators and benefactors. I was able to commission some specialist research on subjects, such as theatrical millinery and costume design, outside my experience. Most people I approached were willing to be interviewed and appropriate times and venues were organized. Considerable preparation and detailed research was undertaken to ensure that informed and relevant questions prompted individual memories and encouraged the subject to relax. I had access to the

material in the Collection to find details of careers not searchable on the internet or through the excellent on-line data-base AusStage. The interviews varied in length and some were recorded over a number of days depending on the stories to be told and the availability of the tellers. Interviews were recorded directly onto CD and digital copies made for access and preservation. At the conclusion of each interview, the subject signed an agreement in relation to access and copyright. I wrote field notes describing the interview situation and ambience and prepared copyright and access details for the NIDA library. Some track notes (or preliminary transcripts) have been prepared but more time is needed for such detailed work. Eighty-five completed interviews, together with the field notes and questions, are catalogued and available in the NIDA library. Depending on access conditions, many can be copied and sent to researchers unable to visit the library.

Being the researcher and interviewer for most of these interviews, it was interesting to learn that the same production or activity (such as the experience of training at NIDA) can be remembered in many ways by different people who were all there at the same time. The starting point might be a production photo or program, or the name of a teacher; however the stories, anecdotes and remembered impact are many and varied. As a researcher using these oral histories, I am generally enthralled by the ultimate rounded picture obtained by cross-referencing.

In 2008 the focus was on interviewing NIDA graduates from the early 1960s including John Gregg, Edwin Hodgeman, Robyn Nevin, Elspeth Ballantyne, Penny Spence, Dennis Olsen and Elaine Cusick, along with NIDA teachers such as George Whaley, Helmut Bakaitis, Keith Bain, Jean Carroll and Betty Williams. Thirty-five NIDA graduates were interviewed over 18 months and in February 2009 I took advantage of the 50th anniversary to record interviews with graduates visiting for the celebrations from overseas and interstate, including Joanna McCallum, Jeanie



Robyn Nevin in the Old Tote Theatre Company 1972 production of *Trelawny of the Wells*. Crinoline, designed by Anne Fraser, from the NIDA Archive and Performing Arts Collection. Photo: Robert Walker.

Drynan and Allan Lander. These interviews provide fascinating insight into the early years of the Institute, in the days when its facilities and resources were limited and the idea of a theatre training school in Australia was very new.

Concentrating, as I did at this time, on the years 1959 to 1963, I had the opportunity to observe clear examples of where memories concur and where they diverge. For example, everyone who had the opportunity to learn from Margaret Barr, the movement specialist, came away with strong and similar memories of the experience, while others had very different perceptions of Robert Quentin as the Institute's first director - ranging from a somewhat aloof and remote Englishman to supportive mentor.

Inevitably, as an Oral Historian, you question the unreliable nature of memory which will always be different some time after the remembered event actually took place. I always reminded subjects that the facts can be found by a researcher so we tried not to waste too much time in the interview remembering and recording the exact dates of events if my research

had not identified these. I learnt that the perspective for the interviewee is likely to be different with the benefit of hindsight. For performing arts practitioners recording their oral history, a production or season will be remembered not only for itself but also in the context of the rest of a career, especially as many next steps in a theatrical career come unplanned from the impact of one's most recent performance. Looking back is very different from looking forward, which is what performing artists do when actually in the moment of preparing or responding to a current production or creative activity. The idea of success or failure or a significant event can be different in retrospect. For example, actor Rupert Everett, in his autobiography, *Red Carpets and Other Banana Skins*, says of the play *Another Country*, which marked his West End debut: 'The play was a triumph, without doubt one of the defining moments of my life, yet strangely enough it's pretty much a blur... but a successful moment in life is hard to grasp when looking back. On the night, a whole future seems to be sitting in the palm of your hand, for the taking. But the further away in time you move from the moment of triumph, the hollower it becomes. Soon it seems to be no more than the precursor for the next period of struggle, viewed with caution. When I think of that night now, I first of all remember Piers' (an actor in the cast who died two years later).¹

I found that many of the stories recorded are frequently positioned somewhere between the advance publicity story (available in print or in broadcast archives) and the review and program copy (also available in print). They are personal and emotional, and provide a unique insight which can only enhance our understanding of what is left after the ephemeral theatrical event has passed. After all, what we have are costumes, photographs, designs etc.; but without the voice of the participants or filmed archive material these objects can seem lifeless, or only significant to those who actually experienced the performance.

The work of many of my subjects is known to me through my own formative experiences of working in the performing arts and much of what we talked about is familiar. The Old Tote Theatre, NIDA and Jane St were an everyday part of my own studies and work in a heady period in recent Australian theatre history (in the late 1960s and 1970s) when playwrights and actors found an Australian voice and theatrical style which spoke directly to audiences with energy and a larrikin style that was very exciting. So I was obliged repeatedly to question my own memory and wonder if I had donned rose coloured glasses or had my own agenda in terms of what I wanted interviewees to talk about.

As I began to shape interview questions for the subjects, I found I was asking almost as many questions of myself as the researcher and interviewer as I was asking the interviewee. I know this is not a unique experience but it is a road that has to be travelled if you are to find your way as an oral historian with a brief to 'value-add' and illuminate records and memorabilia in a specific collection. One of the biggest issues of concern for me is the one of skewing the balance of the interview and posing leading (and selective) questions to cover the specific material we have at the expense of hearing the subject's story from their perspective. Janis Wilton writes of a similar concern in her article 'Telling Objects: Material Culture and Memory in Oral History Interviews'.²

I have come to realise that using collection items (or images or photocopies of these) as aides-memoires is fraught with danger. With a few notable exceptions, what is in our collection is inevitably an inadequate representation of any one career. Items from productions have been 'rescued' on an ad hoc basis – given space and financial constraints, practically everything in the performing arts is recycled or loses its provenance because it is used for another production or altered in some way. Saving items for preservation is not a priority – getting the next show onto the stage is. At best we might have a few items of real or specific significance – a puppet created or a costume or mask designed or worn by our subject, a prompt copy or photographs of a production to which they contributed. With these items and our ambition to illuminate them, we run the risk of skewing the interview to make too much of this and our subject, wanting to be helpful, will place undue emphasis on the related event in their career. On the plus side, however, using the same item to prompt memory can elicit a variety of responses – one person will talk immediately about the set or wearing the costumes or masks; another about their colleagues in the production; another about an amusing or difficult incident related to that scene or production; another about the play and reviews and so on. In the light of this, we need to consider carefully whether, how, why or when to use collection items during the interview. Sometimes the temptation to use items should be resisted. Pushing our perspective on our collection is likely to deflect the subject from their own perspective. I have to keep in mind that if they attended NIDA it was for a maximum of three years, the Old Tote Theatre Company existed for only fifteen years, and the careers of most of our subjects have spanned a period of forty to fifty years. Does focussing on these activities limit the outcome? Are we trying to control too much by pointed questions? Knowing the content

of the collection is essential for archivists and I would suggest understanding the context of the collection is essential for oral historians.

I do not want to inhibit the use of collection items or records as memory prompts, but I do recommend using caution in their selection and presentation. It goes without saying that while a similar story might be included in written material about a play or production, something in the vocal tone and emphasis can tell us a lot more about the moment or process when the protagonist speaks. Oral history interviews usually capture the passion, humour, anger, affection and many other moods and feelings conveyed by the human voice. Whilst emotions may be embedded in archival records and memorabilia, it is rarely possible to access these without the spoken voice, moving image or the skills of a creative writer. For example, when director Terence Clarke was interviewed, he talked at some length about the stages of getting a new Australian play, *A Happy and Holy Occasion*, by John O'Donoghue, from page to stage starting with his initial, unpromising meeting with the playwright in Newcastle. Here is his written description of this moment from his introduction to the script published by Currency Press in 1987: 'I first met John O'Donoghue at a clean up of the high school where we were to have our offices and rehearsal room; it was an inauspicious meeting. "What is your first play going to be?" "*The Floating World*." [by John Romeril] "Why aren't you starting with my play?"

"I haven't read it." End. The business of getting a theatre company going absorbed me for the first few months, and the play languished on my desk...'. In contrast, his oral history interview provides an amusing and more personal view of this event which adds much to the subsequent story of a successful collaboration between director and dramatist. He remembered,

It was my first day of work, 6th January 1976 ... the new theatre company [Hunter Valley Theatre Company] had been given the use of a delightful and small Victorian Gothic school on the hill... it hadn't been used for a long time... I advertised for people to come and help clean it up – they brought brooms etc and worked very hard. At about 11 o'clock a rather bad tempered man came up smoking. I was introduced to John O'Donoghue who was without pans or mops or detergents – he asked 'What play are you gonna start with?' When I told him *The Floating World* he turned on his heels and left! I thought 'I doubt I'll be reading his play any time soon!'³

When actress/director Robyn Nevin was interviewed, I told her the collection held photographs and the blue crinoline dress she had worn in the Old Tote 1972 production of *Trelawny of the Wells*. Suddenly she became the young actress again – her voice lightened as she described her enthusiasm and joy, thirty-six years before:

I remember vividly putting it on in the dressing

room and trying to find the director George Ogilvie – I wanted to say to him ‘Look at me in this beautiful dress!’ I came backstage, which was not easy to do – it was such an enormous dress, and he was backstage and it was all dark and I remember calling out to him. He was very busy and pre-occupied and he didn’t give me the kind of response that I wanted – it was like being a child and doing dress-ups and rushing to find the director and say isn’t this just perfect– it was *very* exciting to wear and corsets, of course, which were new to me.⁴

Inevitably some of the material we have will prompt strong memories (good and bad) and some will be reminders of experiences that left little of note with the subject. When actress Dinah Shearing shuddered on being shown the costume she wore in a disastrous Old Tote Theatre Company production of Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* at the Sydney Opera House in 1974, I felt this was a ‘statement’ far stronger than any words she used later when we were recording the interview. This made me wonder how she would have responded to a question about this production without having seen the dreaded costume? Would she have been able to give a more or less considered (or self-edited) version of her experience?

Another issue of concern for me relates to NIDA as an educational institution. I became aware of my tendency to question my subjects about the creative process hoping they would provide statements or descriptions that might help students appreciate working methods that they can absorb. As an historian I was visualizing, perhaps, a sense of tradition in the performing arts that might be articulated and handed down. Was this another manipulative action? However, the designer Yoshi Tosa’s interview re-assured me that, at least for him, describing the process is the way he tells his story of the period in his life when he was a theatre designer for the Old Tote in Sydney. The NIDA collection contains a number of the 80 masks and 55 costumes Yoshi designed for the significant 1970 Old Tote production of *King Oedipus*. His descriptions, of preparing designs by correspondence with the director, Tyrone Guthrie (who was based in Canada during the planning stages of the production), and his respect and sympathy for the uncomplaining actors, including Ruth Cracknell and Ron Haddrick, who had to wear heavy, primitive art inspired full head masks, hand-painted costumes and raised shoes, do provide informative and stimulating insights for students of design and production techniques. They also provide an understanding of the character of this quietly spoken artist.⁵

When I began the Oral History project, some colleagues assumed that it would be ‘easy’ to interview actors – apparently they are happy to talk

about themselves for hours and all you had to do was set the tape rolling! I did not find this to be the case. With a few exceptions, most were not very keen to talk about themselves and preferred to talk about the work and their colleagues – the performing arts are, after all, mostly a collaborative activity. I was also warned of the possibility that some would ‘perform’ for me – maybe with a camera this could have happened, but I found most interviewees relaxed and forgot the microphone very quickly.

There is also what Lee Christofis, Curator of Dance at the National Library of Australia, has called ‘Dealing with the icon’.⁶ It is not surprising that many of those in the performing arts would like to be remembered for their successes and generous creativity – i.e. the best bits. They do not usually want to talk about personal problems which may have shaped their creativity or well-remembered failures. Do we steer clear of difficult questions for fear they will clam up – how do we avoid being star struck and ask the difficult questions? Knowing the likely trouble spots through research helps – as does the establishment of trust and the pacing of such questions. One director I interviewed likened painful experiences in the business to toothache – you sort of remember the discomfort but not the intensity of the pain. I imagine this applies equally to the highs as to the lows. Factors such as the subject’s time of life at the time of the interview; whether their career is on-going or they are retired;



Mask for Jocasta, designed by Yoshi Tosa, for Old Tote Theatre Company 1970 production of *King Oedipus*. From the NIDA Archive and Performing Arts Collection. Photo: Derek Nicholson.

what they feel, on reflection, about NIDA or the Old Tote; all play a part in how memories are recorded.

An exciting outcome of this project has been the donation of papers and memorabilia from the subjects. The NIDA Collection and Archive has received material from Rob Adams (senior arts administrator), Keith Bain (dancer, choreographer and teacher), Alan Burke (TV producer, director and teacher), actors Neil Fitzpatrick, Ron Haddrick, Jacqueline Kott and Paul Weingott (including the papers of his father, Owen Weingott) following their Oral History interviews. In these cases, the oral history interviews recorded really do enhance and shed light on the material, since both provide comprehensive accounts (in different formats) of lives and careers.

Actor, director and teacher Paul Weingott (NIDA graduate 1969) gave the Collection his father's stage make-up case and other memorabilia. Owen Weingott (1921-2002) was an actor, director, fight co-ordinator, and NIDA fencing teacher. His father, Abe, had made him a small wooden suitcase with 2 layers and specially built sections to hold his false hair, noses, glue, grease paint make-up sticks including blackening, a mirror and small light, coat studs etc. 'I'm not sure', said Paul in his interview, 'when it was made and how often he might have used it but I thought it interesting. My grandfather was a value engineer ... would walk into factories and work out procedures to make the factory more efficient...With his youngest brother he started Kreisler radio and Owen probably had the first mantel radio of any young person in Australia... I remember him making my childhood bedroom furniture – it was very beautiful and he made me toys. This is part of that heritage – he did like making things. The case has 'Owen Weingott' engraved on a little brass plate on the front. Inside the lid there's a mirror – over the mirror an old torch light run by batteries – would have been good for the Independent Theatre [where Owen worked] which had hardly any dressing room facilities at all. It still has the old Leichner make-up sticks in little compartments...'⁷ Paul's interview contains some social history and a picture of Owen's early life and relationship with his father which adds much to the story of the make-up case and other material he donated – without the oral history interview, it is likely to lose its 'value' away from the Weingott family.

Actor Peter Carroll donated his papers to the Collection in anticipation of his oral history interview, which extends to 17 hours. In sorting his material, he had the opportunity to be reminded of his wide-ranging and busy career and he came fully briefed for an interview which demands to be listened to alongside reference to his reviews, programs, photographs, awards and audio-visual material as well as through cross reference to

interviews with colleagues such as Robyn Nevin and John Gaden. Peter's interview is an excellent example of the appropriateness of posing questions and using prompts related to Collection material and, if it were possible in all cases, is the ideal situation which renders irrelevant all my doubts and questions in this paper.

However, the final question is: - do we let these interviews simply stand alone – or should we/can we make connections with other interviews to fill out the picture of a production/ event/ material held in the collection, and how manipulative is this? It is particularly pertinent for the NIDA Oral History project given we were interviewing people who were involved with the same companies, productions and NIDA activities and there is considerable crossover benefit for researchers. Perhaps the answer, given that I agree that the Oral Historian should not edit the record created, is that we can leave the interpretation and making of connections to the users of our collection. I do not want to suggest that these issues are exclusive to oral history processes in relation to a performing arts collection – I am sure variations of the above are applicable to all archives or collections seeking to include oral history in their activities. However, they are considerations that I believe should inform our work in this field.

Endnotes

¹ Rupert Everett, *Red Carpets and Other Banana Skins*, Abacus, London, 2007, pp.119-20.

² Janis Wilton, 'Telling Objects: Material Culture and Memory in Oral History Interviews', *Oral History Association of Australia Journal*, Number 30, 2008, p.48.

³ Terence Clarke, interviewed by author, June 2008, CD OH77 Rodney Seaborn Library, NIDA, Sydney.

⁴ Robyn Nevin, interviewed by author, October 2008, CD OH80 Rodney Seaborn Library, NIDA, Sydney.

⁵ Yoshi Tosa, interviewed by the author, March 2006, CD OH32 Rodney Seaborn Library, NIDA, Sydney.

⁶ Lee Christofis, 'Dealing with the Icon', unpublished paper for PASIG (Performing Arts Special Interest Group, Museums Australia) meeting, Adelaide, June 2007.

⁷ Paul Weingott, interviewed by author, July 2007, CD OH73, Rodney Seaborn Library, NIDA, Sydney.

Navigating the personal to create the public: in search of South Australian architects

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Abstract

Between 2005 and 2009, the South Australian Department for Environment and Heritage funded a team of academic researchers from the Architecture Museum, University of South Australia, to undertake research into South Australian Architects and their Works (SAAW). The major project outcome is an online database, Architects of South Australia (www.architectsdatabase.unisa.edu.au), comprising biographical entries on selected architects who practised in South Australia from 1836. Although the scope of the project did not allow for formal oral histories to be conducted, the team was able to access a number of existing oral interviews. Using the SAAW project as a case study, this paper explores the subject of researching and writing biography using extant oral histories, as well as other sources, to develop a public history of individual architects. In addition, it reflects on the benefits and constraints of drawing upon material originally collected for other purposes.

Biography is a genre of writing relevant in all disciplines. In relation to architecture and the built environment, the field of interest in this paper, it 'can work at several levels: as the life history of an interesting person, as the evaluation of a creative contribution, and as a commentary on the evolution of professional and design milieu'.¹

The task and art of writing biographies calls on researchers to examine a range of sources in order to fully explore a person's life or contribution to a particular field of endeavour. Written and photographic sources and artefacts rarely tell the entire story or provide the full context. Indeed, the act of discovering what there is to know and tell about an individual is enhanced, and at times made possible, by the genre of oral history.

According to well-known oral historian Alessandro Portelli, at its core, oral history is 'the combination of the prevalence of the narrative form on the one hand, and the search for a connection between biography and history, between individual experience and

the transformations of society on the other'; it is 'a genre of discourse' which he calls 'history-telling'.² Researchers may read documentary evidence that places a particular individual in a certain context, but without knowing their subjects' experiences and opinions they are more likely to rely on conjecture. Oral history, however, gives people a chance to place themselves within the world that surrounds them. It is a democratic genre in which persons from all walks of life, not only those in the public eye, may participate.

Historians make judgements about their sources and select and interpret them from various perspectives; they are influenced by a range of factors including personal point of view. Here Portelli sees an ambivalence in the term oral history: 'it refers to both what the historians hear (the oral sources) and to what the historians say or write'.³ Researchers using oral history sources to assist the task of navigating from the personal to the public interpret what they hear or see written and make judgements about what to leave in and what to leave out of the text that they are creating. When they access already existing oral history interviews, that is, those conducted for another purpose, such ambivalence may be further accentuated. In using these oral histories, on the one hand researchers may be grateful for having this source, while on the other be frustrated that the interviewer did not pursue particular topics in depth, or indeed at all.

The issues noted above, and others, came to the fore in a major biographical project named South Australian Architects and their Works (SAAW), conducted from mid-2005 to mid-2009 by a team of academic researchers based in the Architecture Museum at the University of South Australia. This paper introduces the SAAW project following a brief examination of the subjects of biography and of oral history in the biography of architects. It identifies relevant existing oral histories located by the SAAW research team, and explains how the researchers used those interviews

in developing biographies of their subjects. The discussion reflects on the benefits and constraints of using material originally collected for different projects using examples of several SAAW architects and their oral histories to highlight the issues involved.

Biographical typologies

In writing biographies, authors may take any one, or a combination of, approaches, as Lindsay Rogers outlines in 'Reflections on Writing Biography of Public Men'.⁴ Methods range from voluminous studies in which documentary evidence looms large, and is quoted frequently, to portraits which 'frame...the subject in a given position' but provide minimal background. An amalgamation of the first two would produce a study that is larger than a portrait but smaller than a detailed biography. In the last instance a figure emerges, but against a changing background. Artist and novelist Lytton Strachey has beautifully evoked the task:

He will row out over that great ocean of material, and lower down into it, here and there, a little bucket, which will bring up to the light of day some characteristic specimen, from those far depths, to be examined with a careful curiosity.⁵

The extent and quality of personal records available to biographical researchers varies because some people leave more extensive personal archives than others. The practice of oral history creates an additional resource – further material to be caught in Strachey's little bucket. As British historian Raphael Samuel has observed, 'the role of the collector of the spoken word ... is that of archivist, as well as historian, retrieving and storing priceless information which would otherwise be lost ... his greatest contribution may well be in the collecting and safe preservation of his material rather than in the use he can immediately find for it'.⁶ Importantly, however, the very existence of an oral history introduces the potential for a person's 'life and times' to be differently understood, and that history becomes, in fact, a bridge, connecting life to times.⁷ As Portelli suggests, 'the key word in life and

times is the one in the middle'.⁸ Yet the scope and focus of an oral history, along with the way in which it is obtained and applied, can either assist or frustrate the researcher.

Biographies of architects

The practice of writing formal scholarly biographies of architects is not a widely established one. Typically, high profile individuals attract attention and are the subject of in-depth monographs. Full scholarly biographies of Australian architects, akin to Rogers' voluminous studies, are scant in number but include *Accidental Architect*,⁹ Donald Langmead's exploration of the life and professional career of George Strickland Kingston, a colonial architect based in South Australia; Harriet Edquist's examination of early twentieth century Melbourne architect Harold Desbrowe Annear; and Robert Freestone and Bronwyn Hanna's *Florence Taylor's Hats: Designing, Building and Editing Sydney*, which captures the distinctive offerings of Australia's 'first professionally qualified, practising woman architect'.¹⁰

Entries within dictionaries and encyclopaedia are perhaps the most common contemporary source of biographical information about architects, although texts like Walter Hervey Bagot's *Some Nineteenth Century Adelaide Architects*, and Julie Willis and Bronwyn Hanna's *Women Architects in Australia 1900-1950*, offer cameo as well as more extended studies of selected practitioners.¹¹ *The Australian Dictionary of Biography* focusses on deceased individuals and 174 architects are represented currently. Donald Watson and Judith McKay's *Queensland Architects of the 19th Century: a biographical dictionary*, and their *Directory of Queensland Architects to 1940* provide overviews of architects who have practised in Queensland.¹² The forthcoming *Encyclopaedia of Australian Architecture* will focus on architects from all Australian states and territories.¹³

In recent years a trend has emerged towards online biographical databases. *The Dictionary of Scottish*

Figure 1, Architects of South Australia Home page www.architectsdatabase.unisa.edu.au



Architects (DSA) provides biographical information and job lists for all architects known to have worked in Scotland during the period 1840-1980 whether as principals, assistants or apprentices.¹⁴ The DSA is currently being extended to cover the decades up to 1980 but the entries for many architects who practised after World War Two are only brief career sketches. The Irish Architectural Archive's *Biographical Index of Irish Architects* contains information on Irish born and bred architects and on architects who worked in Ireland from 1720 to 1940.¹⁵

Oral history and architects' biographies

The use of oral history as a resource in documenting the lives and works of architects has been limited not only in relation to the number of interviews conducted but also by a tendency to emphasise 'the role of the architect as artist'.¹⁶ A major contribution is architectural historian John Peter's *The Oral History of Modern Architecture*. Published in 1994, it is a series of extracts from sixty interviews conducted with 'advocates and superstars' of the modernist movement. Although they were active over a thirty-six year time frame, most worked in the period 1955 to 1963. One reviewer, while acknowledging Peter's work as having considerable worth as architectural history, has argued that 'the excerpts here are taped conversations rather than oral history. The book falls between the cracks as a massively edited, yet unreflective use of oral history'.¹⁷

For Robert Proctor, lecturer in the History of Architecture in the Mackintosh School of Architecture, Glasgow, works like Peter's also 'ignore...the collaborative nature of architectural practice, and the

range of factors external to design that dictate the forms of buildings'.¹⁸ Proctor argues for contextualising the subject, stating that 'unless the architect's interview is balanced with those from others involved in the building process, both within and outside the firm, it reinforces the architect's status and resists its questioning'.¹⁹ Some other investigations, however, have broadened what is captured by going beyond the immediately well known. For example, when describing his use of oral history in re-examining the theory and ideology of Australian architects from the 1930s to the 1960s, architect and architectural historian Paul-Alan Johnson found the process:

already reintegrating the 'ordinary' architect into the archi-historical record, for the interviews provide ample evidence of a rich array of architectural works, ideas and personalities existing at the everyday level than might be supposed from conventional histories exalting more elevated levels of architectural endeavour.²⁰

Willis and Hanna point to the tendency to 'note only the architect-in-charge as responsible for important designs, rather than acknowledging the considerable extent of team work'. They argue that 'if collaboration and teamwork were more accurately acknowledged, women architects would be far more visible'.²¹ To this end, wherever possible, they have undertaken new, or used existing, interviews with women architects, their colleagues or family members in order to uncover the women's roles and elaborate upon their careers.

Seeking, in the manner of Willis and Hanna, to add richness to her investigations, architect and doctoral candidate Paola Favaro sought to broaden her understanding of the work and contribution of Enrico

Taglietti, an Italian born architect who has lived in Australia since 1955, by interviewing a range of ‘other significant informants’. Her approach not only deepened her appreciation of Taglietti’s story but also led to further enquiry, ‘revealing synergies between oral, written and visual sources’.²²

South Australian Architects and their Works project

The South Australian Architects and their Works (SAAW) project was conceived with the aim of augmenting the limited scholarly biographical literature on the state’s architects. Funded by the South Australian Department for Environment and Heritage, the project also involved developing an interactive online database where the biographies could be published.²³ Being web-based, the database was regarded as a ‘living’ tool through which information could be revised and supplemented as required. New biographies could be uploaded as the project progressed. The end product was *Architects of South Australia* (www.architectsdatabase.edu.au). At time of writing, it comprises 82 entries on architects who have practised in South Australia since its foundation in 1836, as well as lists of their key works, and references for further research. A feedback function allows users to submit additional information. (Figure 1)

A Reference Group guided the task of selecting the architects to be researched and of developing a proforma on which each of the entries is based. The proforma comprised a series of headings which the researchers used to direct their investigations. Therefore, although they vary in length from about 1000 to about 2000 words, the biographies are consistent in terms of their scope and of the nature and the order of data presented.

Considerations in the process of selecting architects included the needs of the target user groups (largely consultants undertaking heritage assessments and surveys, professional historians, tertiary students, family historians, special interest groups); individuals’ contributions in South Australia (particularly relevant in the colonial period), and the period of their contributions; the quantity and quality of research sources; and gender.

The project did not seek to privilege any one time period or category of architects. Consequently the database includes a cross-section of nineteenth and twentieth century figures. Some are better known names than others. Women are poorly represented, reflecting the historical fact that, in South Australia at least, they entered the profession in very small numbers.²⁴



F. Figure 2,
Kenneth Milne. Milne Collection S26/2/26 Architecture Museum, University of SA

Identifying existing oral histories with South Australian architects

As the brief and funding for the SAAW project did not allow for formal oral history interviews to be conducted, the research team members sought to uncover existing oral histories that could shed light on their subjects. A number were found in several collections. They had been undertaken either with the architect concerned or with family and colleagues and focussed largely on the individual’s life and career as an architect. Unlike the circumstances referred to by Bornat, which revolved around secondary analysis of oral histories created initially for a different purpose, the SAAW research team used the oral histories in line with their original intention.²⁵ The sources uncovered are introduced in turn below.

An Oral History of the Building Industry in South Australia

In 1980, the Department for the Environment funded the South Australian Branch of the Oral History Association of Australia (OHAA), to undertake a series of oral histories with a range of people in the building industry in Adelaide.²⁶ John Gasper, an architect and historian whose cartoons have been enhancing Beth Robertson’s *Oral History Handbook* since its inception, conducted the interviews. Four were with architects, the other subjects being engineers, builders, a timber supplier and a brick manufacturer. In his report on the project, Gasper noted that at the time there were interviews with architects in other collections – four recorded by Hazel de Berg and held

in the National Library of Australia,²⁷ and one by an unidentified interviewer for Flinders University of South Australia academic and architectural historian Donald Leslie Johnson.²⁸

Twentieth Century Architecture in South Australia²⁹

The Architecture Museum at UniSA holds tapes and transcripts of three interviews with architect F. Kenneth Milne (Figure 2) who was a prominent local practitioner during the 1910s to 1940s.³⁰ Donald Johnson commissioned these interviews in 1979 as part of a project on twentieth century architecture. The Museum also holds a tape and transcript of Milne being interviewed by professional colleagues.³¹

South Australian Housing Trust History Project

Historian Susan Marsden was commissioned to write a history of the South Australian Housing Trust in commemoration of its fiftieth anniversary in 1986. The outcome was the book, *Business, Charity and Sentiment: the South Australian Housing Trust, 1936-1986*. Marsden relied heavily on oral history interviews and wrote in the Preface:

the decision to make formal use of oral history was unusual in an institutional history...many interviews added to the [incomplete] documentary evidence and also provided an alternative history of personal experience and opinion from tenants, staff and public figures.³²

In all, Marsden and her co-interviewers deposited approximately 150 oral histories in the State Library of South Australia's J.D. Somerville Collection.

Flinders University Oral History Project

In 1984, when Professor Keith Hancock was Vice-Chancellor of the Flinders University of South Australia, he funded the Flinders University Oral History Project. The project aimed to create an oral archive focussing on aspects of the university's foundation (1962 – 1966), and development through its formative years. Averil Holt, an historical research consultant, produced eighteen recordings, with transcripts, only one of which was with an architect.³³

Adelaide City Council Oral History Project

The Adelaide City Council (ACC) commenced a substantial oral history project in 1971. One hundred and ten taped interviews and transcripts from the project are held in the ACC Archives. Interviewees include people associated with the council in a range of capacities; three were architects who served the council at different times as ACC Mayor, Deputy

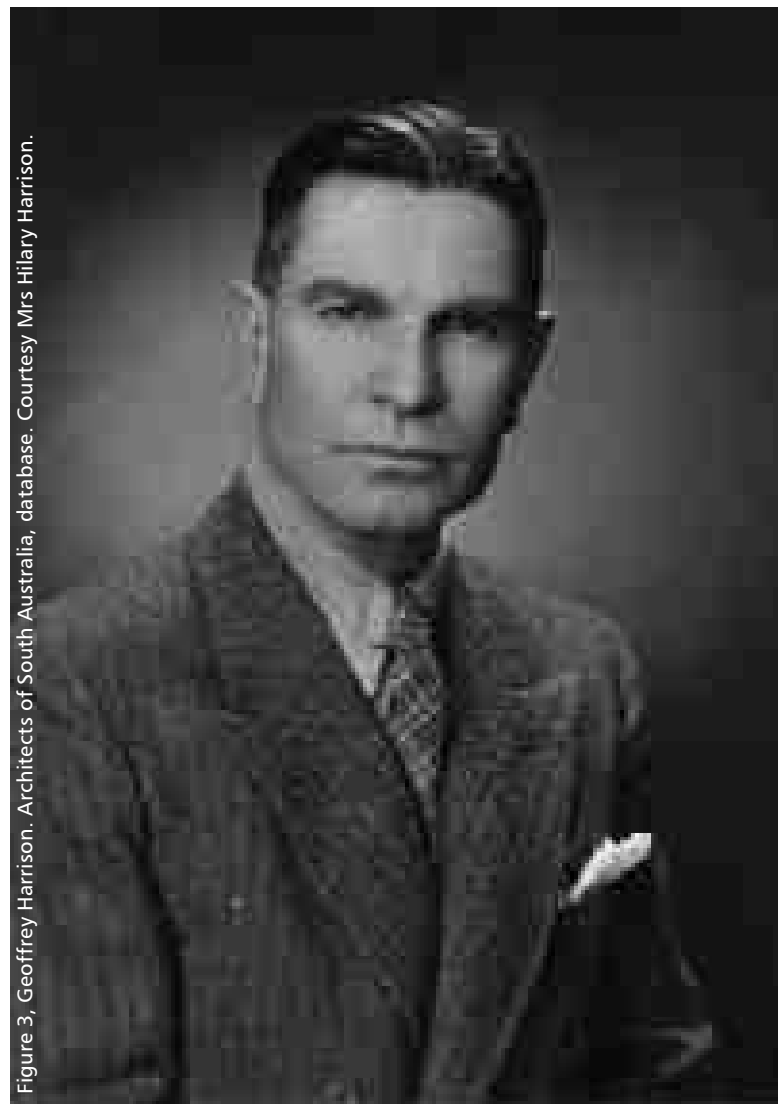


Figure 3, Geoffrey Harrison. Architects of South Australia, database. Courtesy Mrs Hilary Harrison.

Mayor and Aldermen. Excerpts of the interviews have been published in a guide to the project.³⁴

In addition to the oral histories noted above, SAAW researchers drew on interviews recorded in 1962-1963 by local architects John S. Chappel and Dean W. Berry on behalf of the RAIA (SA Chapter). The research team was unable to locate the original tapes and transcripts but Michael Page referred to extracts from them in his book, *Sculptors in Space: South Australian architects 1836-1986*, commissioned by the Royal Australian Institute of Architects (SA Chapter) for the state's bicentenary in 1986.³⁵ Page's text was, therefore, an indirect source of oral history interviews.

Benefits and constraints of utilising existing oral histories: reflections from the SAAW project Extending knowledge

Samuel's declaration that oral historians are archivists and historians was borne out particularly in the SAAW project in relation to Gasper's interviews for the Oral History of the Building Industry project and to Marsden's SAHT history. Gasper's interviews were prescient. They emanated from a project that



Figure 4, Dean W. Berry

originated because a group of oral historians realised that a cohort of built environment practitioners was aging and appreciated that their knowledge should be tapped to create a resource, for others to use then, and in the future. In reviewing her project, Marsden commented 'that the diversity of subjects discussed [by our interviewees] provided useful evidence not only for the Trust's history but for future researchers on many aspects of South Australian history since the 1930s'.³⁶ Existing oral history interviews with architects proved invaluable to SAAW researchers not only because they offered and extended knowledge and/or confirmed personal data about the individuals' professional contributions but also because they revealed information about the times in which they were working.

Insights into personalities and personal challenges

Reflecting upon the approach he took with his interviews, Gasper explained that he wavered between a 'formalist' approach, which he described as investigating the practical aspects of a practitioner's work – design, construction and building technique – and a 'sociological' slant. He chose the former and wrote that 'it will be left for the individual researchers

to sift out the information that they require'.³⁷

SAAW research team members were able to 'sift out' personal information where it was available in Gasper's and various other oral history interviews. Consequently, McDougall could explain that one of her subjects, Geoffrey Harrison (Figure 3), the first Staff Architect at Flinders University and consultant architect to the institution over several decades, spent his teenage years with his family in England during World War Two and became absorbed by architecture.

I was interested at looking at some of the famous buildings about London and England – and I rode a pushbike all over the place ... and also became very interested in all the enthusiastic plans that were being floated at that stage for rebuilding after the bombing of London, from housing through to public buildings.³⁸

Upon his return to Australia, Harrison commenced a Bachelor of Architecture at the University of Sydney, declaring, 'I was committed by then to turning myself into an architect'.³⁹

Susan Lustri and Julie Collins gleaned insights into the difficulties that architect Dean Berry (Figure 4) faced getting started in the profession in Adelaide:

In 1928 Berry established his own architectural practice. However as this was during the Depression, only minor works came his way ... He recalled that 'A three storey block of flats in North Adelaide was a windfall from a family friend'.

They also learnt about his early commitment to the conservation of buildings and his feelings of being a lone advocate for the cause. In the 1960s and 1970s:

he was among the first South Australian architects who called for preservation of historic buildings and said that he 'felt like he was a voice crying in the wilderness', when he 'declared that the historic buildings at the North and South ends of Victoria Square should be preserved'.⁴⁰

Similarly, Susan Lustri illuminated her biography of F. Kenneth Milne with personal glimpses gained directly from oral histories and indirectly from Page's book. She wrote:

Milne lived a life of privilege, thanks to the generosity of his relatives who not only cared for him at various times throughout his life but also paid for his early education and his articles of apprenticeship as an architect.... He also received private finishing tuition. Milne remembered that as a primary school student, 'I always was drawing houses on my school books, even at that age, so it seemed to me that there was nothing I could possibly do in the world but architecture'.⁴¹

Also drawing from Page, Lustri captured a poignant recollection from Milne:

In April 1909 Milne returned to Adelaide and established his own practice in Grenfell Street. It took time for him to build his practice though and he reminisced that he 'often stood at the window and saw friends passing and knew they were going to build, but they wouldn't come to me so that was most disappointing'.⁴²

Echoing Berry's observations, Milne's words confirm the difficulties that architects experienced in commencing professional practice in the early decades of the twentieth century.

Uncovering architects 'beyond the immediately well known'

Existing oral history sources were able to throw considerable light on two architects, Geoff Shedley and Geoffrey Harrison. Although both were influential architects, neither was a prominent or well known public figure. Through the SAAW project, and because of the existence of oral history interviews, they could be 'reintegrat[ed as Johnson urged,] ...into the archi-historical record'.

Adelaide born and trained, Shedley was described as 'one of the six visionaries of Elizabeth', the post World War Two 'model [new] town' established north of Adelaide in the 1950s and designed by a team of SAHT staff.⁴³ McDougall, his SAAW biographer, uncovered some personal data, particularly about his creative skills as a painter and sculptor. She gained biographical information informally from his daughters and from Shedley's brief but tantalising hand written notes on his early life and career.⁴⁴

Being a government rather than a private sector architect, and not having held office in the profession's organisation, Shedley was less visible than some of his peers, and it was the oral histories created for Marsden's book that provided the majority of material for his biography. Although Shedley died during the research phase of Marsden's project, and before he could be interviewed, Marsden referred to interviews with his widow, Mary, and with some of his SAHT colleagues.

Like Shedley, Harrison also was not in private practice. He trained in Sydney and worked in Canberra before moving to Adelaide to take up a new position as Staff Architect at the University of Adelaide in 1959. Three years later, in 1962, he was appointed to the same position for a proposed new suburban campus of the University of Adelaide at Bedford Park (from 1966, Flinders University of South Australia). The Flinders University Oral History project interview provided some biographical background on Harrison and considerable information about the actual Flinders University projects with which he was associated.

However, Holt had not interrogated Harrison's

personal and educational background or the context of his specialist line of architectural practice – campus planning – to the degree required by his SAAW biographer, McDougall. Fortunately in this instance, Harrison was still alive and the family commissioned an independent oral history that provided McDougall with the opportunity to gain a fuller picture of his professional field and personal contributions as a campus planning consultant to the Australian tertiary sector over several decades.⁴⁵

McDougall conversed with Harrison about the context in which he worked and in particular about his approach to campus planning and its application in the Flinders University plan. He outlined the collaborative nature of the project, revealed the names of other consultants involved in the project and explained that, in part, he acted as liaison between the university and engineering and architectural firms. The additional interview drew out information that allowed McDougall to offer a more rounded profile of her subject.⁴⁶

Clarification of data

Marsden's oral history interviews revealed the capacity of the oral record to clarify data available through other sources. Existing oral histories assisted SAAW researchers in identifying individual architects' roles and contributions to particular projects. A case in point relates to Shedley's involvement in a 1936 SAHT design competition for a pair of attached houses. The Trust's meeting minutes attribute the drawings to Hubert Cowell, to whom Shedley was articulated. Although it was then accepted practice to name the architect-in-charge as the designer, evidence from the oral histories clarified that in fact it was Shedley, not Cowell, who was responsible for the design of the houses.

Narrow focus

As noted, Gasper largely eschewed the 'sociological' slant but that, in fact, would have been of more assistance to SAAW researchers. Those interviews covering detailed construction techniques added little personal information to the individual biographies, and they did not provide full insight into the *modus operandi* of a practice and its wider context, as advocated by Proctor. The focus of the Gasper interviews serves to highlight the difficulties, despite Samuel's exhortations, in trying to second guess what future researchers will be seeking and reflect the hard decisions which need to be made when funding and time are limited.

Verification of facts and opinions

SAAW researchers endeavoured to verify draft biographies through informal personal contact with architects who were still alive, mostly to seek their

approval of the text that had been drafted. They also sought out surviving relatives of deceased architects, some of whom were able to clarify, verify and/or amplify data. Where oral histories revealed a divergence in point of view about an individual's approach or contributions, like any biographer, the researchers needed to make judgements about how that material was used since time and funding constraints meant that verification of such data was beyond the scope of the project. One unanticipated flow-on of contact with the son of a deceased architect who had been a prolific exponent of Art Deco architecture in South Australia was the opportunity to interview him, through another project, about his father's work.⁴⁷

Conclusion

Oral histories were a critical source of information for SAAW researchers seeking to uncover and navigate their way through personal data about South Australian architects and to utilise that material to craft biographies that offered a public history of the individuals profiled. Although the interviews produced by earlier historians did have limitations, others' foresight in creating them proved important. The SAAW project not only identified existing oral history interviews but also made their existence more publicly known by including them in the biographies' sources lists. It also led to two new oral histories, one of which amplifies the extant oral record and one which contributes a completely new oral resource.

In several cases, oral histories were the key source of information for the SAAW biographies and, where they were available, they added insight into the researchers' subjects and colour to the existing records. On the other hand, when they were absent, the researchers sometimes wished for them, especially when they were frustrated at being unable to verify leads about the background or life story of the individual being pursued. A particular example is colonial architect William Weir whose actual identity and professional connections remain something of a mystery in the absence of clear documentary evidence.⁴⁸

Given the constraints on encapsulating a person's background and career within one to two thousand words, SAAW project researchers endeavoured to follow Strachey's injunction that 'judicious use of...[a] little bucket was essential'. Additionally and importantly, in navigating their way through the available sources and in writing their biographies, they aimed to use the bridge afforded them by the oral histories and thus give due place to Portelli's critical word, 'and'.

Acknowledgements

The authors acknowledge the South Australian Department for Environment and Heritage which

funded the project *South Australian Architects and their Works*, their academic research team colleagues Julie Collins, Susan Lustri and Christine Sullivan, Shahid Gul who developed the online database, and the members of the project Reference Group.

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²⁷ De Berg interviewed Colin Hassell, Louis Laybourne Smith, Mervyn Smith, and Gavin Walkley.

²⁸ The interviewee is F. Kenneth Milne. We were able to ascertain that Donald Johnson organised several interviews with Milne in the late 1970s. One was by Paul Stark as background to research on Milne's 'bungalow phase'. Others were by Rachel Wharldall (now Hurst). Paul Stark to Christine Garnaut pers. comm. 3 September 2009; Rachel Hurst to Christine Garnaut pers. comm. 19 December 2009. See also notes 27 and 29.

²⁹ Formal records of the project have not been located but Rachel Hurst was employed by Donald Johnson as a research assistant on the project. She interviewed F. Kenneth Milne. Rachel Hurst to Christine Garnaut pers. comm. 19 December 2009

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⁴⁸ Alison McDougall, 'Weir, William', Architecture Museum, University of South Australia, 2008, *Architects of South Australia*: <http://www.architectsdatabase.unisa.edu.au/>

Unanswered questions include: Was the William Weir who sailed from Launceston to Port Adelaide in March 1847, the architect who was prominent in South Australia during the colonial period? Was he the William Weir, builder, of Patterson Street, Launceston in the 'List of men in Van Diemen's Land duly qualified to serve as jurors' (1835) and who possibly became insolvent in 1837? Did he follow the Launceston architect Richard Lambeth who arrived in South Australia in 1846 and collaborated with a William Weir?

'They might as well cut my brain out': the voice of the 'third cohort' in Tasmania's forests

Pete Hay

What follows is a report of a recording project that I have configured as 'ethnographic research' rather than oral history.¹ I was long involved in oral history, but became increasingly uneasy about certain vaguely apprehended – both then and now – ethical issues that seemed to hover at the fringe of the enterprise. 'I wish Alf Frimley g'day/The unused tape bullying my confusion', I wrote in a now-old poem, 'An Oral History Interview with Alf Frimley, 97',² in the wash-up of an aborted attempt to interview an aged great-uncle in which I could not even bring myself to turn on the tape recorder. But worse followed. I was interviewing, alone, a former Member of Federal Parliament when the 'subject' suffered a massive heart attack (he died the following day in hospital). That was more or less the end of my enthusiasm for oral history – but I could not bring myself to stop talking to people, to stop seeking out the wonders and the riches that lie within vernacular story. So I turned to what I prefer to call 'ethnographic research', where 'subjects' are as likely to be younger than the interviewer as they are to be older, and where the present is as important as the past, though usually not more so. Is my distinction a valid one? The reader can judge.

I want you to cast your minds back to the last federal election but one – 2004 – the head-to-head between the now unlamented John Howard and the fatally erratic Mark Latham. It is October 6th, the crucial final week of the federal election campaign, and the polls are all over the place. For reasons bizarre and wondrous, the detail of a so-called 'rescue package' for Tasmania's disputed forests has become the crucial election issue – the one that, it seems, is to determine the outcome of the entire election.

Each leader holds off, wanting to assess the reaction to the other's scheme before releasing the details of his own. It is classical electoral shadow-boxing, and the stakes cannot be higher. Latham's nerve breaks first – and his 'rescue package' is greeted with howls of outrage from the forest industry, including the Forestry Division of the CFMSU, an ALP affiliated union. The

Prime Minister then announces his 'rescue package' for the forests. It is considerably less generous than Latham's in its industry restructure and compensation provisions, and it protects less of the forest estate, though – it has to be said – not enormously so. But it is the politics that are all-important here, not the factual fine print, and Howard takes an extraordinary gamble – he announces his package at a Timber Communities Australia rally in Launceston.

And it works. A boisterous crowd welcomes him as lord and saviour, and vivid media imagery depicts a chuffed Prime Minister being slapped on the back by men jubilant and boisterous in singlets and flannel shirts. Leading the cheering for the Leader of the Liberal Party is Mr. Scott McLean, State Secretary of the Forestry Division of the CFMSU, a member of the Federal Executive of the Labor Party and subsequently an ALP candidate in the 2010 Tasmanian State elections – and not far behind Mr. McLean in the Vote-for-Howard-and-the-Liberals chorus is Tasmania's very own ALP Government, and specifically its then Premier, Paul Lennon.

For most commentators this event was election-defining, and Labor lost two of its five Tasmanian House of Representatives seats – though it is noteworthy, I think, that opinion polls taken in the week before the rally had already foreshadowed large, seat-changing swings.

However – none of this is really to my purpose. What I do wish to observe is that, given the dramatic, highly visible nature of such an apparently election-pivotal event, it is probable that most Australians now see the timber communities as politically undifferentiated, with Timber Communities Australia unchallenged as their voicepiece.

On such a reading, conflict over the fate of the Tasmanian forests takes on a simple rural-urban configuration, the assumption being that opposition to current forest practices is confined, in the main, to large urban areas, with the position articulated by

Timber Communities Australia – one of uncritical support for existing regimes and practices – the voice of the bush.

Though an entirely reasonable interpretation of the evidence supplied by the rally and the election outcome, such a reading cannot actually be sustained. The forest communities are anything but politically monolithic, and are, in fact, deeply conflicted places. Most campaigns against contentious, coupe-specific logging proposals are initiated by local dissidents in the first instance, and even after the campaigns have gained momentum, and island-wide activist structures and personnel have swung into action, much of the energy and strategic savvy continues to be supplied by local people.

There is a tendency for local forest campaigns to be led by and largely consist of comparative newcomers to the communities in which they now live – in contrast to Timber Communities Australia activists, who frequently make potent ideological appeal to a generations-long continuity of involvement in the forest industries.³ Many locally focused anti-logging campaigners came to the communities in which they now live as long as thirty or more years ago, as ‘alternative lifestylers’. Others are more recent arrivals, ‘sea-changers’,⁴ usually articulate and educated, and refugees from professional stress in the large cities of mainland Australia. They bring much-needed capital and are frequently active in community re-vitalisation activities. In politics they are knowledgeable, confident, and strategic. The local landed and business elites who have always promoted economic development as a self-evident good, one beyond any need for reasoned argument, are now forced to compete with a resilient sub-culture of environmentalism.

Within Tasmania, at least, it is known that Timber Communities Australia is not the hegemonic voice of the bush, and the strong presence of ‘alternative lifestylers’ and ‘sea-changers’ within the forest communities is recognised. But this is not the end of it. A third group can be identified, one that shares the political aspirations of the ‘sea-changers’ but has so little else in common with them that members of the two cohorts rarely make common cause.

This group consists of people who, like the Timber Communities Australia constituency, can claim generations-long ties to the communities in which they live, including a continuous involvement in the forest industries, but who are staunchly critical of the harvesting regimes that currently pertain. They tend to be older people, but are not always so, and they are less visible because they keep their views largely to themselves. They do not join together in pursuit of common political goals, and they tend to avoid

political structures set up by others, even when these are congruent with their own views and values.

It may be that in some timber communities they are such a small presence as to be almost negligible – though never, I think, entirely absent. But I have discovered one forest community where theirs is clearly the dominant voice. This is an upland community to the east of Launceston, a basin of land enclosed by the foothills of Mt. Barrow, Ben Lomond and Ben Neevis (as the locals pronounce it), and its place is the catchment for Launceston’s main domestic water supply, the upper reaches of the North Esk river.

Now it just may be that this community is entirely unique. A colleague who knows the southern timber town of Geeveston reports only small evidence of such a cohort there. On the other hand, in the Meander Valley, in the north of the island, it is easy enough to find people who fit the profile of the people I have called the timber towns’ ‘third cohort’, but they are certainly not in the majority. As I move out to investigate other parts of the island, though, I expect to find it a not inconsiderable factor within the demography of the timber communities.

In the North Esk country there are considerably fewer people than in the Meander, and the community infrastructure is restricted to one single community hall – no shop, school or church, not even a current graveyard. Yet this was core sawmill country, with a network of self-contained villages attached to each mill. Most mills were small, but they included a couple – the Roses Tier mill, and Chesterman’s mill at Burns Creek – that were among the largest on the island. Now there are only the diehards left, small sawmillers – not necessarily even old – retired millers, retired ‘fallers’ (as they call themselves), more men than women, and, as yet, no sea-changers.

The place of which I speak is currently the epicentre of possibly the most rapid conversion of native forest to plantation on the island. It should be prime Timber Communities Australia country. It is not. ‘Everyone around here thinks like me’, said one outspoken sawmiller when I asked him how hazardous it was to excoriate forest practices in the way that he customarily does. And when I asked about Timber Communities Australia he said: ‘there’s no Timber Communities Australia around here. They wouldn’t get anyone to join’. Most have only the rudiments of formal education – sometimes not even that – but they are wonderfully articulate. They speak in a strong, old drawl, and they are brilliantly inventive in their deployment of language. ‘They’re baldin’ er up there today mate’, the same sawmiller said to me one day, waving at the nearby face of Ben Nevis. ‘They’re completely baldin’ er’. ‘Balding the mountain’ –

could there, I thought, be a more perfect evocation of the indignity visited upon the land by the contemptible practice of clear-felling!

The people of the upper North Esk hearken back to an economy based around small sawlog production for local or regional need. They carry a very strong sense of local history. They lionise the legendary bush-workers and communities that were here before them. They insist, furthermore, that such an economy remains viable, that the resource to sustain it still exists (though not likely to for much longer), and that it could provide sustenance for a network of small villages and towns, in place of the asset-stripping and depopulation that presently characterises the smaller centres within timber country. One sawmiller said to me:

Even if they just save this little bit, and people get sawmilling going again, and everyone helping everyone out. People would say, 'Gee, I'd like to live in that little town. Get businesses working again and farms going'. People want to stay, but what can they do?

The same sawmiller sees considerable irony in the 'Timber Communities Australia' sobriquet. Like many others, he sees the organisation as a front for a monopolistic industry that actually wants people gone from the bush. In interview he observed thus:

They want to close the farms and the little towns down – they want a clear run at it out there, so they won't have to worry about poisoning people's water supplies, or copping shit about the bloody arc lights that are on all night so they can just keep on working round the clock.

The anecdotal information I have is that most of the men working in the clearfells are not locals; many, indeed, are not even country people, but live in Launceston, Tasmania's second city, which is a mere forty minutes distant, and which is, properly speaking, Tasmania's largest timber community, even though to live in the suburbs of Launceston is not to actually live in the bush.

Much of the antagonism expressed towards current forest practices is directed towards its effect upon water quality, particularly high up in the headwaters, where permanent hydrological changes are seen to be taking place. Some are scornful of industry and government scientists, who are thought to turn up to do their studies and take their measurements at precisely the times when they can be sure of not finding anything in breach of the Forest Practices Code. One local said:

There are people up here can't read and write, and none of us are scientists, but we're here all the time, and we see things – dead wombats in the creeks and

that, the creeks foamin' like y'wouldn't believe, algae up here where none's ever been known before – we see stuff that the bloody scientists never see because they aren't here when it's right there in front of you.

Such an observation raises questions about the comparative status of grounded place knowledge versus the authority of science. Who should we believe? Scientists who turn up three or four times a year, stay for an hour, gather samples and take them away? Or local people of little or no formal education who have developed a keen eye for the most subtle of changes; who understand the land in its minutiae, and the nuances of its biophysical processes? The 'third cohort' people of the Upper North Esk know animals and animal behaviour, weather, trees – and they can also discourse idiomatically about soil types and properties, and about hydrological matters. And many are openly contemptuous of forest science as they have experience of it.

On current 'falling' regimes there is similar scorn. 'We used to spend hours working out how to fall a tree so as to do the least damage to the forest', said one retired 'busher' – another local colloquialism – and then, with bitterness: 'I don't know why we bothered'. One of the sawmillers quoted above has a one-person mill that lies idle for most of the year. He insists that most of what goes to the chipper is 'millable', and that it is only greed, laziness and incompetence that condemns it to the chipper.

I could make a year's living out of just one truck-load going down the road there to St. Leonards – where they'll just say, 'No good, off to the chipper with it'. That's because they don't know how to mill. I do. I can get timber from logs that no-one else can. I could make a fortune out of the Blackwood that's going to the chip. If they'd drop one log off here on the way I'd make more from that one log than they'd make from the rest of the load.

There is also much sadness for the animals and birds whose lives are destroyed in clearfell operations and the subsequent laying of 1080 poison. One sawmiller, a man who walks through the bush in all weathers in bare feet, who lives in a humpy at the centre of which is, I think, an old caravan, and whose home within fire-adapted bush is surrounded by old car bodies, spoke of the wild things of the bush in a way, and entirely unselfconsciously, that was almost primal. A recurring observation is that animals cannot live in the plantations, and that, along with the much publicised decline in the Tasmanian devil population – and the disease that is ravaging devil numbers was universally attributed to the chemical regimes deployed in forestry operations – the quoll and tiger cat are also in significant decline, as are many species

of birds. 'And there's a lot more roadkill now', one man observed to me. 'The animals are so docile with all that poison in them. Even the fish just lie there in the creek, with no energy'.

Finally, a tangible sadness hovers around the lives of these people. They are not optimists, and a sense of utter powerlessness overwhelms most of them. Stories are told of marriage and health breakdown – even suicides – as one social consequence of life within the devastation of the clearfells. That is one of the reasons why the gender imbalance is skewed. When families break up as a consequence of the stress of living in the midst of a devastated landscape, it is the women who move away. And when people die, widows move to town, and widowers stay put.

I struggled to comprehend the stress that these people are under.⁵ Remember that they are not politically confident or savvy people, and low or non-existent literacy levels prevail. Most are poor. Many simply cannot conceive of ever living anywhere else – or doing anything else. Then I heard a story that broke through that comprehension barrier. A sawmiller waved to the mountain at his back, and he said:

That bush up there is all I know. I can take you up there and show you how the wind shifts when you go a yard or so that way, and how the temperature pools differently over there. And this summer they're going to flatten that bush. They'll plant it out in *nitens*, but it wouldn't matter if they let it grow back – it still wouldn't be the bush I know. And that's all I know. They might as well cut my brain out.

I have no idea how prominent this cohort is within the wider mesh of forest communities in Tasmania – let alone the rest of Australia. It is an invisible community, its members lacking the political skills and confidence to organise, and for the most part they keep their views to themselves. It is not likely that they will be as prominent in most timber communities as they are in the one in which I have spent time, but neither are they often likely to be negligible. Their existence greatly complicates present assumptions about the political complexion of the timber communities.

Let me, in closing, do a lap on one of my favourite hobbyhorses. The left of politics, where I have lodged all my adult life, dismisses the hearkening-back of my 'third cohort' as anti-progressive, as hopelessly romantic. Against this I would argue that whatever can defend the integrity of collective vitality against abstract and frequently brutal market forces should properly be championed by people of progressive disposition. What, then, should be the response of the progressive wing of politics to the plight of the 'third cohort' of Tasmania's timber communities? As we have seen, these people hold a generations-forged

sensibility of what is and what is not appropriate interaction with the ecological and social conditions upon which their way of life is based, a sensibility that is profoundly affronted by the practices and processes of present-day industrial logging. Can the values of these people really be categorised as a form of reactionary romanticism? For them change has brought with it a loss of individual and collective agency, a diminution of human potential. They are politically disarmed – but this only serves more dramatically to highlight the fact of disempowerment in the face of centrally-imposed economic structures, as well as the anti-progressive nature of technologically-rationalised change in forest practices and its incumbent socio-economic consequences.

The 'third cohort' within Tasmania's timber communities falls below the radar. It is of unknown numerical strength, not politically organised (and probably not amenable to organisation), and its likely survival into the future is tenuous at best. That it presently exists, though, challenges the predominant view that the bush is politically undifferentiated, a view that received considerable but tragically misleading affirmation through highly visible events during the 2004 federal election.

Editor's Note: This article grew out of the author's experience of conducting an exhaustive collection of oral history interviews with members of Tasmanian forest communities.

Endnotes

¹ This is the text of a speech – with the footnotes subsequently added – delivered at the 2009 Watermark Literary Dinner, Kendall, NSW. An earlier version was published under the title, 'The Moral Economy of the Bush' in *Arena Magazine* in 2006, and the text of the speech itself was published under the title "'That Bush Up There Is All I Know': The Voice of the Voiceless in Tasmania's Forests' in *Island Magazine* in 2010, whilst the ethnographic research upon which the speech was based also formed the basis of an academic article, "'Balding Nevis': The Place Imperatives of an Invisible Cohort within Tasmania's Forest Communities', published in *Geographical Research* in 2008.

² In *The View from the Non-Members' Bar*, Hazard Press, Christchurch, 1992, pp. 13-14.

³ Timber Communities Australia is said, by the National Association of Forest Industries' Tasmanian director, Terry Edwards, to have 30,000 members (Michelle Paine, 'At Loggerheads over Tax', *The Mercury*, Hobart, Tasmania, 3 April 2006). In the same newspaper report Greens Senator Bob Brown describes Timber Communities Australia as a 'shadowy' organisation funded by the National Association of Forest Industries. TCA's reputation in Tasmania took quite a hit in May 2006 when it conspicuously failed to defend harvesting contractors against a decision by Gunns Ltd. to cut long-term supply contracts in response to a sudden drop in woodchip demand, thereby fuelling a widely-held public perception that, far from being a grass-roots organisation created by and for the

timber folk, TCA is merely a front for large industry interests (Sue Neales, 'Let the Record Reflect', *The Mercury*, 20 May 2006). I have myself interviewed an ex-staff member of Forestry Tasmania who claims that Timber Communities Australia was an initiative of Forestry Tasmania management, but I have been unable to verify this claim.

⁴ Often unnecessarily re-labelled – by those apparently ignorant of the linguistic function of metaphor – 'tree-changers'.

⁵ Of course, the scale and the brutalism of clearfell forestry ramifies throughout the island, with an unknowable but sizable proportion of all Tasmanians suffering through a deep and endless grief for the loss of the forests and the wild places. Richard Flanagan has written, 'Not only the forest has been destroyed by this industry. Its poison has seeped into every aspect of Tasmanian life: jobs are threatened, careers destroyed, people driven to leave'. Observing that, 'after firebombing', a clearfell calls to mind images 'of the battlefields of great wars' (Richard Flanagan, 'Love Walks Naked', in Richard Wastell, *We Are Making a New World*, Dick Bett Gallery, North Hobart, Tasmania, 2006, p. 5), he gives potent voice to the sadness and despair that are so prevalent. 'The great forests are gone, and they will not return, and nor will the intense human response we had to such places. Everything hereafter will be ordered and imaginable, paintable and representable in a way that those wild places never were, and we will be less' (ibid., p. 6). If it is so for those of us who live many ridgelines distant from the devastation, imagine how much harder it must be for those who live, sleep and move about in its very midst.

Place and people: stories by and of unemployed youth in a small island community

Terry Whitebeach

Abstract

Native American writer Leslie Marmon Silko¹ notes that within traditional Pueblo society, story telling (oral history) is part of a communal process of remembering, in which everyone is expected to listen and to speak up and contribute a detail or a fact that has been omitted, or to recount a conflicting version. People welcome even conflicting versions of events, recognising that loyalties, grudges and kinship influence narrative choices, and truth lies somewhere within the web of differing versions, disputes over minor points and outright contradictions arising from old feuds and rivalries.

This paper explores this way of oral history and memory making. It focuses on accounts by and about unemployed young people in a rural community in Southern Tasmania. It discusses the way these accounts were collected, transcribed and transmuted, in a collaborative venture, into literature (to date, a novel and a radio play) in order to stand witness to a community's memory and experience and also to ensure that particular individuals not be shamed – a dialogue which includes the conflicting accounts, attitudes, opinions and versions whose effective coexistence is essential to maintaining co-operative interdependence in small island communities.

People and Place

I recently spent an afternoon in a small country town with a young Indigenous woman. Through a process of oral history interviews we created the opening chapter of her memoir. The old aunties had pointed her out. 'That one, she wants to write.' So I approached her and she jumped at the chance. The mother of two young children, she had suffered severe post-natal depression and also had been a victim of domestic abuse. She saw the documenting and sharing of her story as part of a healing process, her way of recovering her life. She was undertaking this work for the sake of her children, she told me. 'I want to see my kids laugh,' she said. 'I'm going to call this story *How I Overcame*.'

Now, I am not suggesting that oral history interviews

and the recounting of a life history single-handedly will solve deep-seated problems or magic away troubles, but something about being heard, having a receptive audience, shaping one's story to the ears of a sympathetic listener, discovering one has something to say and saying it, and having one's story valued, is life enhancing, and helps to beard the Monster Despair in his lair, even if it might not despatch him in one fell swoop. A well-told story, full of life and truth, carries great power. Make the pain into art, was a mantra we often employed during the time I was working with Stolen Generation writers, and when they became temporarily overwhelmed by their own and their families' grief, suffering and irretrievable losses.

I love the collaborative nature of oral history, a cooperative undertaking growing out of and implying connection and community. Shared social acts and interactions, 'sending our hearts back across the years', to paraphrase one Native Canadian story teller, showing each other our worlds. 'See My World' is a Fred Hollows Indigenous literacy project in which Indigenous youth in regional Australia share their lived realities in poems, stories and songs. It was as part of this project I met the young storyteller mentioned earlier.

Oral history interviews are generally sought from, and given by, older people. I have spent a lot of time listening to, recording and transcribing the stories of elders. But the young have important stories to tell as well. And in common with those in their senior years, young people often face great challenges and must grapple with significant life changes. They are very vulnerable to depression and despair.

Native Americans condense their entire sacred law to two essential principles: everything is born of the feminine and seeded by the masculine (the yin-yang principle) and the second: nothing must be done to harm the children. Much *has* been done that has harmed our children. And continues to be done. The

transition to young adulthood is often difficult and lonely. And the statistics for self harm for those in this age group are alarming. It was when I realised that Tasmania had the highest suicide rate in the world of rural young males that I really sat up and took notice. That statistic touched me more closely when my younger son attempted suicide.

He'd had a hard row to hoe; a serious medical condition had meant years of medical and hospital treatment. This had affected him deeply. He hated school, and apart from a few years at a wonderful community school, Zoe, continually asked me when I could 'get him out.' He possesses a sentience and practical intelligence that does not thrive in institutional settings. He begged for an exemption at fifteen (ironically, both his parents and most of his aunts were teachers) and with great joy secured himself a job on a fishing boat. Going to sea was his dream, all he asked of life. At nineteen, with a wrecked knee, and after a failed operation to fix the injury sustained at sea, he found himself stranded on dry land, unemployed, not trained for anything else, living in a small country town where two thirds of the population were unemployed as a result of rural downturn generated by cynical business manoeuvres and government neglect and ineptness. Grog, drugs, sport and brawling seemed to be the major anodynes for the townsfolk. When my son made his second (and thankfully unsuccessful) suicide attempt I decided I must act and act quickly.

When he'd rung me one low day and wept on the phone, 'Mum, how can I stay alive?' I was shocked into speaking the bare truth. 'We're held in life by those who love us,' I told him, 'and by the land, of which we're made, and which sustains us.'

I couldn't bear it that my funny, generous, practical son could find little reason to live. It was then I conceived my plan. As he was an adult male, it was not appropriate for me to hover over him with my 'Mummy kiss it better' anxiety. But neither was I prepared to lose him to despair, when, from hard experience, I knew, as those of us who have lived long



enough and weathered many storms have found, that although as young people we may feel nothing will ever get better, the old promise 'This too will pass', or as a friend once phrased it, 'It won't be this in the morning', holds true. But you have to keep on living, in order to discover this.

My son was and is an excellent raconteur. He comes from a family of good talkers and he can spin a great yarn. He has a keen eye for telling detail and an excellent sense of the ridiculous; his language is somewhat salty and his stories are funny and engaging. He sees through humbug quickly and can spot the humour and humanity present even in dire situations. And he has a love of the bizarre, the zany, the offbeat. He collects eccentrics around him and often finds himself in odd situations, which somehow work out with a peculiar logic that leaves me gasping in disbelief and admiration.

I was living in Central Australia at that time and he in Tasmania so I had to find a legitimate reason for ringing him on a regular basis, beyond the anxious desire to check he was still alive, so I said to him, 'Let's write a book together.' He was appalled. His

protracted school career had led to a lack of confidence in anything he perceived as literary or academic.

‘You talk, I’ll write,’ was the deal I offered, emboldened by a letter he had written me in which he said, *I s’pose I’ve been pretty slack when it comes to writing to you. I’d rather get on the blower any day.*

The rare letters he did write were wonderful – humorous, engaging, with a real flair for language and detail – some of them are included in the book we subsequently wrote – as are his many yarns of rural life. He tried to wriggle out of our agreement, of course, in true teenage style: he suggested I write the book on my own. ‘You’re the writer,’ he said. ‘But they’re your stories,’ I told him. ‘And your life. You and all the other “rural youth” the statistics are about.’ (That last is a quote from the radio play I wrote after the book² had been published. The play is a documentary drama about the process of collaborative writing, entitled *Bantam, a Real Book by Mick Brown & Terry Whitebeach*, and it was broadcast at the time of *Bantam’s* serialisation on the ABC *Book Reading* program.)

About six weeks after the book was launched Mick said to me (quoting from the radio play, again):

Son: You know, I read the book the other day.

Mother: Which book?

Son: Ours. Bantam. I didn’t know it was so cool.

Mother: But you wrote it.

Son: Yeah, I know, but I never read it before this. And you know what?

Mother: What?

Son: It’s a real book. Like writers write.

Mother: (Rather faintly) Yes.

Son: A real book. *Bantam*, by Mick Brown and Terry Whitebeach.

So, how did our collaboration operate? A couple of times a week I’d ring him and ask, ‘What’s been happening down there?’ I’d put the tape recorder by the phone and record our conversations. It was a delicate process. I never asked, ‘How are you?’ That was not the deal. Sometimes he told me; sometimes he didn’t. But there was always some zany or interesting incident to recount. We named our fictional town ‘Bantam’, a joke those familiar with a certain Tasmanian town would appreciate, but also with a logic internal to the narrative, because the fictional hero of the book, Mick Shearing, kept chooks, and one of his sorrows was that old ladies and chooks seemed to find him more attractive than young women did. Mick and I both love chooks, and were delighted when our friend, Alexis Wright, brought two of her bantams

to the launch of the book in Alice Springs in 2002.

Some days even I would be gasping at what had gone on since I last rang, and I knew the town well. We never identified the town, in fact did not even specify the location, beyond SE Australia, and as further subterfuge we used the generic term Koori, rather than Palawa, for the Aboriginal characters in the book. But there are well-placed clues for those in the know. I was highly amused, listening to my son being interviewed on *Bush Telegraph* to hear him deftly deflect the interviewer’s questions about the authenticity of the characters in the book. ‘Only the dogs play themselves,’ was all he would admit; beyond that, he refused to be drawn. Jezebel and Tyke were the only ones who got a guernsey. Everyone else was a figment of our imagination.

We all know fact is stranger than fiction, and when our startled editor first read the manuscript, she said, ‘I find it hard to believe so many disasters – fires, explosions, car crashes, fights etc – happened in one small town in less than a year.’ My son laughed when I related her remarks. We had not set out to write an exhaustive history of the town and deliberately had reduced the number of disasters we had included, so as not to overload the narrative. ‘She’d spin out if she lived here, wouldn’t she?’ he said.

Here is an example from a chapter entitled, ‘An Explosive Few Weeks’:

Mick rings his mum next day.

‘You’ll ever guess what happened last night.
[Takeaway blew up.]’

She’s appalled. ‘But how?’

‘A gas leak. Been leaking for weeks, they reckon. Heaps of people told Briggsy, but he didn’t do anything about it.’

Mick’s mum’s voice nearly fades out. ‘Why not?’

‘Too slack,’ Mick says. ‘Hey, you know it used to be a bank years ago?’

‘Not so far back.’

‘Yeah, well, the walls are reinforced concrete. That’s what saved the town from being totalled.’

‘It’s frontier land down there,’ Mick’s mum says. She’s so shocked she forgets to growl at Mick for ringing her reverse charges.³

Before that chapter ends it also recounts a fire at the Takeaway Shop next to the petrol station, and the torching of the South East Aboriginal Centre. And I can assure you that despite our concealing the name and exact location of the town, and making composite characters from real people, the disasters recounted in *Bantam* all actually occurred. In the chapter, ‘The Other Shoe Drops’:

Two really bad things happen then. The first is that three young kids suicide in as many days. On the Monday, Danny Green, a sixteen-year-old who's been in trouble most of his life, hassled out by welfare workers and cops non-stop, shoots himself with a twenty-two. And on Wednesday, two fifteen-year-olds hang themselves. Justin McGivney, a quiet clever kid no one would have suspected as troubled. And Kevin Mundy, Toad's cousin-brother. Three kids in one week. Two Aboriginal, one white. All of them related to someone in town.

The same mob gathers in the bottom pub on Wednesday night but everyone's quieter than usual. Black Dog weeps openly into his VB and for once Ed Stuart's not trying to get up him. Even Johnny and Maire Baker seem to have called a temporary ceasefire. They sit at either end of the bar scowling at one another like they always do but not blueing.

Roy Bullock's wife, who took to religion in a big way after Roy burned their house down, silently replaces the New Testaments she regularly leaves in the Ladies and Gents dunnies and which the drunks regularly destroy. There's none of her usual sermons on the evils of drink tonight. And no stirring from the town drunks.⁴

Sometimes it was hard to keep my son up to the mark. He'd lose heart. But I'd nag him. Again, I quote from the play:

So, talk to me. Ring me up. Keep telling the stories. I'll keep writing them down. We can't give up now. And maybe we can have a laugh at some of the loony tunes that pass for everyday life. And he'd begin again: There was a pretty good blue, the other day, right outside the butcher's shop...⁵

And in the talking, telling stories, spinning yarns, holding audience, there was a reprieve from the sense of futility that dogged his footsteps and those of his mates during those dark days, for they all were dragged into the project. I would send down the drafts of the chapters and Mick's girlfriend would read them out to everyone as they gathered in Mick's cottage or in the pub, and they'd all put their sixpenn'orth in. Thus the book generated a sense of inclusion, and eventually, of ownership and pride. I teased my son: 'You've got a literary circle down there.' The comments from some of the listeners to the narrative were included in later chapters. The readings generated new anecdotes. My son told stories against himself and his mates and everyone in town, but what shone through was a sense of community. 'It's a book about friendship,' my elder son remarked to me. About getting through the hard times, about helping each other, something that people say no longer exists, or that the youngsters of today know nothing about. In the book, as in life, Mick Shearing and his mates joined forces to help each other survive, pooling resources and taking on casual

labouring jobs to help eke out their dole money, and tackling their precarious lives with the reckless, admirable courage of youth. An excerpt from the chapter 'Mick Moves Out' illustrates this:

Woodhooking's not a bad way of getting some instant moulah, except that Toad's a bit too wild with the chainsaw for Mick's liking. Goes in like a maniac, without checking properly where the tree's going to fall. Tries to be a big hero. Mick thinks for sure he'll be dragging Toad's mangled body out from under ten tonne of blue gum one day.⁶

Above all we need hope, and young people more than most, so you will be pleased to know the book has a happy ending. In real life I persuaded my son and his girlfriend to join me in Central Australia where my son gained a horticulture apprenticeship and his girlfriend a traineeship in healthcare. Since then we all have returned to Tasmania to live and although my son keeps up his associations with *Bantam*, he no longer is held hostage by the despair that is still so prevalent in that part of rural Australia and which sours the lives of so many country people.

In the final chapter, 'Life, the Universe and Everything', we see Mick at peace with his world.

Mick looks out across the bay to where the sun makes sparkling ripples on the water. There's a sharp smell of salt and seaweed, and the tang of eucalypt in the air. He imagines for a moment that he's going to say something special, something big, like poetry or the Bible, but the words don't come. Somehow it doesn't matter. They're there, deep in his belly, and on the wind and in the air and glinting on the scales of the salmon. It's enough.⁷

Much story telling has its roots deeply in a sense of social justice, that holds all lives valuable, and all stories worthy of a hearing, especially the stories of those who, historically, often have been excluded or silenced. In the postscript to *Bantam* we wrote:

This book was also written for conscripts in high schools whose reading skills may be dodgy or even absent but whose hopes and dreams are as significant as everybody else's and whose stories are just as worth telling.⁸

Endnotes

¹ L.M. Silko. 'Interior and Exterior Landscapes', in S.J. Ortiz (ed.) *Speaking for the Generations*, University of Arizona Press, Tucson, 1998, pp. 9-10.

² Terry Whitebeach & Michael Brown, *Bantam*, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, Fremantle, 2002.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 80-81.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 116-117.

⁵ Terry Whitebeach, *Bantam, a Real Book by Mick Brown & Terry Whitebeach*, Australian Broadcasting Commission, 2003.

⁶ Terry Whitebeach & Michael Brown, *Bantam*, pp. 16-17.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 140.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 142.

The OHAA *Journal*: editorial considerations and the peer review process

Francis Good

The main purpose of this paper is to explain why the Oral History Association of Australia has recently begun offering potential contributors of articles for the OHAA *Journal* the option of having their papers subjected to peer review, the mechanisms and processes this involves and how the OHAA manages them.

To do this, it is necessary first to look at what the *Journal* should be aiming to achieve – what kind of publication it is, and how the Association views it. Then follows an outline of what we believe the review process can achieve, and for whom, looking both at its strengths – and perhaps also some limitations; followed by a sketch of the actual mechanisms and procedures, and their rationale. Along the way, hopefully, a sense should emerge of what authors considering this option need to understand about things the OHAA Editorial Board (formerly the Publication Committee)¹ and the reviewers look for in papers that are sent for review.

But it's important to flag at the outset that peer-review is an option being offered – offers are only put into the review process if authors specifically request it. This is a defining aspect of the publication as it has evolved, underlying the strengths that it has achieved that we want to retain, while adding this additional layer of peer-review.

I edited the *Journal* for five issues (2003 to 2007) and the offer of peer-review was introduced for the last two of these issues. To begin with, there was a learning curve for all involved, but we now have a formally designed process which has been considered and endorsed by the OHAA's National Committee. We certainly needed to do this when I asked OHAA in 2006 to find another editor to replace me after the 2007 issue – any incoming editor would need to have an agreed set of protocols within which to operate. We were very pleased indeed that Dr Jan Gothard from Murdoch University in WA agreed to be the editor of the 2008 issue (and subsequently also the 2009 issue); what I'm describing was the framework which had

been established from when she took up the challenge of editorship.

I've not been aware of any past formal discussion of the role and objectives of the *Journal*, but in formalising this process, the OHAA's National Committee adopted the following as a fair summary of what kind of publication it should be.

The *Journal* should aim to:

- provide a forum and showcase for work and ideas from a broad spectrum of the oral history community, particularly from Australia – so it's not just for OHAA members, but for anyone working in fields that are relevant to the Association's interests
- provide a range of practitioners and scholars, by access to examples of the work and insights of others, with a stronger sense of context for their own work and the opportunity to reflect on how it may be developed or improved – going beyond being a vehicle for oral historians' own work, by giving them a sense of their place in the community of practitioners and how they can further develop their ideas and aspirations
- make a contribution to current thinking about oral history methodology and its relationship to the world of learning in general – providing a forum for contributors to explore and develop ideas beyond definitional limitations, acknowledging the extraordinary cross-disciplinary nature of contexts in which OHAA members find themselves involved
- offer a valid vehicle for those seeking publication that contributes to their academic career – obviously, not an exclusive or paramount purpose, but essential if we are to continue to attract the broadest range of material

The OHAA *Journal* also has general and informative aspects similar to a magazine or newsletter, and has a role to inform about relevant publications etc. through reviews, and important events through notices. All of the above aims may be satisfied to a degree by

material not subjected to peer-review, but the reality is that the last two points in the above list are best served by offering authors peer-review of their material, and further, that articles that have been through this process also make a high-value contribution to the first two aims.

On the other hand, it can be argued that a solely academic journal would unacceptably limit the breadth, originality and inclusiveness of material offered for readers, and hence the current approach of including both peer-reviewed and other articles provides a balanced outcome.

Peer review of papers: some basic considerations for OHAA

As I said earlier, contributors to the *Journal* have been offered the option of having papers subjected to peer-review commencing with the 2006 issue. We found it necessary to adopt a formal process that allows for:

- anonymity for authors and reviewers
- a collegiate approach to the judgemental aspects, trying to avoid domination by influential individuals within OHAA, and aiming to promote standards and understandings that are generally accepted, rather than being idiosyncratic and biased.

This might seem somewhat utopian, but we think the following is a way to keep faith with these ideals.

In summary, OHAA appoints a General Editor for the overall production of the *Journal*, supported by an Editorial Board which has oversight of the peer-review process, and the work involved in that process is managed by the board's Convenor under the jurisdiction of the General Editor. There may also be a Reviews Editor, who will actively seek review copies of publications, write detailed reviews of some of these and obtain critiques from other appropriate reviewers.

General Editor

The General Editor has overall responsibility for all final content and its arrangement, and substantive decisions on article inclusions/exclusions, layout,

presentation and cover design. Offers of material that do not request peer-review are handled by the General Editor alone, who may or may not seek the assistance of the Editorial Board in determining suitability of the material or need for further work. Typically, this involves detailed attention to around twelve or so papers or articles offered each year (i.e. some 60,000 words plus), as well as OHAA Branch reports, reviews and notices etc. The General Editor also decides which offers can be included from any that become available after publicly-announced deadlines, whether evolving out of the peer-review process or otherwise. However, although taking part in the Editorial Board (below), the General Editor delegates the ongoing process work on offers for peer-review to the Board's Convenor.

Editorial board and its convenor

The Board oversees the ongoing peer-review process. It comprises a Convenor, the General Editor and at least two other members with particular strengths and experience in published academic material. The Convenor services the peer-review process under the jurisdiction of the General Editor, as spelt out below. The Board only advises on material not being peer-reviewed if specifically requested to by the General Editor.

The process begins with a triage of the offers made for publication as peer-reviewed material. It is vital to maintain goodwill of reviewers if we are to rely on their cooperation in a task that requires their voluntary, skilled and time-consuming work, so in order to ensure that material sent for review is suitable and does not waste reviewers' time, each member of the Editorial Board examines all of the offers for peer review (from copies made without attribution to the author). These copies are compiled by the Convenor from original author versions submitted either directly to the Board or through the General Editor. Operating on a consensus approach, the Board determines which papers can be sent for peer-review, and which should not be.

Authors whose papers are not accepted for review can be offered the option of publication without it, if these papers are seen as worthwhile contributions by other criteria. (The General Editor is also able to seek the Board's consensus on inclusion/exclusion of non-peer reviewed material if desired.) This initial level of scrutiny and feedback has been shown to be quite useful and beneficial in itself, and authors have expressed their appreciation for insights gained and assistance given by the Board in strengthening their material.

For papers accepted for review, the Convenor then contacts a range of potential reviewers to seek their cooperation, and sends each paper to two from whom agreement to voluntarily participate has been gained. Only anonymous versions are sent (even though, sometimes, unavoidably, the identity of the author may be deduced by detail in the text).

After referral to reviewers, some follow-up is required by the Convenor – although some reviewers may respond fairly promptly, it could be a month or two before their reports are provided. Invariably, reviewers recommend some revisions – this may mean that some points need elaboration or clarification, that further reading is required or that substantial recasting is recommended.

Following receipt of referee reports, their substance is communicated to authors, and the Convenor then liaises and negotiates with authors for a mutually satisfactory outcome, and is responsible for ensuring that revisions meet the issues raised by referee reports. The option of publishing as a non-reviewed article in the forthcoming issue can be considered; or authors may opt to revise the work for reconsideration. The Convenor keeps the Board informed of progress on a regular basis, seeks their advice if necessary, and clears with the Board any undertakings to authors that papers are sufficiently developed to be passed to the General Editor for inclusion in the next available Journal.

This division of labour and responsibility helps to relieve the General Editor of the attention to detail and negotiation that efficient and valid operation of the peer-review process demands, without compromising the General Editor's overall responsibility for compiling and producing the Journal, a task which has a high level of other time-critical demands.

One major change to previous practice with non-peer-reviewed material was necessary: where revisions to peer-reviewed papers are required, experience showed that there is often not enough time for an author to complete this work for inclusion in the Journal issue for the year it was offered, depending on the amount

of extra research and writing that may be involved. Consequently, authors are invited to offer material for peer-review at any time of the year, with a statement that any material not received by (say) the end of December² in any year may not be processed in time for publication in the following year. The Editorial Board can stagger the triage selection over two or three stages during the year; referral to and follow-up with reviewers will be an ongoing process not necessarily tied to publication deadlines, although these can be borne in mind as the processing evolves.

Conclusion

We believe that peer review is a process that has a number of benefits. Certainly it is primarily aimed at giving contributors the opportunity to gain academic credit for publishing their work. It is worth mentioning here that, judging from some of the offers that have been made by authors requesting peer-review, there is sometimes a misconception that assessment is mainly about intrinsic worth of ideas or work done, and perhaps a sense of kudos, rather than the opportunity to expose a paper to academic critique. In fact, reviewers generally focus on aspects such as authors' engagement with relevant aspects of current and historical scholarship, and contribution to the discipline through analysis, argument and conclusions presented in this context. Recommendations are made on initial drafts which can then facilitate further development of ideas and writing, which could range from some judicious clarifications and adjustments to fundamental recasting.

It could be said that there is a downside to this process, and that perhaps it can inhibit creativity and originality; but we feel that by continuing to offer a forum for material that does not fit the peer-review mould, we are hopefully encouraging contributions that would usually fall between the cracks in a purely academic journal, and will continue to encourage the climate of innovation and insightful crossing of disciplinary borders, to reflect the eclecticism that has characterised our field and offer a broad forum and showcase for oral history projects and activities.

By the nature of the process, peer-review offers readers material that has been well developed in terms of its relationship to relevant previous literature of the discipline and its major themes. However, although the process is of particular benefit for contributors seeking academic credit, it also has the potential to benefit others who are not part of academe, and who may not otherwise have the opportunity for the kind of advice and objective assessment that scholars generally experience. Anyone can benefit from feedback which helps an understanding of the place of authors' material within the broader literature, its

relevance to what has been written before, and which can provide sources for further study and indications of how material can be further developed to a higher standard.

All of this is not to imply that contributions which are not subjected to this process cannot also be of high value and interest – on the contrary, material may be worthwhile, creative, refreshing and insightful or make an original contribution without broad, scholarly engagement with relevant historiography to date. However, where peer-reviewed material is included in the *Journal*, contributors and readers can certainly benefit from the broader outcomes of what can be, at times, the daunting process of critique and revision to which authors submit work for peer-review.

However, an important consideration is that for papers to be accepted for academic credit (and this may also have course-funding implications), institutions must be satisfied that work is subjected to the breadth and detail of assessment generally expected within the higher education sector in Australia, so that credit and recognition is based on their conception of appropriate standards.³ In other words, it is academe that is setting the agenda, and OHAA is obliged to ensure that the process it follows for peer review of papers provides collegiate, objective and anonymous assessment expected by the Australian higher education sector, going beyond the views prevailing within this Association at any given time.

We hope that the process we offer satisfies these considerations, as well as providing benefits for the whole range of OHAA's membership, including scholars and a broader, informed readership in general.

Endnotes

¹ The title Publication Committee was in use at the time an earlier version of this paper was initially presented in September 2007, but was changed shortly after to Editorial Board. The text of this paper has been edited slightly to conform with current usage.

² For the 2010 issue, papers had to be submitted by December, but this may change for 2011; the OHAA national web-site carries the call for contributions to the *Journal*, and should be checked for deadline information (<http://www.ohaa.net.au>).

³ A concrete manifestation of this aspect is that in 2008, the OHAA *Journal* was listed as a scholarly, peer-reviewed journal in tier B by the Australian Research Council in its ranking of all refereed journals of significance to the Australian academy as part of its esteem indicators for the Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) initiative.

The *Journal's* editorial and peer review process

Jan Gothard

Convenor, 2010 Editorial Board

The Oral History Association of Australia *Journal* publishes articles and reports on almost all aspects of oral history: shorter descriptions of projects, which are normally published as reports and usually written by participants; more extensive analyses of work being undertaken, usually located in a broader context of other work in the field and drawing on associated secondary material; and more theoretically-based pieces, which would usually be published under the rubric of peer-reviewed articles. All pieces submitted for consideration for publication are subject to an editorial process, which involves the writer working in conjunction with the editor or the editorial board. Close reading, detailed feedback and constructive criticism are essential to maintaining the standards of our *Journal*, and writers who offer articles generally find this process an engaging and positive one.

The publication of articles which have undergone a process of peer review is relatively new for the *Journal*, which only began accepting articles for scholarly peer review, or refereeing, from 2006. Peer-reviewed articles are a small and important part of our offerings but they do not constitute the majority of articles published. The OHAA is an organisation whose membership extends well beyond universities and as the working journal of a disparate community of oral historians the *OHAAJ* needs to serve equally both academic and more broadly based interests. The dialogue within the community both informs oral history practice and is an essential element of oral history research; the *Journal* is the repository of these metaphorical conversations and exchanges. For that reason, it is essential that the *Journal* retains its part-refereed status and continues to attract quality non-peer-reviewed articles. All articles intended for publication as non-refereed pieces or reports should be submitted directly to the Editor for consideration.

Peer review has important implications for academics and scholars attached to universities. Publication in Australian Research Council (ARC)-ranked 'refereed journals' is an essential element of the research output

on which an academic's scholarly reputation is judged and also serves to attract funding to their institution. The *OHAAJ* has earned the status of a tier B journal which, according to the ARC's descriptors, denotes a journal with a solid national reputation which serves as a particularly important outlet for publications for early career researchers and Ph.D. students. This formal ranking, assessed as part of the ARC's Excellence in Research in Australia (ERA) initiative, is a critical one and will ensure the *Journal* continues to attract scholarly articles of quality. The *Journal* is a forum for both Australian and international academics to publish cutting-edge material on ethical, methodological, legal and technological challenges in oral history practice; for critiques and analyses of strategies and protocols in projects; and for reflections on the perceived value and meaning attributed by oral historians to their work; and this is the focus of the *Journal's* peer-review articles.

Writers who consider their articles appropriate for peer review first submit them to the convenor of the Editorial Board. 'Appropriateness' in this context is not simply a measure of 'quality'. Of course, questions such as relevance to the OHAA membership, accessibility and readability, and methodological soundness, originality of subject matter and approach are fundamental to acceptance of any piece for the *Journal*. But to be deemed 'appropriate' for peer review, an article should also demonstrate a larger capacity to contribute to the scholarly discipline of oral history, an awareness of theoretical readings in the area and a strongly grounded historiographical base.

At present the majority of articles submitted for peer review meet the first set of criteria but not the second, and for that reason, the number of peer-reviewed articles published to date has been small. Between 2006 and 2010, more than twenty articles were submitted for peer review and, of these, six have been published as peer-reviewed pieces. However, many of the articles originally put forward for peer review are

subsequently published as non peer-reviewed pieces, because of their general merit and their interest and relevance to our readership.

The Editorial Board makes the first decision as to whether or not they consider a piece should proceed to peer review. If the article is to be refereed, it is sent to two academic readers or reviewers. This is a double-blind process: the piece is first stripped as far as possible of all identifying references, and the writer is not informed of the reviewers' identities. The reviewers critique the article and return written reports commenting on suitability to proceed as a refereed piece, on the basis of the criteria already outlined. The Editorial Board then reviews these comments and comes to a decision: that the piece be accepted as it stands; be revised in line with suggestions made by reviewers and Board members; be offered publication as a non-refereed piece; or not be accepted.

Where suggestions for revision are offered, as is almost always the case, the writer has a rare opportunity to respond to a frequently very detailed critique of their work, and a number of writers have commented on how much they have benefited from and valued this process.

Though it is a time-consuming task for all involved, the process of peer review will preserve the reputation for high quality the *Journal* has developed over its thirty-year history and ensure that it remains the publishing outlet of choice for academic historians working in oral history across Australia. Further, the peer-reviewed status of the *Journal* will lead academic historians to the treasure trove of non-peer reviewed articles which comprise the greater body of our publication and help ensure this material becomes more widely known and circulated within the academic community.

Nominations for the 2011 Hazel de Berg Award

Nominations for the 2011 Hazel de Berg award are now invited. Please send nominations to
Chairman, Hazel de Berg Award

PO Box 66

Camperdown NSW 1450

Email: ohaansw@hotmail.com

Nomination forms are available online at

www.ohaa.net.au

Beyond the clichés? Navigating between official, popular and individual stories of the Brisbane Exhibition

Joanne Scott and Ross Laurie

After more than five years of researching the show's history, we suspect that every family in the state has at least one 'Ekka' story, or will soon acquire a story, or at least knows someone who has a story. Even Queenslanders who would never dream of attending the show readily offered their opinions about the event. As long-term visitors to the show – it is part of our traditions, just as it is for thousands of other Queenslanders – and as researchers, we were aware of a tendency to reduce what we suspected and hoped were the Exhibition's multiple meanings and rich history to a few shorthand phrases and images, clichés that organisers, show-goers and the media could deploy to summarise the show quickly and neatly. A desire to transcend the easily accessible and eagerly promoted narratives of the 'Ekka' in order to create a more nuanced and comprehensive analysis of Queensland's most significant annual event provided the original impetus for our project and informed our research, including more than fifty oral history interviews. After situating those interviews within the broader project and outlining the dominant narratives of the show, we reflect critically on how those interviews contributed to the realisation of our aim.

First held in 1876, the Brisbane Exhibition is still, according to its advocates, 'Queensland's most loved and anticipated annual event'.¹ One of Australia's largest agricultural shows, the Exhibition – or 'Ekka', as it is fondly known – is firmly embedded within Queensland's cultural landscape. Run by the same organisation year in and year out, cancelled on only two occasions, and always held at the same site, the Brisbane Exhibition is an iconic event. Many of our informants, whether casual visitors or members of the Exhibition community, relied, to a greater or lesser extent, on a handful of stock phrases to structure their accounts of the show. Those popular expressions provided easy answers to questions about the event's importance; enabled individuals to align their accounts with the dominant show narratives; and operated as a mechanism for some interviewees

to straddle potential gaps between their specific and specialist knowledge of the Exhibition and our assumed level of understanding. They also resulted in some thoughtful, delightful and valuable accounts of the show and its significance, challenging our initial assumption that clichés would hinder rather than provide access to the richer history that we sought. Individuals' readiness to engage with those clichés also required that we take seriously aspects of the core narrative of the Exhibition that, on the basis of written records, we had been reluctant to accept. Whereas the value of oral history often resides in its capacity to elicit stories that challenge, undermine and even contradict dominant versions of the past, in our project it was frequently the support provided in interviews for the dominant show narrative that was important. Additionally, however, the ready availability of stock expressions and images of the show could discourage alternative stories. As well as outlining tensions between official, popular and individual accounts of the Exhibition, we propose some reasons for the scarcity of stories that directly contradicted the dominant show narrative.

The project and its interviews

The fifty-plus interviews that are the focus of this paper were undertaken as part of a project which also relied on the extensive records generated by the Royal National Agricultural and Industrial Association of Queensland (RNA) which has hosted the Brisbane Exhibition since 1876; records of other participating organisations; newspaper coverage across more than 130 years; a rich photographic record; newsreel and television footage; unpublished and published government documents; written accounts by individual show-goers; artefacts; the showgrounds themselves; informal conversations with current and former exhibitors, employees, volunteers, show-goers and people who do not attend the Ekka;² and our own experiences and observations. Secondary sources, notably Richard Broome's publications which draw on oral history, provided important information on

the history of sideshows.³ With the wealth of available sources, the interview section of the project was deliberately designed around a specific cluster of issues and informants.⁴

Like so many oral history projects, therefore, the interview component of our research was structured primarily to encourage responses to questions that we could not otherwise answer satisfactorily and to explore aspects of our topic which were under-represented in other sources. Despite the quantity and value of those other sources, for example, they contained very little about working life, except in sideshow alley. The print sources demonstrated a pattern of long-term involvement by individuals and families, extending across decades and generations, but offered scant information about why some people were so committed to the event.⁵ Sections of the Exhibition, such as the grand parade and the horse and cattle competitions, have traditionally enjoyed a higher profile than others, such as poultry and fine arts, a distinction that is sometimes mirrored in the

extent and quality of surviving records, notably still and moving images.⁶ There was relatively limited information on eating and drinking at the show. Prior to the 1980s, material on showbags was scarce.⁷

We also wanted the benefits of oral history's focus on individuals – other sources usually provided the basis for generic claims about experiences at the show, obscuring rather than revealing whether individuals had distinctive experiences and understandings of the Exhibition, its history and its significance.⁸ Additionally, we hoped that stories about why particular individuals had participated in the show, what they did, what mattered to them and what they most enjoyed or disliked would prompt members of our intended audience to reflect upon their own engagement with the show, whether their personal histories matched or contradicted the accounts that we heard.⁹ A recently-appointed RNA councillor, Michael Grieve, discussed his childhood 'map' of the showgrounds, detailing the order in which he and his grandfather had visited different sections of the show

Crowds around the main ring, 1907 (Charles Arvier album, State Library of Queensland)



in the 1970s, providing opportunities for readers of our book to consider their own childhood understandings of the event, family traditions and whether they had developed Exhibition routines.¹⁰ Our interviews were also intended to introduce audiences to elements of the show about which they had no or only superficial knowledge. An interview with Stan Cornish, a butcher who had worked in the meat pavilion for more than four decades, provided information that was not available to a casual show visitor. He described the pre-show preparations including negotiations between the RNA and the butchers; identified changes across four decades in the meat pavilion; discussed how he fitted visits to other parts of the show into his twelve-hour workdays; and explained why he continued to participate in the Exhibition. For Stan, the Ekka was an enjoyable opportunity for him to ‘put something back into his trade’; he ‘wouldn’t do it if it wasn’t fun’.¹¹

With an overwhelming number of potential informants – in the first decade of this century the RNA regarded an annual attendance at the show of about half a million as a ‘good number’, a significant decline compared with the record crowd of almost 900,000 in 1981¹² – we had no intention of implementing, attempting to implement or pretending to implement a comprehensive interview program. Accepting the constraints imposed by project timelines, our core group of informants consisted of individuals whose involvement in the Exhibition suggested that they would each be able to answer some of our unanswered questions. Given the cluster of issues we had identified as the focus for our interview program, we requested interviews primarily with individuals such as Stan Cornish whose engagement with the show extended over multiple decades and who had worked at the show – whether as volunteers, employees, self-employed workers, business owners and/or exhibitors. Inevitably, this focus drew us to older and avid supporters¹³ of the show, allowing us to pursue answers to one of our key questions, ‘why have some individuals and families developed and maintained Exhibition traditions?’ We did not, however, want to underestimate other experiences, and also interviewed individuals who, after a long association with the show, had retired; who had been enthusiastic show-goers as children but not as adults; who had been occasional rather than regular visitors; and whose engagement with the Exhibition was relatively recent.¹⁴ Regardless of our primary reason for having asked someone for an interview, we asked most interviewees about other topics that were poorly-represented in print and visual sources such as show bags, as well as encouraging each individual to identify topics of importance for them.

Identifying and comparing show narratives: official, popular and individual

An oral history project about such a public event presents an obvious opportunity to explore connections and contradictions between different categories of memory, a key topic in the oral history literature.¹⁵ Those categories are variously (and sometimes confusingly) described as collective, official, popular, public, shared, private and individual memory.¹⁶ We were particularly interested in the extent to which official, popular and individual memories of the show were aligned and what that might reveal. Did a strong alignment imply that the official and popular accounts of the event had overwhelmed the capacity of individuals to construct and sustain different stories? If we did not discover alternative versions of the show should we assume that they did not exist or that we had failed as interviewers? We were also curious about similarities and differences between the stories recounted by individuals whose engagement with the show was relatively casual, a group we describe in this paper as the Queensland community,¹⁷ versus those interviewees with a sustained and substantial degree of involvement in the event who belonged to the Exhibition community.

Since 1876, the RNA has been the institution which has constructed the official version of the Exhibition and the media has been a central driver in the generation and representation of popular versions of the show. Those two versions have usually, but not always, been largely congruent and captured in stock expressions and images. Those expressions and images have conjured shared and powerful understandings of the event and have occurred and re-occurred in official, media and individuals’ descriptions of the show since the late nineteenth century. Across the Exhibition’s history, the standard images of the show have undergone some changes, reflecting changes at the event itself, in the technologies that have captured those images, and in Queensland’s economy and culture, but the longevity of particular images is noteworthy. The main ring and the grand parade; sideshow alley; and crowds moving slowly and more or less patiently around the grounds dominated newsreel footage of the Exhibition from the early twentieth-century until the newsreels’ demise in 1975. Television coverage retained those images and added show bags, strawberry ice-creams and fireworks.¹⁸ Stock phrases have included assertions that the Exhibition is a celebration of Queensland for Queensland; even in the worst of years it presents the best of rural industries; it’s when the country comes to town; it’s a tradition; it’s a community event; it’s a



place for the whole family.¹⁹

Explaining the reliance of the RNA and the media on those images and expressions is straightforward: journalists typically need ‘quick grabs’; RNA officials know that a concise and evocative phrase is more likely to survive the media’s editing processes than a lengthy description; the Exhibition is so well known in Queensland that it needs little explanation; and the standard images and phrases offer an efficient and easy mechanism for representing this complex and major event.²⁰ Of particular importance to our study are three further reflections on the readiness with which a dozen or so images and ideas were often used to encapsulate this event. First, the very public nature of the show, combined with a widely- and long-held sentiment that the Exhibition belongs to the community, has restricted the ability of any individual or organisation to promote versions of the show that contradicted the community’s shared understanding. That understanding is fundamentally a moral story: the Exhibition is ‘a good thing’.²¹ Secondly, there is the possibility that a limited range of concepts and pictures represented the heart of the event. The third, linked, issue acknowledges that maintaining the show’s status as a key element of community identity

has been facilitated by emphasising a relatively small number of themes that are readily recalled and offer a sufficiently generous framework within which individuals can situate their own, particular narratives.

We frequently heard rich, detailed accounts that extended beyond the standard phrases but which began with and often remained aligned with those phrases. Veteran showman Stan Durkin, for example, emphasised family traditions, the meeting of country and city and the show’s history, a framework within which he then situated his personal history at the show, including living on site, the rides he and his family had owned, and changes he had witnessed in sideshow alley.²² Individuals who directly shaped the official narrative of the show provided accounts of their involvement with and understanding of the event that extended far beyond a few catchphrases and far beyond their past and current official RNA roles. RNA President Vivian Edwards traced his changing forms of engagement with the show including travelling to the show as a child in the 1940s on a pony which then performed in the main ring, enjoying the games and tents of sideshow alley in the 1950s, seeing his father

volunteer at the event, working at the show while a university student, becoming the honorary medical officer in the 1960s, and joining the RNA Council in 1987.²³ Almost all of our interviewees acknowledged and engaged with at least some parts of the dominant or public narratives of the show, while generously sharing their individual experiences and values. Bob Green, for example, began timing his holidays from his job at the Commonwealth Bank in the 1970s to work as a ticket seller at the Exhibition, and then became a gate supervisor and change runner; in retirement, he continued to work as an RNA employee at the show each year. He also understood the show through the lens of being a father taking his children to the show from the late 1960s and later as a grandfather buying show bags. During his interview he used the classic show phrase, ‘the country comes to town’ and emphasised traditions at the Ekka and the Ekka’s status as ‘part of life’. He also provided specific details about how the show and his jobs had changed across more than three decades.²⁴ Our core group of informants consistently drew on all of their forms of engagement with the show to explain its importance. Although we interviewed Gloria Smith primarily because she was a long-term casual employee, her account of the show’s meanings was equally shaped by her memories of attending the Exhibition as a child.²⁵

For aficionados and even for those with more casual links to the show, the Exhibition is so fundamental that, on occasion, asking why it matters triggered what we interpreted as disbelief, surprise and concern – surely everyone already knows why the Ekka matters? And if we didn’t know, were we the right people to be writing about the show? As Margot Laurie told us when describing her childhood visits to the show in the 1930s and 1940s, ‘you went to the Ekka because it was the Ekka’.²⁶ Such sentiments were expressed by individuals whose engagement with the Exhibition was, as with Margot, relatively casual, as well as by members of the Exhibition community, typically exhibitors, competitors, RNA Councillors, stewards and judges, other volunteers, staff employed by the RNA or other organisations at the show, and business operators, particularly in sideshow alley and the showbag pavilion. The Exhibition community accommodated considerable diversity of experiences and attitudes that included but extended well beyond the official version of the show. Sub-groups within the Exhibition community had their own collective memories and traditions. The cattle pavilions are home to a tradition of practical jokes; members of the agricultural hall are proud of a history in which mutual support and keen competition co-exist; fine arts and cookery volunteers have a tradition of friendship,

expressed through shared meals and conversations; the older generation of ‘showies’ in sideshow alley express pride in their history and regret over what they see as an inevitably changing culture.²⁷ After outlining earlier patterns of community in sideshow alley, veteran ‘showie’ Jim McLoughlin lamented that we were ‘much closer-knit people than they are now’.²⁸ The sub-groups, the RNA, the media, the Exhibition communities and the very broad category of people who have some limited engagement with the show, have overlapping but not identical memberships. Networks within the Exhibition community are strengthened by interpersonal, including multi-generational familial, relationships. Mrs Haag, a competitor in the district exhibits explained, ‘it’s a family tradition ... [my husband’s] grandfather, his father and him and now we’ve got children involved and their children are becoming involved, washing vegetables’.²⁹ She had attended every show since 1954. Across their lifetime, individuals may shift from one grouping to another, participate in multiple groupings simultaneously, or withdraw from and then return to the Exhibition community. John Behm, for example, described being a show visitor, a country police officer who was sent to work at the showgrounds during the 1960s, an RNA employee, and a member of the sub-group of poultry exhibitors.³⁰

In general, casual or occasional show-goers offered recollections that were compatible with the stock images and descriptions of the Exhibition but extended beyond those simple catchphrases. The Exhibition could have considerable personal significance even for those whose engagement with the show appeared minor, and stories that might initially sound superficial carried meaning for their narrators.³¹ A reference to wearing stockings to the Exhibition in the 1950s was the opening statement of a story about the transition from childhood to becoming a young woman.³ In explaining the significance of particular memories, some informants provided support for popular claims about the show that we had been reluctant to accept. From our document analysis, we concluded that the show had always been a highly regulated event, contradicting a popular narrative that defined the show as a place of freedom. Casual conversations with friends, colleagues and show-goers confirmed the existence of the narrative but provided scant evidence. From our interviewees we received specific and fondly remembered examples of the relaxation of everyday norms, corroborating this dimension of the show from the 1930s onwards. As a teenager in the late 1950s, for example, Raymond Evans enjoyed his ‘first taste of alcohol at the show. It seemed to be easier to buy a beer there’.³³ Accounts

of the Exhibition as a backdrop for romance reassured us about the existence of this dimension of the Ekka, which, without the interviews, fell into the category of unsubstantiated myth.³⁴

Collective and individual stories from members of the Exhibition community shared some features with the stories from the Queensland community – people from both groups, for example, emphasised the importance of the Exhibition as a once a year event, discussed how crowded the showgrounds were, and recalled with pleasure the special excitement of anticipating and then attending the show during childhood.³⁵ Don Lingard, who visited the show casually, mainly as a child in the 1930s, remembered the impatience with which he and his brother ‘had been waiting for all day’ to enter sideshow alley.³⁶ For Martine Davies, who attended the Exhibition as the granddaughter of a ‘show family’ two decades later, ‘it was like this whole other world’.³⁷ As a group, the Exhibition community stressed the huge effort involved in the organisation of the show, the camaraderie of their community, and their pride and pleasure in their contributions to the show; our interviews enabled us to explore the notions of community operating within the showgrounds, especially from the 1950s onwards.³⁸ Councillor in charge of fine arts and cookery, Susan Hennessey, offered a typical account when she explained, ‘I have the best stewards. I keep telling people this. We’re just one big, happy family, even our paid staff are part of that family. I think there is a great respect for each other’.³⁹ The value of this set of interviews closely matches Rosemary Block’s description of the ‘finer points of corporate oral history’ which can act

as ‘a wonderful preserver of the anecdote and lore of an organisation; and ... can give an insight into the relationship between the staff and management as well as between staff and the customer’.⁴⁰ For our project, this involved relationships between visitors and volunteers, visitors and employees, volunteer workers and exhibitors, and volunteers and employees, as well as between staff, management and customers. Long-term casual employees, Cheryl McCabe and Jenny Reid, for example, talked about the importance for them of their engagement with exhibitors, with volunteers in the horticultural section, with management – ‘each year, it’s nice to get that call back’ to work, and with other staff.⁴¹

Whereas the Queensland community tended to focus on the entertainment provided by the show, the Exhibition community regarded the showgrounds as a site of work, competition, achievement and shared endeavour. Individual stories that unpacked these meanings introduced us to multiple, rich experiences of the show that are well understood by the show’s insiders but rarely visible to outsiders. Keith Enchelmaier, who helped feed his father’s canaries at the show in the 1950s, worked at the Exhibition as a cleaner while he was enrolled at teachers college in the 1960s, and subsequently organised show camps for schoolchildren, commented that ‘The casual Ekka visitor doesn’t realise the community that is here, that comes back every year’.⁴² References to feeling part of ‘one big family’ were common. Maureen Bishop, who ‘does’ for the horse people at the show and whose husband had a history of engagement with the show dating back to the 1930s, explained that her



Moreton district exhibit in the agricultural hall, 1957 (Greg Dalton collection)

commitment to a job that involves long hours and repetition derived from her enjoyment of 'working with friends', adding 'it's like a family If some of the old ones left I think I'd leave too because you're losing part of your family'.⁴³

The Exhibition community offered detailed explanations of the show's value, ranging from its educational benefits to its importance as a meeting place for urban and rural Queensland. 'The country comes to town' was not a meaningless catchphrase. Instead, several informants recounted why the meanings attached to the phrase had changed as Queensland had become more urbanised, provided examples of how that increased urbanisation had affected the show and argued that the show's importance has therefore increased in recent decades because 'generations ... aren't as connected to the bush as they were'.⁴⁴ The Exhibition community typically had a much keener sense of the changes that had occurred at the show than did casual visitors who were more likely to stress the event's unchanging nature. While individuals' stories offered distinctive details, based on personal experience, they were underpinned by the Exhibition community's shared vision of the show. At the same time, those individual stories emphasised the existence of multiple experiences of the show, with particular accounts focused on specific sections of the show.

Neither the influence of dominant show narratives nor the power of collective memories stifled criticism. The insistence in the official version of the Exhibition that the show continues to offer value for money was, unsurprisingly and convincingly, repeated in interviews with some RNA Councillors.⁴⁵ It was countered in other interviews, including those with other Exhibition community members.⁴ Criticisms of current trends at the show were frequently aligned to key features of the official and popular show narratives. The profound sense within the Exhibition community and, to a lesser extent in the Queensland community, that they 'own' the show is happily incorporated within the RNA's narrative. That ownership carries with it a responsibility and right to defend the show; for some informants, that included identifying problems that should be fixed. Drawing attention to unsatisfactory practices in both the past and present aligned neatly with the Exhibition community's emphasis on its commitment to continually improve the show. The role of tradition connected otherwise disparate criticisms, with some interviewees offering trenchant criticisms of changes that had, they believed, led to a weakening or loss of fondly remembered past practices; been introduced without sufficient respect being accorded existing practices; had undermined camaraderie; and were part

of a decline in the Exhibition's significance. Particular interviewees were well aware of the tensions between their assessment and official pronouncements about the Exhibition. With recollections extending over multiple decades, they offered explicit and implicit comparisons between their memories of earlier shows and more recent shows. Some comparisons may be interpreted through the lens of nostalgia but, as a single explanation, it is far too simplistic. An individual could question some changes but welcome others, or regret a change while acknowledging that it was an improvement. Audrey Fleming, who began as a fine arts competitor in 1984, subsequently became a steward in fine arts, and who also worked as a volunteer at the Queensland Country Women's Association's refreshment stall at the show, explained that 'It's changed for the better but I liked the old ways'.⁴⁷

A period of concentrated interviewing in and around the 2007 show was useful for considering connections between the varieties of stories and the stability of those connections, as well as emphasising the fundamental connections between the past and present that are constant features of oral history. Prior to the 2007 show, the official version of the Exhibition and the media's version of the show had been closely aligned for several decades.⁴⁸ In 2007, however, there was a temporary rupture in this alignment, when the media broadcast reports warning people not to attend the show because of a flu epidemic.⁴⁹ Within the Exhibition community there was resentment, even anger, over the media stories; several of our interviews began or concluded with informants expressing dismay about the media's treatment of the show. As the Exhibition community passionately defended its show against detractors, there appeared to be an especially strong alignment between the official and Exhibition community's versions of the show, and some weakening of links with the versions of the show offered by the media. Based on common threads in interviews and conversations, we infer that during the 2007 show, confronted by an external threat, the Exhibition community was particularly united and evinced a heightened awareness of the show's value.

Acknowledging omissions: public versus private stories

Efforts to use interviews to elicit stories that contradicted the official and popular narratives of the Exhibition enjoyed, at most, only partial success. To some extent, this reflected the capacity for those official and popular accounts to accommodate diverse individual stories; as noted previously, criticisms of the show could be aligned with the official narrative.

Nonetheless, the relative absence of explicitly contradictory accounts of the show deserves further exploration. Any attempt to explain this outcome is inevitably constrained by a lack of evidence; the written and visual sources for our project shared the strong tendency in our interviews of alignment with the dominant show narrative.⁵⁰ The following discussion is further constrained by the parameters of ethical practice, limiting our ability to provide examples to demonstrate our claims.⁵¹ The lack of evidence precludes the achievement even of some level of certainty about the extent of untold stories. Nevertheless, allusions to untold stories and occasional examples of stories that were offered warily and with limits on how we could then use them suggest at least three overlapping factors that contributed to this situation.

Firstly, some stories were withheld from us because of a belief that they would have negative consequences for the informant, a family member or friend, either because a past action reflected poorly on the person concerned or because that past action had involved breaches of laws or Exhibition regulations.⁵² Secondly, for some individuals, there was a clear distinction between private and public Exhibition stories. Private stories concerned topics that are not usually discussed with outsiders, such as sexual experimentation, and were classified by at least some informants as stories that had taken place at the show, but were not part of the show narratives and did not belong in the public domain. Private stories might, under some circumstances, be shared with selected insiders but would not be available for wider consumption. Our own understanding of our relationship with some members of the Exhibition community is that we were, somewhat precariously, balanced between the roles of knowledgeable outsiders and novice insiders. Certain informants were therefore prepared to trust us with private stories, sometimes only as sparse outlines, in order to improve our understanding of the Exhibition. Such stories, though, were not to be shared with a broader audience.

Another explanation for our limited success is that, for some members of the Exhibition community, particular stories were ultimately incompatible with the show, its values and meanings, and therefore could not be shared. There was a distinction between stories of acceptable 'high jinks' that could be accommodated within a framework of youthful and harmless misadventures at a site long recognised as a venue in which the norms of everyday behaviour were somewhat relaxed, and unacceptable behaviour that existed outside the moral framework of the Exhibition. Presumably, different people had at least somewhat

different definitions of acceptable and unacceptable stories but we were impressed by the strength of adherence to that framework by our informants. There was a near absence of accounts of criminal activity, incidents involving violence, and excessive alcohol consumption.⁵³ One story involving violence was told to us in confidence. The requirement not to use information from certain interviews and conversations was frustrating, but it still, of course, offered multiple benefits: providing us with lines of inquiry that we could pursue through print sources; alerting us to possible omissions in other sources, including other interviews; and offering details against which we could assess the accuracy and comprehensiveness of alternative sources. In this case, we located a newspaper article about the incident, which occurred in 1958. The *Courier-Mail* described a clash between Exhibition attendants and adolescents, after the latter jabbed cattle with pitchforks. The attendants chased, caught and punished three of the culprits, cutting their hair with sheep shears. According to an unnamed informant in the article, 'One got a bald "crew cut", the second a short back and sides, and we clipped a two-inch part down the middle of the other one's head'.⁵⁴ Even though a half-century had elapsed since this incident, for at least one member of the Exhibition community this story remained well outside the bounds of acceptable behaviour at the show, or at least of behaviour that could be shared with the general public.

Conclusion: Learning from the clichés

Alistair Thomson comments that, 'Oral historians know better than anyone that when we tell a story that makes sense of the past our attempt at clarity inevitably causes us to lose detail and smooth out the complexity and muckiness of human experience'.⁵⁵ Much of the appeal and power of oral history derives from its capacity to reveal multiple voices and multiple meanings, to recognise the 'complexity and muckiness'. The small cluster of stock expressions and images that so often serve to represent the Brisbane Exhibition is one example of how a large, complex, sometimes overwhelming event can be reduced to an apparently superficial summary. Our interviews extended that summary with a rich tapestry of stories, experiences and values, but simultaneously warned us against dismissing the clichés of the show. Those clichés had genuine significance for many of our informants who understood and could readily articulate the meanings attached to them. Whereas other sources failed to provide support for popular claims about freedom and romance at the show, our informants provided specific examples about those topics.

Just as we learned not to ignore the clichés, so we also learned that we could not equate extent of engagement with the show with the significance for individuals of the show; memories of the Exhibition could be important for casual show-goers as well as for members of the Exhibition community. Meanings could be shared and individual. Official and media versions of the show shaped and were shaped by the stories of the Queensland and Exhibition communities. Our interviews gave us access to dimensions of the show that were not available through other sources, presenting a complex portrait that, nonetheless, generally remained aligned with the stock phrases and images of the show. The interviews confounded attempts to fully separate the various versions of the show from each other. Individual accounts could endorse and also challenge official and popular memory, with informants able to couch their criticisms of the event within the frameworks provided by the dominant narratives. Oral history is often and appropriately praised for its capacity to reveal otherwise hidden stories and, in the process, to undermine well understood and oft-repeated official and popular narratives. By contrast, the value of oral history for our project resided in its capacity to reveal stories that supported, explained and enriched official and popular memory, providing a platform from which to explore the influence of and interactions among official, popular and individual understandings of the Brisbane Exhibition.

Endnotes

¹ RNA, Annual report, 2005, p. 7

² These conversations allowed us to engage with a much greater number and diversity of people than was practicable through our interview program, and provided some counter-balance to, for example, our focus on individuals whose engagement with the show was sustained.

³ Richard Broome's work includes 'Not strictly business: Freaks and the Australian showground world', *Australian Historical Studies*, vol. 40, no. 3, September 2009, pp. 323-42; 'Theatres of power: Tent boxing circa 1910-1970', *Aboriginal History*, vol. 20, 1996, pp. 1-23; and with Alick Jackomos, *Sideshow Alley*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, 1998. Other academic studies on agricultural shows include Kay Anderson, 'White natures: Sydney's royal agricultural show in post-humanist perspective', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, vol. 28, December 2003, pp. 422-41; Kate Darian-Smith and Sara Wills, *Agricultural Shows in Australia: A Survey*, The Australian Centre, University of Melbourne, Melbourne, 1999; Kate Darian-Smith and Sara Wills, 'From queens of agriculture to Miss Showgirl: embodying rurality in twentieth-century Australia', *Journal of Australian Studies*, no. 71, 2001, pp. 17-31; Rob Edwards, 'Colonialism and the role of the local show: A case study of the Gympie district show 1877-1940', *Queensland Review*, vol. 16, no. 2, 2009, pp. 29-42. There are also commemorative publications, typically produced by the local show society or a local author with links to their community's show.

⁴ Sometimes we identified particular individuals from written records; on other occasions we asked members of our professional,

social and family networks and members of the Exhibition community for suggestions about people who matched our profiles of the types of individuals we wanted to interview.

⁵ See, for example, RNA, Council meeting, 31 August 1944 and Finance committee meeting, 27 July 1949, RNA archives; Queensland Country Life, 9 August 1951, p. 6.

⁶ While the cattle and horse sections have consistently been the most prestigious sections of the Exhibition, the relative ranking of some other sections has changed; the District Exhibits contest, for example, declined in importance in the last third of the twentieth century. A host of other factors affecting the quantity and quality of records relating to different show sections included technical issues relating to indoor versus outdoor filming, especially in the early twentieth century; the existence of specialist journals such as the Queensland Agricultural Journal; and the individuals who were responsible for record-keeping.

⁷ From the 1980s onwards local newspapers published detailed contents' lists for show bags. Prior to this, and apart from oral history, our research on sample bags and show bags relied on occasional references in RNA records and newspapers, surviving examples of bags and their contents held at the Queensland Museum, and a limited number of photographs.

⁸ The exceptions included June Adamson, *Lucky Legs and Sugar Rushes: A Brisbane Childhood*, QUT Publications, Brisbane, 2004; and Meta Truscott diaries, University of Queensland Fryer Library.

⁹ This statement applies to the interviews we conducted and which were part of the research for our book *Showtime: A History of the Brisbane Exhibition*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 2008 and also to the stories that were told via commissioned interviews, documentary film, photography and sketches for the *Ten Days in August* exhibition on the Ekka at the Museum of Brisbane, 2008.

¹⁰ Michael Grieve, interviewed by Joanne Scott, August 2007. An excerpt from this interview is included in a discussion of family show traditions in Scott and Laurie, *Showtime*, pp. 198-99. Recordings of all interviews in this piece are held by the authors.

¹¹ Stan Cornish, interviewed by Joanne Scott, August 2007.

¹² Comments about a 'good number' were made by various individuals during casual conversations; as per our ethical protocols, we do not identify by name those people who participated in casual conversations. RNA, Director's report to finance and management committee, 25 September 1990, RNA archives.

¹³ Other possible explanations include the value placed on a permanent position by employees and acquiescence to pressure from relatives to maintain family traditions of show participation but neither of these explanations emerged in our interviews and conversations.

¹⁴ This group represented about 20% of the individuals we interviewed.

¹⁵ This is part of the broader oral history fascination with memory; see 'Interpreting memories: Introduction' in Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (eds), *The Oral History Reader*, 2nd ed., Routledge, London and New York, 2006, pp. 211-20.

¹⁶ For a brief summary, see Valerie Yow, *Recording Oral History: A Guide for the Humanities and Social Sciences*, 2nd ed., AltaMira Press, Walnut Creek CA, 2005, pp. 54-57.

¹⁷ This description is used for convenience but we recognise that engagement with the show is not limited to Queenslanders; our focus on Queenslanders reflects our understanding of the show's significance as relating primarily to Queensland.

¹⁸ This analysis is based on newsreels of the Brisbane Exhibition at the National Film and Sound Archives, and sampling of television coverage. Local television coverage has typically included additional, different scenes for each day of the event, for example, images of the poultry one day and the cookery section on another day.

¹⁹ Examples of these and similar phrases exist, for example, in RNA annual reports, newspaper accounts including letters to the editor, newsreel voiceovers, entries in children's essay competitions about the Exhibition from the first decades of the twentieth century, and interviews.

²⁰ In 1876 the inaugural show was the largest event ever held in the colony. Nowadays, a typical Brisbane show runs for ten days, includes more than 3000 classes of competition and involves expenditure by the RNA of millions of dollars.

²¹ Jane Moodie, 'The moral world of the Waikite Valley' in Anna Green and Megan Hutching (eds), *Remembering: Writing Oral History*, Auckland University Press, Auckland, 2004, pp. 43 and 57, discusses 'moral stories'.

²² Stan Durkin, interviewed by Joanne Scott, August 2007.

²³ Vivian Edwards, interviewed by Ross Laurie and Joanne Scott, October 2007.

²⁴ Bob Green, interviewed by Joanne Scott, August 2007.

²⁵ Gloria Smith, interviewed by Joanne Scott, August 2007.

²⁶ Margot Laurie, interviewed by Ross Laurie and Joanne Scott, December 2005.

²⁷ These conclusions are based on a combination of interviews, conversations and observations.

²⁸ Jim McLoughlin, interviewed by Joanne Scott, August 2007.

²⁹ Mrs Haag, interviewed by Joanne Scott, August 2007.

³⁰ John Behm, interviewed by Joanne Scott, August 2007.

³¹ Ruth Finnegan, 'Family myths, memories and interviewing' in Perks and Thomson (eds), *The Oral History Reader*, pp. 177-78 explores this dimension of stories in the context of family history interviews.

³² Lyn Scott, interviewed by Joanne Scott, September 2007.

³³ Raymond Evans, interviewed by Ross Laurie, January 2006.

³⁴ For example, interviews with Margot Laurie; Raymond Evans; Philip Harpham, interviewed by Ross Laurie, August 2007 and Greg Dalton, interviewed by Ross Laurie, August 2007.

³⁵ More than 90% of the informants we interviewed referred to at least one of these matters.

³⁶ Don Lingard, interviewed by Ross Laurie and Joanne Scott, July 2007.

³⁷ Martine Davies, interviewed by Ross Laurie, October 2007.

³⁸ While some of our informants' childhood memories pre-dated the Second World War, evidence about community was more apparent in people's recollection as adults. Our project appears to have generated comparable findings to projects on particular communities including specific workplaces. See for example Rosemary Block, 'Everybody had a cousin at Colgates: The community of the Colgate-Palmolive oral history project', *Oral History Association of Australia Journal*, no. 18, 1996, pp. 69-78.

³⁹ Susan Hennessey, interviewed by Joanne Scott, August 2007.

⁴⁰ Rosemary Block, 'Corporate Australia: Histories in sound in the oral history collection in the State Library of New South Wales', *Oral History Association of Australia Journal*, no. 31, 2009, p. 21.

⁴¹ Cheryl McCabe and Jenny Reid, interviewed by Joanne Scott,

August 2007.

⁴² Keith Enchelmaier, interviewed by Ross Laurie, October 2007.

⁴³ Maureen Bishop, interviewed by Joanne Scott and Ross Laurie, September 2007. 'Doing' for the horse people involved preparing food and drinks.

⁴⁴ Allan Warby, interviewed by Joanne Scott, October 2007.

⁴⁵ Justification for entry charges was provided, for example, by Councillors Tim Fairfax, interviewed by Joanne Scott, August 2007 and Joan Scott, interviewed by Joanne Scott, August 2007. Our analysis of changing entry prices versus average wages tends to support their arguments.

⁴⁶ Even with permission to use interviews, we remain wary about the possible consequences of linking individuals' names to criticisms.

⁴⁷ Audrey Fleming, interviewed by Joanne Scott, August 2007.

⁴⁸ Publicity releases by the RNA provide the basis for some media accounts, journalists interview RNA officials, the RNA facilitates journalists' activities at the showgrounds, and there is media sponsorship of the show.

⁴⁹ For example, *Courier-Mail*, 7 August 2007, p. 2; 8 August 2007, p. 1; 9 August 2007, p. 10.

⁵⁰ There are negative accounts of the show in newspapers and the RNA's records include details of problems ranging from pickpockets to exhibitors who cheated to financial difficulties to workplace health and safety issues but such accounts are minor compared with the overall thrust of the print records.

⁵¹ Lesley Alves offers another example of trying to explore off-the-record stories without breaching ethical practice in 'Don't record this...': Private and public sensitivities', *Oral History Association of Australia Journal*, no. 16, 1994, pp. 84-86.

⁵² Doubtless we also missed particular stories simply because we did not meet the people who knew them.

⁵³ Given evidence of such incidents and behaviours in other sources and very occasionally in our interviews, there are further distinctions to be drawn between what individuals regarded as acceptable at the time and in retrospect; between actions and sharing information about those actions; and between different groups at the Exhibition.

⁵⁴ *Courier-Mail*, 11 August 1958, p. 1.

⁵⁵ Alistair Thomson, 'Response', *Oral History Review*, vol. 34, no. 2, 2007, p. 125.

Fictionalising oral history: narrative analysis, voice and identity

Ariella Van Luyn

Project overview: aims and aesthetics

I write this article from the perspective of a creative writer working with oral histories. I stumbled on the field of oral history almost by accident while working on a research project and I became fascinated by stories of the domestic (for the purposes of this article I use ‘domestic’ to mean the routine, the ordinary and the day-to-day) revealed in oral history interviews I conducted. The compulsion to fictionalise oral history led me to undertake a practice-led Honours thesis, consisting of a 10,000 word novella and accompanying exegesis.

Michael Frisch (2008, 223) claims that ‘oral history tapes [are]...precious documentation that [are] inaccessible and generally unlistened to.’ My own experience may illuminate this statement. I had approached the Queensland Police Museum, Brisbane, to discuss conducting an interview with a retired police officer (a member of the public had approached the Oral History Association of Australia, Brisbane branch, of which I am a member, suggesting the interview). The curator informed me that while she had a number of oral history interviews on file, she had neither the staff nor the resources to make them available to the general public. They were stored in a drawer in the curator’s office. In their present form, as unedited audio tapes, they would make a poor museum display. In general, oral history transcripts and audio recordings can sometimes seem rambling or irrelevant if not contextualised. They can contain strings of often only tenuously connected narratives encumbered with extraneous details. Oral histories also appear to be limited to a particular audience, generally scholars and readers of history.

Yet, as a writer of fiction, I’m fascinated by the compelling quality of spoken anecdotes. I’m drawn to oral histories as rich sources of personal details of lived experience. These details are often not present in traditional historical documents. Oral histories have the potential to imbue works of fiction with authentic and intimate details of a particular time and place, and to reveal vocal strategies that lend oral tales

their captivating quality. I feel that fictionalisation of oral history might offer one strategy for making oral histories more coherent and engaging to a broader audience, particularly readers of fiction. In this task, I do not seek to replace or devalue the oral history transcripts (for this reason, I felt it was important to include the oral history transcript as an appendix to the thesis). Instead, I offer an understanding of them in a different kind of symbolic language.

For this Honours project, I conducted five hours of interviews with my Grandma, Beth Bevan. As a child, Beth had contracted poliomyelitis—polio—a contagious disease that causes paralysis. Beth woke up one morning to find her left leg was paralysed. When she was six, her family decided to enrol her in Montrose Home, an institution in Brisbane catering for children with disabilities. In the interviews we talked about this aspect of her lived experience, focussing on her day-to-day routines.

Mary Marshall Clark states that ‘oral history is strengthened by an alliance with other forms of artistic practice’.¹ For example, Paul Thompson explains, one of the central goals of oral history scholarship, in its conception, was to restore the human subject to history.² Here, fiction, with its traditional emphasis on an individual protagonist, aligns with this aim, serving to stimulate new dialogues about the past on a personal and intimate level. In order to make the story more engaging, I planned to invent scenes that never took place, characters that never existed and re-order events, in order to capture an essential rather than literal narrative. In addition, I wanted to explore how I could use the language of fiction to access the cultural and historical space revealed by Beth in the interview.

In making the distinction between historical and fictional writing as modes of representing the past, Hayden White argues that:

viewed simply as verbal artefacts histories and (realist) novels are indistinguishable from one another...both



Children pictured outside the Montrose Home for Crippled Children, 1939.
Photo courtesy John Oxley Library, State Library of Queensland

wish to provide a verbal image of reality...the image of reality which the novelist constructs is meant to correspond in its general outline to some domain of human experience which is no less 'real' than that referred to by the historian.³

White⁴ claims that the difference between writers of fiction and writers of history is that the novelist presents his or her version of reality indirectly, by figurative techniques. I saw myself as occupying a position somewhere in-between, and therefore the voice of the fictional work was integral to the success of the creative work; it had to have both the sound and orality of the interview, yet successfully manipulate fictional techniques.

The force driving both my creative and academic work was this: how can I develop a methodology for fictionalising an oral history interview while still retaining the essential aspects of the interview? After some false starts, I achieved this by unpacking the language and discourses operating in story-telling. In this article I will discuss how I used narrative analysis to develop a convincing voice for the fictional work, and consider how I applied relevant narrative analysis concepts to my particular project—Beth's interview—in order to develop a fictional voice. Late in the project, I discovered disability studies and the theories offered in this field provided a lens through which I could understand the interview.

An artful voice: narrative analysis, voice and identity

Portelli claims that oral historical sources are narrative sources.⁵ The emphasis on narrative emerges from the 'narrative turn' in social sciences, first noted by Lawrence Stone in his 1979 essay 'The Review of Narrative: Reflections on an Old New History'.⁶ Portelli also believes that 'the analysis of oral history materials must avail itself of some of the general categories developed by narrative theory in literature and folklore'.⁷ I felt the notion of narrative was a way I could engage with the oral history interview.

How was I to define narrative? Oral historians generally agree on the definition advanced by Russian Formalists which states narratives have three components: theme, discourse and genre.⁸ Lyotard argues that narrative is 'the means by which knowledge is contained and conveyed'.⁹ And it is the 'language of the narrative, its content, its location, its narrator and its listener that provide a cumulative understanding of knowledge in which who is talking and who is listening [are] all implicated in the presentation of the narrative, and its re-presentation in terms of meaning'.¹⁰ Analysis of these elements of narrative provides oral historians and ethnographers with a framework for interpreting oral histories, and situating and understanding them within a cultural context.



Catherine Riessman, for example, in her study of divorced couples, *Divorce Talk*,¹¹ employs narrative analysis as a means of interpreting oral histories. Like Lyotard, Riessman believes that narrative can be understood through language. In her readings of texts, Riessman observes the structural properties of the narrative; key metaphors; key words; verb tense and how substantive themes develop through linguistic choices.¹² Other researchers unpack core narratives and the ‘thematic and linguistic connections between them’¹³ or consider the notion of ‘unsaid’ as a way of seeing through the gaps in an oral testimony.¹⁴ Such examples demonstrate that narrative emerges as a valuable tool for exploring how ‘human experience is storied’ as well as the ‘texture and everydayness of human life’.¹⁵ Therefore, the methodologies of narrative analysis allow an examination, in the oral history interview, of how the language constitutes a narrative.

Narrative analysis

I spent March 2008 interviewing Beth at her home. The interviews sprawled out over a number of days, the stories meandering through meal times, hovering over endless cups of tea. It was difficult to explain that I only had 10,000 words in which to cram a life. And that was the obstacle facing me: how exactly was I to apply narrative analysis to the interview?

In transcribing the interviews I felt that including my words as well as Beth’s was important. I had to acknowledge my role as questioner and audience in shaping the narrative.¹⁶ I preferred a method of

transcribing that included pauses and noises made by the participants.¹⁷ To me, such moments were essential to the rhythm of the interview. I noted ums, ahs and laughter, feeling it was all part of the storytelling performance. I applied Todorova’s practice of multiple readings of the interview text.¹⁸ Drawing on the idea of a ‘core narrative’ described in Bell,¹⁹ I conducted my first reading. While I did not go so far as to exclude stories that seemed irrelevant from the transcript, as Bell does, I did identify key stories/descriptions of events in the transcript, using coloured post-it notes. Later these would function as plot points in the fictional work. This was essentially a content reading. In the second reading, drawing on some of the examples of narrative analysis provided above,²⁰ I examined sentence and clause structure in the key stories, considering how Beth arranged and delivered information. In the third reading, I read for Todorova’s language of the un-sayable, including instances of negative statements, incomplete sentences, spaces and sudden changes in story. In the fourth reading, I identified and marked particular word choice; metaphors, key words, active and passive voice and instances of irony. I paid particular attention to how Beth described things, and to her vocabulary, noting just as much words she never used as words she often did. These readings allowed me to unpack the language and content of the interview.

I found the language in the interview was relatively free of metaphor. It was simple, almost child-like. There were brief moments of ironic reflection, such as

when I asked Beth if she was allowed to decorate her bedroom table and she said, 'Oh no...no personality in 1938, 1945'.²¹ I saw that when describing objects Beth used simple descriptors. She often used 'big' or a similar simple adjective followed by another adjective, then the noun she was describing. For example, she would say:

- big wide gate;
- long roadway;
- big circular gate;
- old farmhouse.

Beth also used 'this' or 'that' to precede (modify) nouns, for example:

- this wide window;
- that window;
- that trip;
- this set of rules;
- these little stumps.

Intriguingly, Beth used second person in her initial description of Montrose, and guided us, the 'you,' through the layout of Montrose as though we were out-of-body spirits. Beth said, for example, 'And then you'd go, come up to, a big circular garden that was raised above the ground... you came to the nurses' bedrooms that were down to your right. And straight ahead you'd go to the kitchen, a big large kitchen... And you had your little, own bedside table beside your bed there'.²² At different points in the interview, particularly when describing events at Montrose, Beth returned to second person, such as when she described how 'you were taken out (of class) to see the doctor or physio or what have you'.²³ At other times, when revealing life outside of the home, Beth reverted to the more natural first person.

In this reading, I also noticed that Beth described how the disabled children move, 'wheeled' or in trolleys, or moving by using her wrists, or sliding on (their) bum. She twice told the story about the doctor who diagnosed her saying, 'Take that girl off her feet', when she entered his surgery walking.

There were silences too. She described her calliper to me in great detail, but when she showed me a picture of herself at Montrose, she wasn't wearing it. When I asked her why, she seemed confused for a moment then answered, 'I don't know.' Why had she taken the calliper off for the photo? I discovered that although this level of analysis, which examined key scenes and language, was useful because I could describe things in the fictional work Beth may never have seen, and sound like her when I wrote it, it wasn't addressing these questions. I was missing the core of what was happening in the story-telling process. I needed to consider the why.

Narrative identity

Then I stumbled on a concept that altered the way I understood and engaged with the interpretative practice. Oral histories are a context in which identity is practised.²⁴ Chase states that narrative researchers 'listen to the narrator's voice—to the subject positions, interpretative practices and complexities—within each story. Rather than unified, fixed identities... narrators construct non-unity subjectivities; revised identities; troubled identities'.²⁵ I saw that through voice, narrators construct identity. Was it possible then, to read for narrative identity? The fictional counterpart to identity is naturally character. Was an understanding of voice the key to the development of a complex fictional character? This notion would take me beyond the more superficial readings, allowing me to delve into the discourses and themes emerging from the interview.

I had to consider how narrative related to identity. Bruner,²⁶ Fisher-Rosenthal²⁷ and Polkinghorn,²⁸ among others, agree that narratives provide us with access to people's identity. This approach advocates an understanding of stories as both the presentation of an inner reality to the outside world and as shaping forces, which construct the narrator's personality and reality. People create stories using the story-telling strategies offered by culture and histories.²⁹ Sapir develops this notion further, stating that how we understand a lived event is based largely on our cultural context:

We see and hear and otherwise experience very largely as we do because the language habits of our community predisposed certain choices of interpretation.³⁰

At the same time, these stories make meanings that tie narrators to the culture.³¹ Kiesinger states:

It is through communicative practices that one's sense of self and reality are constructed, maintained and transformed. Discursive practices, or 'ways of speaking' are intimately tied to the making and shaping of human identities. As a mode of enquiry that centralizes ways of speaking and telling, narrative studies often become studies of identity, or the way self emerges through talk.³⁰

Listening to how a narrator constructs reality (through voice, or in Kiesinger's term, discursive practices)³³ would allow me to understand how a specific culture shapes narrative; what types/genres of stories are available; and how the narrator understands their identity within that culture.



Girls' dormitory at Montrose Home, circa 1940s. Beth Bevan is in the front row, second from right. Photo courtesy of Beth Bevan.

Components and layers: narrative identity and Beth's story

'A story may have melody, pitchness and loudness, which compromises many interwoven, sometimes conflicting themes, and forms Identity may have components and layers'.³⁴ I must acknowledge my reading for narrative identity was based on my project and purpose. It was an idiosyncratic process; the readings I conducted examine the discourses and themes—such as war and disability—that I found intriguing in Beth's life story. To some extent also, it was the interview texts themselves that determined the nature of the reading. However, another artist working with this material may have emphasised a different set of discourses. My non-traditional approach is evident. For me, reading for narrative identity involved a process of returning to the key moments I had identified in earlier readings and re-examining them in terms of the themes or discourses they engaged with, or subvert. I was interested in how Beth situated herself within a specific setting. I then developed a character description based on my understanding and in-depth analysis.

Reading Beth's story in this way, I was able to reflect on how she positioned herself within a specific context: Brisbane during the Second World War. I heard, for example, how she slipped easily into the language of propaganda of the day. At one point she said:

So it was the Yanks coming into the war, and the

Yanks came into it because their islands were being bombed by the Japanese. The silly Japs made a big mistake when they knocked out the Americans.³⁵

I had never heard my Grandma call Americans 'Yanks' before. I wondered if this was because, as Polkinghorn suggests:

People are historical beings retaining as part of themselves their previous experiences. Embedded habits present themselves not only as motor skills and bodily movements but also as patterns of thought (and, I suggest, speech).³⁶

In speaking about that particular period, Beth 'reverts' to an earlier habit, an earlier way of thinking. Language can be seen as a link to that time—voice (a distinct set of language choices) can represent the past; expose an ideology; reveal cultural discourses; demonstrate the story-telling strategies accessed and render an identity informed by all these things.

War emerged as almost a secondary theme in this story, something distant. Beth's account of going to the air-raid shelter, where I might have expected some explanation of the wider context, was not really about the war at all, but about how those with a disability had to be catered for:

And to get them (children with dislocated hips) in (to the air raid shelter), because they wouldn't fit through the doorway, they had to put them in through this wide window.³⁷

I realised that to understand this story, and to understand the emerging narrative identity, I needed to consider how Beth understood herself in terms of her disability. Hirsch notes that ‘the central aspect of disability history is the experience of living with a disability...(which is) as varied, complex and shifting as life itself’.³⁸ It was disappointing then that I came too late to the topic of disability studies in the thesis. While I was aware of the huge body of literature that exists on the topic, it was beyond the scope of my exegesis—and indeed, this article—to provide a detailed analysis of disability studies. Rather, I considered a few core concepts that shaped the development of my creative work. ‘Narratives of Identity: Post Structural Narrative Analysis of Three Deaf Women’s Life Stories’ investigates stories of otherness and disability.³⁹ Rebecca Hole considers the following when grappling with stories of deafness:

How do deaf people perceive the influence of hearing loss as they construct their identities in the narratives? they tell?

How do they (deaf people) incorporate, resist and/or reject various discourses as they go about the creative act of constructing their identities in narrative?⁴⁰

I felt these questions could be asked of Beth’s narrative in terms of polio. I saw that Beth defined herself according to what she couldn’t do physically; for example, Beth states she ‘didn’t ever do races’.⁴¹ As Polkinghorne suggests, ‘illness and bodily incapacity affect a person’s self-identity’.⁴² Further, Couser states, ‘whereas the un-marked case—the normal body—can pass without narration, the marked body—the scar, the lump, the missing limb—calls for a story... culture inscribes narratives of their (disabled people’s) bodies’.⁴³ This was perhaps why she described people physically, in terms of how they moved, especially if they didn’t move around ‘normally,’ i.e. by walking. If her understanding of herself were based on her body, wouldn’t her understanding of others be grounded in this too? Hole considers that ‘the juxtaposition of discourses of normalcy and discourses of difference led to the construction of identities based on perceptions of difference, based on opposites’.⁴⁴ One side of these pairs is privileged while the opposite is ‘Othered.’ The operation of these discourses is revealed in a 1933 *Courier Mail* article about the opening of Montrose. A spokesman for Montrose Home states:

We are going to make many cures and rehabilitate children for life.⁴⁵

This statement reveals the belief that there was something wrong with the children that needed to, and eventually would, be cured. It also engages with the idea that people with disability should be able to

operate like healthy members of the community, i.e. be ‘rehabilitated.’

Beth’s story is riddled with similar discourses. Her story of the child who described himself as spastic is a startling example of the strength of these labels, and how disability was the centre of identity. I re-create this story in the novella:

Of a Sunday morning, of course, we went to Church.

We had cars coming to take us to our various churches. We’d all line up. Mr Morgan came for me and the other Anglicans, in his beautiful Morris. It had a canvas top and open sides. You know, the cars of the ’40s. But there was a new fellow on this week. He walked along the line asking each of us:

Are you Church of England? Are you Church of England?

And he gets to this one boy, saying, are you Church of England?

And the boy said, No, I’m spastic.⁴⁶

I realised that she incorporated the discourse of ‘cripple’ as ‘Other’ in the construction of identity. She engaged with the cultural attitudes and fell into patterns of describing people with disabilities with language she would not have used ordinarily (as with the descriptions of war). For example, Beth talked about children with ‘water on the brain,’ or the ‘ones with chinky eyes’.⁴⁷ She couldn’t remember that the condition was Down Syndrome. I had to remind her. Beth knew she was not like ‘well’ or ‘normal’ children, but longed to be separated from the other ‘crippled children’:

All I wanted to do was get away from Montrose. I didn’t want crippled children.⁴⁸

Here too, might be an explanation for why she often used second person in describing her experiences at Montrose. The use of second person seemed to be a distancing technique, a way of removing herself, the Beth of the present, from the ‘crippled’ child of the past, the ‘you’ a remote, disembodied being.

Goffman describes the discourse of ‘passing’, which is ‘the work taken to minimize, disguise, and/or hide difference, and therefore, to ‘pass’ as normal’.⁴⁹ Beth seemed to be engaging in acts of passing. Her desire to leave Montrose; the lack of pictures with her wearing a calliper; even her comment at the end of the interview: ‘Oh, you must have enough now, Ari,’ all reveal the tension between her identity and the discourses surrounding disability. I found also that Beth immersed herself in the discourse of rehabilitation present in the newspaper extract mentioned earlier in this paper.

During one of the readings I scrawled this on the

bottom of a page of the interview transcript:

Who is the main character? She is passive, restrained, and well behaved. She is embarrassed by her illness. She is engaged in an act of reflecting and remembering.

What does she want? To be normal. To get out of Montrose. To not be seen as a cripple.

This moment of understanding, reached through reading and analysis, simple though it is, became the backbone of the protagonist in my fictional work, *This Wide Window*. Narrative analysis was one means through which I achieved my aims, creating a readable and engaging novella. I'm continuing developing this methodology in my current PhD project, *The Artful Life Story: Oral History and Fiction*.

Endnotes

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² P. Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, 3rd ed., Oxford University Press, New York, 2000, p. 1.

³ H. White, 'The Fictions of Factual Representation', in D. Preziosi and C. Farago (eds), *Grasping the world: The Idea of the Museum*, Ashgate, England, 2004, p. 22.

⁴ H. White, 'The Fictions of Factual Representation,' p. 22.

⁵ A. Portelli, 'What makes oral history different', in R. Perks and A. Thompson (eds), *The Oral History Reader*, Routledge, London, 2006, p. 35.

⁶ M. Chamberlain, 'Narrative Theory', in T. Charlton, L. Myers, and R. Sharpless (eds), *Handbook of Oral History*, AltaMira Press, Lanham, 2006, p. 384.

⁷ A. Portelli, 'What makes oral history different,' p. 35.

⁸ M. Chamberlain, 'Narrative Theory', p. 390.

⁹ Cited in M. Chamberlain, 'Narrative Theory', p. 389.

¹⁰ M. Chamberlain, 'Narrative Theory', p. 389.

¹¹ C. Riessman, *Narrative Analysis*, Sage, London, 1993, p. 5.

¹² C. Riessman, *Narrative Analysis*, p. 5.

¹³ For example, the work of Susan Bell cited in C. Riessman, *Narrative Analysis*, pp. 34-40.

¹⁴ See for example, I. Todorova, 'The Said and Unsaid: Approaches to Narrative Analysis', in *Cognition, Creier, Comportament*, vol. 11, no. 2, 2007, p. 229. Todorova conducts multiple readings of a single interview or transcript in order to understand the content and plot evident in the text as well as that not explicitly stated. She identifies the language of the 'unsayable' as instances of negation, revision and smokescreen, paying attention to negative statements; incomplete sentences; spaces; sudden changes in the story and logical thoughts not carried through.

¹⁵ C.E. Kiesinger, 'Anorexic and bulimic lives: making sense of food and eating', PhD. diss., University of South Florida, 1995, p. 44.

¹⁶ It must also be acknowledged that the close relationship between the interviewee and I influenced the way Beth told her stories. I explored this notion in the novella by having the first person narrator directly address a 'you,' an implied grand-daughter.

¹⁷ Susan Bell uses a similar approach as described in C. Riessman, *Narrative Analysis*, pp. 34-40.

¹⁸ I. Todorova, 'The Said and Unsaid: Approaches to Narrative Analysis,' p. 229. See footnote 12 also.

¹⁹ Cited in C. Riessman, *Narrative Analysis*, p. 40.

²⁰ See p. 3.

²¹ Beth Bevan, interviewed by author, March 2008, tape and transcript held by author.

²² Bevan interview.

²³ Bevan interview.

²⁴ A. Errante, 'But Sometimes You're Not Part of the Story: Oral Histories and Ways of Remembering and Telling', in *Educational Researcher*, vol. 29, no. 2, 2000, pp. 16-27.

²⁵ S. Chase, 'Narrative Inquiry: Multiple Lenses, Approaches, Voices', in N. K. Denzin and Y. Lincoln (eds), *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Sage Publications, London, 2005, p. 663.

²⁶ J. Bruner, 'The Narrative Construction of Reality', *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 18, no. 1, 1991, pp. 1-21.

²⁷ W. Fisher-Rosenthal, 'The Problem with Identity: Biography as a Solution to Some (Post) Modernist Dilemmas', *Comenius*, vol. 15, 1995, pp. 250-265.

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²⁹ A. Lieblich, *Narrative Research*, p. 7.

³⁰ M. Chamberlain, 'Narrative Theory,' p. 394.

³¹ A. Lieblich, *Narrative Research*, p. 7.

³² C. E. Kiesinger, 'Anorexic and bulimic lives,' p. 45.

³³ C. E. Kiesinger, 'Anorexic and bulimic lives,' p. 44.

³⁴ A. Lieblich, *Narrative Research*, p. 45.

³⁵ Bevan interview.

³⁶ D. Polkinghorn, 'Narrative Configuration in Qualitative Analysis', in J. Amos Hatch and R. Wisniewski (eds), *Life History and Narrative*, Routledge, London, 1995, p. 17.

³⁷ Bevan interview.

³⁸ K. Hirsch, 'Culture and Disability: The Role of Oral History', *Oral History Review*, vol. 22, no. 1, 1995, p. 6.

³⁹ R. Hole, 'Narratives of Identity: Post Structural Narrative Analysis of Three Deaf Women's Life Stories', *Narrative Inquiry*, vol. 7, no. 2, 2007, pp. 259-278.

⁴⁰ R. Hole, 'Narratives of Identity,' p. 261.

⁴¹ Bevan interview.

⁴² D. Polkinghorn, 'Narrative Configuration,' p. 17.

⁴³ T. Couser, 'Disability, Life Narrative and Representation', in L. J. Davis (ed.), *The Disability Studies Reader*, 2nd ed., Routledge, New York, 2006, p. 399.

⁴⁴ R. Hole, 'Narratives of Identity,' p. 268.

⁴⁵ Author Unknown, 'Marks Notable Epoch. Montrose Opened. Home for Crippled Children', *Courier Mail*, May 1933. Courtesy John Oxley Library, Brisbane, Queensland.

⁴⁶ Ariella Van Luyn, 'This Wide Window', Hons Diss., Queensland University of Technology, Australia, p. 52.

⁴⁷ Bevan interview.

⁴⁸ Bevan interview.

⁴⁹ Goffman, cited in R. Hole, 'Narratives of Identity: Post Structural Narrative Analysis,' p. 268.

Roy, 1932

Esther Ottaway

Mick and I break into bushmen's huts
hungry for bread or cake. We are never lost,

the bush and the stars have seeped into our feet.
Neither are we found. At home, our mother's welcome –

there you are you little blighters, a few hits with the stick.
We trap snakes, practise birdcall, suck at the teat

of someone's cow, follow a creek or a twist of cloud
for days. We sleep furred in the cold hearts of trees.

When I reach the team at each week's end
it is smoko. I am nine. I stand with the horses

as men gather packs, set out for weekends
of clamouring children, oven-hot stew,

the taut embraces of stalwart wives. My father slaps my
shoulder in passing, doesn't look back.

The crunch of their boots over leaf-litter fades, there are only
the sounds of the forest closing its fist.

I feed the horses; they all have shoes. My soles run red,
apprenticed to bracken and granite,

ants, razor-edged rocks, dry-ice frosts.
I pee on my freezing feet, clamber up a horse

to knead them under its mane's patchy blanket.
If ever I cry there are only the mares to hear.

The fire in the hut is dying again, the bush
hunching itself into the knot of night.



Esther Ottaway. Photo supplied by author.

Soon enough I am broken in: *tough like an Abo*.
I am a child workhorse, shod with scars.

Along the dry creek-bed the log is gaining
on the hard-bitten shoe-horse.

My father shouts, fast and fricative,
time yawns open like the mouth of death:

a stone to feet of clay, the iron-shod log
grinds hoof and hock in a scream of chain.

He grips the victim's head,
speaks into her ear with a nurse's calm.

Perhaps he will take the needle from his kit snap a
long hair from her panicked tail

scald it in the billy, skirl boracic powder
into the wound, and stitch, the way I have seen him

stitch many horses, and his own injured body. He
does not. He reads in the mangled achilles

the limits of care brooked by death.
No exit from the bush except on one's feet.

He slits the carotid with a barking axe,
helps the horse lay down. I gather branches,

sit with my feet to the pyre's heat.
That night my father quickly snuffs

the lantern, orders sleep. In dreams he owns
a sunlit paddock, filled with broken horses.

Uncle Rocky Couzens

Interview recorded 2.7.04 by **Bruce Pascoe** for
the Wathaurong Language Program

Uncle Rocky's extraordinary life was thrown into confusion three years ago when he had a stroke and lost his memory. He describes that period as like being lost in the wilderness. His memory began to return a month ago with one clear memory of the Warrnambool Hospital and the names of the doctors and nurses. Since then he has been working hard to reclaim the lost years and recently celebrated his steady recovery by appearing in the Wathaurong Community Language Film.

Rocky (Ansell Mervyn) Couzens was born in the Warrnambool Base Hospital in 1934 to Nick and Georgina (nee Winters) Couzens. Rocky describes his father as a 'pretty smart cookie' who worked for the Warrnambool Council. His mother was born on the mission. The family grew up on the Framlingham Aboriginal Mission where Rocky and his six brothers and sisters went to school. The family lived on a dairy farm near their Uncle Tom Clarke's farm. All the Clarkes and Couzens grew up together on those farms.

Rocky did quite well at school and when in Grade six was often asked to teach the Grade two children. The children used to cross the Hopkins River to Panmure on a swing bridge that their uncle and brother built.

At fourteen Rocky joined the Panmure Football Club and by the age of fifteen was playing in the Senior team with his brothers Ivan and Grattan.

He took his first job in Coleman's Bluestone Quarries where he worked with his brother Ivan and his cousin, Val Clarke. At first Rocky made the tea for the workers but was soon breaking stones, but when the boss' brother, Bruce Coleman, bought another quarry near Mount Elephant, Rocky got an overhead crane licence and later a bulldozer driver's licence to clear Coleman's bush block. Eventually he got an explosives licence. He and his brother, Grattan, were looked upon as first class workers.

Rocky's cousin, Val Clarke, worked at Fletcher Jones textile mill at Warrnambool with a young woman,

Irma. Ivan began going out with Val, and Rocky with Irma. They were so constantly in each other's company that they became known as the Four Musketeers. One night Rocky returned from visiting Irma in Warrnambool and woke his parents to tell them that he intended to marry Irma. They advised him to join the Catholic Church, as Irma was such a devout Catholic.

Rocky and Irma were married on 27th October 1956 at St Joseph's Church in Warrnambool. Around this time Rocky worked building bridges, but a work colleague advised him to work for the railways in Geelong. He began in 1959 and was soon driving train engines, and became the first Aboriginal train driver in Victoria. His photograph was featured on the wall of the Railways Department. One of his most memorable tasks was to drive the train that took the Queen to Albury in 1956.

Their first child, Maria, was born in 1957 and a son, Doug, in 1958. Both Irma and Rocky were working very hard to build something for their family. Irma was working at Sunkist Foods and together they were able to rent a bigger house in Forster Street and eventually to build their dream home in Buffalo Avenue.

Rocky left the Railways and started at Alcoa and gained more licences and certificates to speed his advancement. He later moved to Blakiston's to drive trucks before taking a position with the Department of Human Services as Aboriginal Liaison Officer, and later as Housing Officer.

Both Ivan and Rocky were very talented footballers. On one occasion the Victorian Football League talent scouts came to look at Alistair and Stewart Lord but Rocky gave both the Lords a complete hiding, so that the famous Lord twins, who were to later play in Grand Finals for Geelong, had to share the recruiters' attention with the Couzens brothers.

Hawthorn invited the brothers to play in Melbourne and accommodated them in a hotel, but on their first

night in Melbourne there was an almighty blue in the pub. Rocky and Ivan, two shy blackfellas from the bush, listened to this riot from their room and decided then and there that the city was not for them and left to go back to Warrnambool.

Rocky continued to play into his forties and even coached the Little League to Premierships. Both he and Irma were on North Shore's committee for years. Geelong tried to recruit Rocky soon after he left Hawthorn but North Shore grabbed him first and he was happy there and decided to stay. He played over two hundred senior games with the club.

During these years Irma worked at the Wathaurong Aboriginal Co-op as Child Services Officer and Rocky as Aboriginal Liaison Officer. Rocky left his job when Irma developed breast cancer and he needed to care for her and the family while she was sick. Irma was in remission for nine years but died in 2001.

Rocky remembers that the early days at Framlingham were pretty tough and they lived on rabbits that his parents caught. They ate the rabbits and dried the skins for sale in Warrnambool. Grattan, Rocky's brother, was always called George because of his resemblance to their Uncle George. Rocky never knew his own real name was Ansell. It got confused and some called him Hansen, but soon everyone was calling him Rocky and that's the way it stayed. His was a close family and they all worked hard. Rocky's mother had a terrific vegetable garden and Uncle Banjo Clarke lived further along the river and was also very good at catching rabbits and eels.

Sport was a big part of their lives and Rocky tried everything from darts, ten pin bowling, footy, athletics, tug of war, golf and for a short while, boxing. He fought Tiddy Austin at Warrnambool Town Hall and knocked him out but that was his first and last formal bout. He ran for the Railways Institute and some said he should have won the Stawell Gift after easily accounting for the previous winner of the Gift. He represented Victoria in Tenpin Bowling and his bike riding career



Photo: Bruce Pascoe: supplied by the author

was very successful too. He won many events at the Kardinia Park bike track and ran second to the great Hubert Opperman in the Colac to Warrnambool road race. Rocky rode a bike made for him by his father while Opperman had the latest light-weight road racer. Rocky was leading the race until puncturing just before the finish. Given the same opportunities and support what would the outcome have been?

Rocky's Great Uncle played Test Cricket for Australia in the Aboriginal team that toured England at the end of the nineteenth century. Rocky's daughter, Maria, has many sporting trophies mounted in her lounge, from all members of the family. Many of them are Rocky's but he admits to having thrown three large boxes of trophies out to the tip.

Rocky is very proud of his children who have had great success in their careers. Maria works for Aboriginal Affairs Victoria and Doug has a job promoting football for the AFL in Darwin. Rocky's has been a great life and his contribution to his family and his people has been enormous.

Helen Gee, Ronnie and Dyan Summers

Interviewed in Hobart, 10.3.2010, by **Terry Whitebeach**

How did your collaboration start?

Ronnie Summers: It was at Windsong, that's where it started. We went to Windsong, Jane and Tom Tenniswood's property, on the East Coast, in 2005.

Helen Gee: Aboriginal people were welcoming us whities to the land. It was a most moving weekend. There were about twenty or thirty of us there, people living on the east coast, and there were several Aboriginal people from the North but also from Orford. We sat round the fire, and Ronnie sang, and we burnt gum leaves and sticks—

Ronnie Summers: for smoking—

Helen Gee: To represent the issues we had about the land and our problems with dealing with it. With the sticks we threw into the fire went all our angst, all the things standing in the way of moving forwards with healing and reconciliation. It was very positive, a real charge. It was the most wonderful weekend, of feeling we were all here now to look after the land. It was very much a healing weekend. On the Sunday, before the end, Ronnie asked me to give him a hand to write his story.

Ronnie Summers: People had been asking me for years. I suppose I'd been doing it for years, sitting down, even when I was drinking, I'd sit down and tell these stories and we'd have a good laugh about everything. And when I knocked off drinking it just kept on going. And my dreams amazed me, my dreams were just unreal, and then when I started talking about that, a lot of people said, 'You've got to start writing this down.' And I went up to you [Helen] and I said, 'Well, this is the time.'

So then I started telling you [Helen]. The worst part was getting the years together, wasn't it? I'd be thinking to myself - I'd tell poor Helen something and I'd think, 'Now, I wonder what year that was?' and I'd be trying to rattle my brain, but we seemed to get it pretty well.

Helen Gee: But that didn't matter much, because we got off on the childhood on Cape Barren Island, and

I'd been over on Cape Barren in 1968 with Abschol, so everything made sense to me about the location.

Ronnie Summers: She went to one of the dances, where my uncle played.

Helen Gee: Yes, Devony Brown.

[Working together] was a sort of organic process. It certainly wasn't done in chronological sequence and often we'd start back on Cape Barren and then we'd get back to the jobs, in Burnie, and sometimes you couldn't remember – and we just talked. And the next time, we'd write down the sequence we thought and Dyan would check it through, and she'd say, 'That can't be right'. She knew it all, right. And being accepted into the Summers' home, being treated like family, was *special*.

Ronnie Summers: Because of that I was thinking to myself, 'Poor Helen, I'm going from one thing to another.' I must have switched pretty quick on Mrs Brady and Mrs Wattleworth. I was talking about Mrs Wattleworth, then I was talking about Mrs Brady then I got Helen all mixed up. Then the book came out and it righted itself in the next couple of pages. I was saying who Mrs Wattleworth was, a lovely old lady, a flower power old lady: I love those people; down to earth people. Then it [seemed like] Ozzie was her son. But then in the next couple of pages I was talking about Mrs Brady and her son, Ozzie Brady. So it righted itself.

Helen Gee: Don't you remember all the times you had to go through it again?

Ronnie Summers laughs.

Helen Gee: I used opportunities to go to Hadspen: I've got family up there so I was always coming and going. I'd try to work two or three hours, not too long, and once or twice Ronnie had a headache and we'd just leave it a while. We might go back over the childhood and then the next time I'd say, 'Ronnie, when did you leave the island?' and that would bring it to the schooling, and leaving [Cape Barren Island] to go to Flinders [Island].

Most of the interviews were in Hadsphen, but a few were in Hobart, when Ronnie and Dyan were down here. So that meant I got to meet family. And I've seen the grandchildren grow up during the six years it took [to complete the book]. And it's been magic to see Coby take on music, because he didn't play or sing and now he's going great places. He's got real talent. So that's been happening during the book process.

Did you have to set aside a lot of time for the book?

Ronnie Summers: We just fitted it in amongst everything. Helen's the one that worked hard. She had to rattle her brains.

Helen Gee: It was pretty special for me.

Ronnie Summers: I had Dyan up there trying to rattle my brains a few times, too!

Dyan Summers: I'd say, 'But you *must* know it!'

Ronnie Summers: I'd say, 'Oh yeah, I'll think about it.' But we got through.

So there were really three of you working on the book.

Ronnie Summers: Yes. But Dyan gets really stressed out, but I'm pretty cool. I just sit there with a silly look on my face, thinking to myself, 'I wonder what it really was?'

Helen Gee: We were a very good team. Dyan gave us some really key information, or she'd go off and do some research, and come back with a birth certificate or something; documents and particularly photos.

Ronnie Summers: And when she was putting it all together - I think she thought the computer was going to make it better - but [it was] one o'clock, two o'clock, three o'clock, before she finished and all of a sudden, as soon as she hit the light on the door, I sat up and said, 'Thank God you're here!' Just like the ad on television!

Helen Gee: Dyan did proofreading. I did the recording and transcribing. I wanted to keep Ronnie's voice almost 100%. Every now and then I might change something slightly, but pretty well it was as Ronnie told the story. A few different people have voices in the book: Dyan and I at times. I think it works quite well.

Then of course there was changing the sequence of it. Dyan would read through it and sometimes she'd say, 'You've got this in the wrong order', or 'That's not quite right about the necklace making'. Actually, about that, [as it] was women's business, we had to deal with it a bit differently, put it into [Dyan's] voice. So there were a lot of those issues.

And once Magabala was involved, there was another stage, when their editor came down and talked to Ronnie because he wanted more on the mutton birding.

Because it was going to be for national readership he wanted a little more information, not a lot, but just to slant it from a national perspective, rather than just for a Tasmanian audience.

There was a lot of time went by at one stage when we weren't sure about publication. Ronnie was keen to get it published, and we talked about who it should be, how wide a circle. We got a grant from the Australia Council. That was critical, because that meant a whole lot of assistance to the production of the book - the photos, the CD in the back. It gave flexibility, because Magabala got half that grant to improve the quality of the book.

How did you decide which publisher to go with?

Helen Gee: The manuscript went to three or four publishers and Magabala responded positively.

The launch was just brilliant, and the comment that the Magabala representative made was, 'Just my kind of launch.' We couldn't have asked for a better launch, with music and dancing. I came in when you [Ronnie and others] were practising, and I had tears in my eyes as I walked through the door. I thought back to when we first talked about it and now suddenly it was here and was being launched. It was that flash you get: it's come to pass.

Did you, Ronnie, always have the idea from the beginning that you wanted it to be a book, out in the world?

Ronnie Summers: No, not really, it's just different parts of my life; I didn't feel good about myself. Like football; I wanted to play football at home but I was too frightened, the other boys were too rough. They used to torment me. And the other thing that tormented me most of all was the happenings down in the Flinders Island days; that they did what they did: they were the main two things that used to follow me around. All the other stuff was all good stuff. A lot of stuff: like stuff in Launceston that happened, that, after you thought about it-

Helen Gee: That's where, personally it meant very much to me.

Ronnie Summers: Yes, you walked up to me and said, 'Ronnie, that's touched me: that was at Chalmers Church.'

Helen Gee: I was at school in the sixties in Launceston and there were attitudes that I was brought up with, and didn't really question heaps: it was just the way it was, but I look back now and think it was racist. You'd go to dances and Aboriginal people would come in and they'd be told to leave, before they could even appreciate the music. I'm pretty sure it was Ronnie, at one of the dances at Chalmers, when I look back. And I can remember thinking 'That's not right. It's

terrible.' I must have been fourteen or fifteen.

When I got to Uni I joined Abscol, and we went to Cape Barren Island for a week, and that was such a great education, to sit and talk to people. I started to fit things together, people I had met, living in Invermay. Then I went to Darwin and taught quite a few Aboriginal kids, and went out to Maningrida. Yes, I've always felt really strongly a sense that we have so much to do to make amends and to start the healing, and this is just a tiny piece of the puzzle for me, personally, just to do my bit in helping to set the record straight. I had no idea about the great life on Cape Barren. I had a completely different view from [school]. Let's face it: we had very little Tasmanian history and no history of Cape Barren or the Aboriginal perspective.

And in the mid-seventies I became a site recorder with the Australian Institute for Aboriginal Studies. So it's been through my life, always coming back to it. And there's Ronnie, in the eighties, going around recording Aboriginal sites too.

And those bad experiences you had, Ronnie?

Ronnie Summers: Since the book, I don't worry about them. It's lifted. It's in the book now. It doesn't worry me like it used to.

Helen Gee: And talking about it, to start with, it was really hard for Ronnie to talk about it, and to get it right. It had obviously gone from one part of the mind to the other. And talking about it shifts the focus.

Ronnie Summers: And I was wondering about the feedback, from my own people. It was so funny to have feedback from my sister. My sister said to me, 'Ronnie, when did you sleep under the bridge?' I said, 'What did you say?' She said, 'When did you sleep under a bridge?' I said, 'Carleen you should know, your brother was that frightened he wouldn't sleep under a bridge by himself. What's wrong with you?' She swore that somebody told her. Told her all right: wrong information. So I said, 'I never slept under the bridge.' 'No, but,' she said, 'I had a good cry [when I read your book].'

Your book has been really well received.

Ronnie Summers: That's the good part about it. A lot of my relations say, 'Good book, Ronnie. You did a good job.'

Helen Gee: Last time Tasmania was the focal state for the National Folk festival in Canberra, Ronnie was there, singing and playing to four thousand people.

Dyan Summers: Ronnie and the others opened the closing ceremony with the Fanny Cochrane Smith song.

Helen Gee: And we'll be there this year, again, in April, launching the book, and it will be a real opportunity for promotion.

Dyan Summers: While we're up there we do a lot of work with the National Library.

Helen Gee: In particular, the Folkloric section, with collector, Rob Willis.

Dyan Summers: They've got some amazing stories of Ronnie and mine, and some beautiful pieces of music. The library has always supported Ronnie and me when we go to Canberra. That's probably where we'll have the [Canberra] launch of the book.

Helen Gee: Ronnie and Dyan have been asked to open the basket weaving exhibition.

Don Dunstan Foundation Project

Lindsay Marshall

Members of the Don Dunstan Foundation's Queensland Chapter are making progress on an oral history project called Decades of Division. The project plans to cover Queensland politics between 1969 and 1989, through interviews with people who have first-hand knowledge of the political trends and events in that period.

The period in question begins shortly after the August 1968 selection of the late Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen as state premier and ends prior to the 1989 election of the Labor Party government of Wayne Goss.

About 20 potential interviewees — politicians, civil libertarians, trade unionists, and others — have been chosen to cover one or more of four subject areas:

Divide and Conquer: Covering the confrontationist approach of successive Coalition and National Party governments and their attacks on civil libertarians, environmentalists, trade unions, and individuals who disagreed with their policies or decisions.

A Government Divided: Covering the internal divisions evident within Coalition governments that led ultimately to the 1983 split and the National Party's governing alone.

Dividing The State: Covering the distorted electoral system that gave the Country Party/National Party a head start in electoral contests at the expense of the Liberal and Labor parties.

Divisions in the Labor Party: Covering the often bitter divisions and personal or factional disputes within the Labor Party and their effect in lessening the party's ability to present itself as a credible alternative government.

We also have an agreement with the National Library of Australia for the conducting of the interviews and their lodgement as part of the library's Oral History collection.

A special section of the Don Dunstan Foundation's website (www.dunstan.org.au) will also be devoted to an abbreviated version of the project that can point people to the NLA collection.

As at mid-March 2010 we have conducted four interviews with:

- Transport Workers' Union state secretary, Hughie Williams
- former Liberal party cabinet minister, Bill Hewitt
- former Liberal Party state director, David Fraser
- former Queensland Trades and Labour Council president, Harry Hauenschild.

All of the interviews so far have included remarkably frank insights from those involved. We look forward to further interviews, but have no illusions about the hard work in store.

The Don Dunstan Foundation (www.dunstan.org.au) was established in South Australia in 1999 to continue the advocacy and social leadership role of the former South Australian Premier who died that year. Voluntary DDF Chapters undertake activities in Queensland, Victoria, and NSW.

For further information, contact Lindsay Marshall lindsaymarshall@rocketmail.com



Former Liberal Party cabinet minister Bill Hewitt. Former Queensland Trades & Labour Council president Harry Hauenschild. Queensland branch secretary of the Transport Workers' Union, Hughie Williams. Photos courtesy Lindsay Marshall.

Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants Oral History Project

National Library of Australia is conducting an oral history project to record the lives and experiences of Forgotten Australians and former Child Migrants. Interviews will be conducted across Australia, will be preserved in the National Library and made publicly available, subject to any access conditions imposed by interviewees.

This oral history project has received funding from the Commonwealth Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. It will run for three years and aims to document a rounded history of the experiences of children in institutional and out of home care and the lifelong impact of these experiences on their lives and their families. The project will also interview a selection of advocates, and allied professionals including welfare officers, employees of institutions and administrators.

Interviews

The Library is working closely with the National Museum of Australia which is developing an exhibition entitled 'Inside' about the history of institutionalised care of children. The Library is also working with the Australian National Maritime Museum which is developing the travelling exhibition 'On their own – Britain's Child Migrants'.

Since former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's Apology, there has been widespread interest in being interviewed for the project. The Library will be selecting people to interview so as to build a collection which will contain stories telling the diversity and complexity of the experiences. If you would like to express an interest in being interviewed, then you can complete an Expression of Interest.

Collections

The Library is seeking to collect other materials about the experiences of Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants including ephemera, self-published autobiographies, websites and manuscripts. The Library has made a list of a significant number of publications which it does not hold and would like to collect, catalogue and make available. If you have published a book about your experiences you can check here to see if the National Library holds a copy. There is information about the Legal Deposit scheme and where to send a copy of your book.

Further Information

For further information on the Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants oral history project, please feel free to contact Dr Joanna Sassoon, Project Manager, Oral History project: Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants, Phone: 1800 204 290.

Military History International Network

At the XVIth International Oral History Conference in Prague a group of oral historians of a military history bent and a group of military historians with a focus on oral history had discussions regarding setting up an international military oral history network in order to stimulate a more systematic exchange of knowledge and to promote better collaboration in this field.

This initiative is being sponsored by Stef Scagliola, a military historian of Italian descent who is based in the Netherlands, and who is the curator of an oral history archive with close to one thousand life stories of Dutch veterans. The network aims to establish a permanent online presence. Initially, data will be collected through questionnaires and the information then collated. The network will have an international flavour, with members from Great Britain, the Netherlands, Italy, France, Australia and New Zealand.

To find out more or to join the network contact:

Dr. Stef Scagliola s.scagliola@veteraneninstituut.nl

Ben Morris taxmaster_1@yahoo.com.

The Hazel de Berg Award for Excellence in Oral History 2009 : Janis Wilton

Jan McCahon Marshall

For more than thirty years Janis Wilton has raised awareness of oral history within the oral history profession, amongst historians, and within the general community. She is the author of many books about oral history as well as those based on extensive oral history research, such as her ground-breaking *Old Worlds and New Australia: the post-war migrant experience* (Penguin 1984) and *Golden Threads: the Chinese in Regional New South Wales 1850-1950* (2004), which was also the basis for a major touring exhibition and an historical resource website.

Oral history has been integral to her academic teaching career. She pioneered the teaching of oral history as a university subject in the 1980s, and has inspired many of her students to pursue oral history in varied and diverse ways in their subsequent careers. She is a passionate promoter of the relevance of oral history to academic research and history writing.

Janis has provided a crucial link between international oral history movements and the practice and theory of oral history in Australia. From 1998 to 2006 she was a member of the Council of the International Oral History Association and served terms as journal editor, Vice President and President.

An early member of the Oral History Association of Australia, Janis has served several terms on the OHAA National Council. From 1982-86 she co-edited the OHAA *Journal* and recently helped to transform the *Journal* into a publication for both academic and general audiences. Her list of oral history collections and organisations in Australia was published by the OHAA and was successful in raising public awareness of the institutional support for oral history from local to national levels.

She is a true oral history enthusiast. Through her active involvement in oral history organisations, community-based projects, university teaching and her own research and writing, she continues to inspire



Janis Wilton being presented with the Hazel de Berg award by National President OHAA 2009, Jan McCahon Marshall. Photo: Jill Cassidy

and assist people and local communities to capture the power and beauty of people's life stories.

Jan McCahon Marshall

National President Oral History Association of Australia 2009

Life memberships

Dr Janis Wilton, OAM.

For service to the Oral History Association of Australia and to oral history, a citation for the proposal for Honorary Life Membership of the OHAA by OHAA (NSW)

Janis Wilton was a foundation member of the Oral History Association of Australia in 1978. She remains a member to this day and served for a number of years as the International Representative on the National Committee of the OHAA. She has participated in all OHAA conferences since 1979 and has presented papers at many of them. Her preferred place of publication for her papers is the OHAA *Journal*. From 1982-86 with Louise Douglas she co-edited the OHAA *Journal* and more recently has served on the Editorial Committee to support the establishment of peer review as a beneficial and educational process. This has brought the *Journal* and thereby the Association to the notice of academic institutions both here in Australia and overseas.

She was the first Australian to serve on the council of the International Oral History Association with which our Association is affiliated, and was its president in 2002/2004. She has attended international conferences regularly and was a participant in the reorganising of the international association. Janis was fundamental to the success of the proposing of Sydney as the venue for the 2006 international conference. OHAA (NSW) was the host for the International Oral History Association conference held in Sydney in 2006 and Janis was a co-convener with Rosemary Block and Paula Hamilton

Janis is Associate Professor in the Department of History at the University of New England, where she pioneered the course in local history which includes the important component of oral history. She always encourages her students to join the OHAA in their state. Many have joined the NSW Branch of the Association and come regularly to the seminars held at the State Library. She gives workshops on the practice and technique of oral history mainly in northern New

South Wales and southern Queensland and again promotes OHAA membership for both states. She is an inspiring teacher in both academe and in the wider community and is a much sought-after public speaker

She compiled *Oral History in Australia: a list*, 1994, which is the seminal guide to published oral history in Australia. This was published principally for the OHAA membership and has been long out of print. At present she is part of a negotiating team suggesting that the National Library of Australia might publish the second edition on-line

Janis was a pioneer in oral history recording and her professionalism in oral history includes promoting best practice in interviewing and also promoting correct archival and storage practice. Her own recordings have been deposited in archival institutions. Janis is invariably available for consultation on OHAA matters and her suggestions and ideas are always pertinent. In sum, the record of her leadership and her service to the OHAA is outstanding.

Life memberships

Bill Bunbury

The West Australian branch of the Oral History Association of Western Australia would like to nominate Bill Bunbury as an Honorary Life Member. Bill Bunbury is a widely known broadcasting identity and author who retired in 2007 after a long and distinguished career with the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. For 22 years he was associated with the ABC's Social History Unit where he created and presented an extraordinary number and range of compelling documentary history programs. Bill has won numerous national and international awards, is an Adjunct Professor at Murdoch University in the area of Media and Communications, and is the author of nine books.

Bill has encouraged hundreds of Australians to tell their stories so that we can better understand our past. His recording style has left us with an invaluable record of our history as well as our varied Australian voices. He has successfully used recorded interviews to provide evidence for our historical record, by seeking a wide range of viewpoints to establish a balanced view on past events and experiences. He is especially noteworthy for his use of documentary history and recorded interviews as a valuable tool for the reconciliation of Indigenous with non-Indigenous Australians.

He has approached his subjects with impeccable research skills and in-depth interview style, together with a willingness to go to remote corners of Australia to carry out extended interviews. Through his efforts, hundreds of Western Australians have contributed to the recording of Australian history, while thousands more have heard either his radio programs or read his books.

The quality of Bill Bunbury's work means that he has not only created hundreds of radio programs to educate and entertain Australians about their own history, but he has also created an invaluable and unique archive of Australian voices from every walk of life.



We particularly recognise Bill for his contribution to the development of oral history in Western Australia. Bill has set the highest standards in the field of Oral History recording, always insisting on the highest quality recording equipment to achieve the best quality sound. Moreover, he has consistently been generous with sharing his time and experience with the members of the WA Branch of the Oral History Association. From the early days of the Association until the present day, he has shared his knowledge of all things oral history through workshops, master classes, conference presentations, and his presence at meetings and events. It is for his contribution to not only the field of oral history, but to the WA Branch of the Oral History Association of Australia in particular, that we nominate Bill for this honorary award with our thanks.

Life memberships

Suzanne Mulligan

Suzanne Mulligan is one of those people whose mere presence forces you to jump higher and do better. She is one of the most enthusiastic and dedicated members of the Queensland branch and the backbone of the Queensland committee. At the same time she is the most modest. She keeps information about herself and her achievements to a bare minimum while concentrating on the lives of others.

Her first encounter with oral history - as in many other cases - was accidental. Knowing her inquisitive nature, her parents presented her with a book titled *If Only I'd Listened to Grandpa*. It changed Suzanne's life: the journey of an oral historian began. In 1986 she recorded her first interview with her own grandmother and soon developed an avid interest in interviewing older people about the significant events in their lives. Her portfolio of oral history interviews - to name a few - includes a collection of interviews with a WWI veteran, interviews with Queensland's longest serving policewoman, with a pioneering Northern Territory cattle property owner, with a group of Korean War veterans and the British harbour master after the Falklands War. Some of these interviews were accepted by the Australian War Memorial and some will be donated to the State Library of Queensland.

The Degree in Journalism obtained in the University of Queensland and a membership of a photography club, the *Queensland Camera Group*, were significant stepping stones in Suzanne's career as a historian but she didn't stop there. Not only does she continue her own professional development but she also inspires everyone around her to move forward: to attend a course, a workshop, a conference. In the pursuit of the professional training and development of the Queensland oral historians Suzanne came up with an initiative to offer bursaries to OHAA members. This year these bursaries will enable three very deserving members to attend the national conference in Tasmania.



Photo: Suzanne Mulligan

Suzanne's contribution to the Queensland committee is hard to ignore. At times she was the committee and kept everyone on their toes. For many years she was Editor of the *On Tape* Newsletter (in hardcopy and later online), providing an array of interesting articles and useful links for ever information-hungry Queensland oral historians. She combined these duties with those of the committee's Secretary and both she did brilliantly, working above and beyond the responsibilities of this post. She was instrumental in the preparation and running of the national 2007 conference in Brisbane and we owe the conference success to her strong will and organisational abilities, creativity and dedication.

Currently Suzanne is the Secretary of the OHAA Queensland Branch. She has a passionate interest in oral history and has become the first point of contact for everyone interested in oral history both in Queensland and around the world. She is well known and immensely respected in this field. She is interviewing people, writing grant tenders, and keeping an interesting oral history blog that continues to attract attention (and new members) to our association. She is dedicated and committed to sharing her knowledge with others and ensuring the association moves seamlessly into a digital age. OHAA (Qld) can't think of a more deserving candidate for Life Membership than Suzanne Mulligan and we wish her well in her future endeavours.

Obituaries

Vale Meroula (Mollie) Lukis OAM, OBE, HON. D. LITT. (1911-2009)

A Western Australian pioneer of oral history, Mollie Lukis, died a fortnight before her 98th birthday.

After completing BA (Hons) in 1932 at the University of Western Australia and a Diploma of Education the following year, Mollie taught mathematics in Australia and overseas, and worked in the Defence Research Laboratories in Victoria during the Second World War. In 1945 she was appointed archivist for the archives collection in the Public Library in Perth, the first woman and third archivist appointed in Australia.

The Public Library was refurbished and became the State Library of Western Australia in 1956. It had a separate reading room for the extensive local history collection, which became the J. S. Battye Library of West Australian History, with Mollie Lukis in charge. Western Australia was not used in the title because the collections pre-dated white settlement.

In 1956, Mollie Lukis was awarded a Carnegie Fellowship and during her time in the United States, saw what was being done in oral history. She realised its value in telling the story of people and lifestyles that were rarely reflected in archival sources.

Mollie Lukis started an oral history collection in 1961, conducting interviews and collecting the work of others. Her first major interview series was with pioneer aviator, Sir Norman Brearley. This was followed by interviews about the Great Depression, and the North West of Western Australia. During a visit to England she interviewed Alexander Sanderson, who had worked with Western Australia's most outstanding and innovative early engineer, C. Y. O'Connor.

Remarkably, Mollie thought to do an oral history project in 1961, choosing the Collie coalmining industry, which she felt would change or disappear, and including coalminers' wives in her interviews. Among early recordings collected were of a bullock driver giving commands to his team and an Aboriginal message stick containing greetings from Aborigines at Ethel Creek Station in the North and replies from other Aboriginal communities.

Today, Battye Library has the largest oral history collection in any Australian State Library, with the earliest date of birth of a person interviewed being 1863. The collection contains over 14,000 hours of recordings from all over WA.

In travelling around the State seeking archival records, Mollie was very aware of the needs of regional areas and was responsible for copying materials held in the Battye Library to start local studies collections in various regional centres and towns.

Mollie Lukis retired as State Archivist and from the Battye Library in 1971. She was also known for her support of community organisations, many of them involved with history, and her promotion of women's education and work opportunities. She was a member of the Western Australian Committee for Equal Opportunity from 1958-1973.

Among many honours and awards were Fellowships of the Library Association of Australia, the Royal Western Australian Historical Society, and the Library Board of Western Australia.

To mark Mollie's 90th birthday, the State Library set up the Mollie Lukis Award for Excellence in Archival Practice to be presented to an individual or work team for an outstanding contribution to any aspect of appraising, collecting, arranging, preserving and making available materials which reflect the cultural heritage of Western Australia. Through this award and her many outstanding achievements in her personal and working life, Mollie Lukis will not be forgotten.

Ronda Jamieson

Obituaries

Jenny Hudson (1933-2010)

I suppose life would not be complete without regret and it is with sadness that I note the death of Jenny Hudson. She had been a member of OHAA (NSW) for some years before my arrival in 1991 – one of the ‘faithful remnant’ who had carried the flag since OHAA’s inception until the active participation of the State Library of New South Wales. She was a regular presenter at national conferences and had conducted a number of oral history projects. Among these was a large series of interviews with people living in the Western Division of New South Wales which provide a fascinating insight into how farmers and others were conducting their lives in that fragile land. She was a contributor to the NSW Bicentennial Oral History Project and had a particular interest in country communities and very especially in the Liverpool Plains where she and her husband Rusty owned a property near Quirindi. In latter days she was commissioned to interview for corporate histories. Among these were Woolworths, Bonds, Utilux (Tyco) and others. She was a pioneer professional historian and was always ready to share her fee structure, her advice and her methodology with interested members.

Added to my regret at her sudden passing is the fact that I did not think to make her a Life Member of the OHAA to acknowledge her long and valued contribution to the Association. I suppose I did not really want her to retire – and had been in touch to offer her some projects quite recently. It was only then, on her refusing them, that I was forced to recognise that her health was becoming not good although she stayed the same cheerful, competent and lively companion. I thought then – ‘next year’ - and now we have left it too late. However, I do want you all to know that she would indeed have been nominated for 2011. But now I have to say alas, only ‘in absentia’ and in our memories. Vale Jenny – you will be much missed.

Rosemary Block
President, New South Wales Branch

'Oral history holds all lives valuable': a glimpse of the 16th National Conference of the OHAA in Launceston 2009

Denise Phillips

In 2009, I enjoyed four engaging days at the 16th National Conference of the Oral History Association of Australia (OHAA), *Islands of Memory: Navigating Personal and Public History*. The conference hosted 49 or so inspiring speakers and attracted about 135 delegates from across Australia and abroad. Held at the Tram Shed Function Centre in Launceston, Tasmania, we enjoyed the city's beautifully preserved, historic buildings and the picturesque, rural scenery of the Tamar Valley. A diverse range of topics was covered, with a mixture of single and parallel sessions. These topics spanned the use of oral sources in museums and heritage institutions, academia, the media, law courts, the arts, and family and local histories. This is a glimpse of the conference, from my perspective.

On Thursday 17th September 2009, Jill Cassidy, the President of the Tasmanian branch, opened the conference and Aboriginal elder, Nola Hooper, gave the Welcome to Country. The Honourable Ewan Crawford, Lieutenant-Governor of Tasmania, conducted the official opening. Drawing on his role also as the state's Chief Justice, he commented on how oral accounts give layered and often conflicting views of the past, and quoted Alessandro Portelli to remind us that these sources tell us about meanings. He drew on Alistair Thomson to suggest that oral history has never been so exciting or uncertain, with innovative approaches in analysis and rapid advances in digital technology.

Richard Whiteing, the Research Manager of Robben Island Museum at Cape Town, gave a moving keynote address in 'Remembering Mandela on Robben Island'. During South Africa's apartheid era, Richard joined the resistance movement, was exiled and became a member of the African National Congress. Richard has overseen an extensive collection of oral history interviews with Nelson Mandela's former fellow-inmates. In sharing their memories of Mandela during his 18 years of imprisonment on Robben Island, rich insights into his life as a prisoner, political

leader, comrade and family man have been captured. Mandela used subtle methods of resisting oppressive conditions within prison, challenging authority while still recognising limitations. If his warders said he must run, then Mandela would walk. Maintaining intellectual rigour and establishing clandestine political structures enabled Mandela to further the struggle against apartheid. Mandela, Richard told us, was noted for humanising the prison warders by 'rescuing the human being within', often through adopting a conciliatory or fatherly approach.

Several speakers shared their projects on Indigenous stories, showing the vital role oral history plays in the continuing process of reconciliation. Elaine Rabbitt argued that through storytelling, Indigenous Australians can gain recognition of past suffering and non-Indigenous Australians can glean a better understanding of how the past affects Indigenous lives in the present. Leonie Kelleher spoke passionately about the way Western society still privileges white voices and interpretations, particularly in law courts. She argued that Australia's national story remains a work in progress, and advocated greater inclusion of all voices.

Through the oral histories of her own people about places and 'Aunty Maggie's' house, Lorina Barker gave insights into the social interaction and culture of Aboriginals from Weilmoringle in north-west New South Wales. Lorina used the innovative concept of 'memory maps'. Her narrators sometimes clammed up when the recorder was turned on, so she suggested they draw a map of their town or dwellings to show where things had happened. This put them at ease and drew out rich stories of humpies, new houses and town landmarks, such as the 'car cemetery'. Noah Riseman delivered a well-crafted and nuanced paper about the role of the Yolngu people in defending Australia from Japanese invasion in the Northern Territory during World War II. Using oral histories,



Tamar River, Launceston. Photo: Denise Phillips

he challenged the dominant view that the Yolngu people were rallied into action by anthropologist Donald Thomson to show that they had also exercised their own agency in defending their lands. Helen Klæbe outlined her exciting pilot project to record responses to the Australian Parliament's Apology in 2008 to Australia's Indigenous Peoples, with the hope of others gathering stories nationwide.

One of Thursday morning's parallel sessions was marked by three outstanding speakers. Together, they formed a powerful trio with a common theme of using oral history to empower others. Greater understanding of those with learning difficulties was encouraged through Susan Grimes' presentation. Jan Gothard, having interviewed people with Down syndrome as well as being a mother of a child with Down syndrome, explored the difficulties of maintaining authenticity when interviewing those who present as less articulate. She nevertheless delivered a convincing case for empathetically assisting the less articulate to create narratives - because the alternative is silence. Terry Whitebeach shared her moving journey of writing the book, *Bantam*, with her son, Mick Brown. Unemployed and living in a small, rural community,

Mick was experiencing a troubled stage in his life. To tell his story, Terry often recorded his voice over the telephone. Terry reminded us that we can become paralysed by inaction when overtly concerned about the 'right way' to do oral history. This was heartening because it offered non-conventional ways to capture timely experiences which might otherwise be lost. Her willingness to fictionalise, although with a strong commitment to 'getting the voices right', enabled her to 'tell the truth' and raise awareness of critical social issues. That all three brought their own personal experiences to their work made this session particularly riveting.

Another highlight was delivered by Alan Harris Stein. Among numerous prominent positions, Alan is an archival oral historian, a lecturer at Chicago State University, and Associate Director of the Consortium for Oral History Educators. He shared memories of the acclaimed and arguably radical oral historian Studs Terkel. The late Studs recorded over 9,000 hours of tape and was dedicated to creating history 'from the bottom up'. Alan inspired us with a delightful trailer from the film, *Rocking the Boat: Studs Terkel's 20th Century*. The film mapped how activism, such as



Pam Willis and Alistair Thomson at Conference Dinner.
Photo: Denise Phillips

labour movements and the civil rights movements, has won significant social changes over the last century in America. Studs notes, however, that young Americans have no memory of these past victories which have brought benefits to their lives. Oral history, Studs says, is 'a corrective to collective amnesia', and that through memories, we educate society. He advocates that, 'You've got to rock the boat' to bring about social change and that the rewards for rocking the boat are found in creating a world in which it is easier for people to live. (The trailer can be viewed online at: *You Tube*, <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=1141734559388187113#>)

On a lighter note, we were regaled with stories of the Perth Zoo from John Bannister. Having celebrated its 110th anniversary in 2008, people's memories showed that the zoo was a 'constant in a changing place'. Joanne Scott and Ross Laurie spoke about their search for sensitive insights into Brisbane's Ekka through careful analysis. Negative or very personal memories were often considered incompatible with the grander, public narratives and clichés of this iconic, annual event. Emma Hewitt charmed us with a love story. Emma then discussed how stories of love are shaped over time and argued that 'we manipulate memory

to make the present plausible'. Using a partly postmodern approach, she also reflected on ways she might have projected her personal fascination with love onto her narrator, drawing attention to our own role in shaping oral histories. Emma concluded with the short but profound idea that, 'Perhaps in listening, we are loving too'.

Alison Alexander gave us a taste of the more colourful histories behind the dry, formal minutes of the Launceston Church Grammar School. We also got an often cheeky view of the academic career and occasional philandering of Theodore Thomson Flynn, the father of Tasmanian-born actor Errol Flynn, from Tony Harrison. Other topics ranged from women's economic aspirations in Western Australian goldfields, to 'gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered Aboriginal people' in northern Manitoba, by Maureen Simpkins who had travelled from Canada.

Unfortunately, Karen Barrett and Jayne Persian were unable to attend the conference because of illness. We missed their presence as each had had much to offer. Karen had planned to talk about the use of oral histories by the Main Roads Heritage Centre while Jayne was to discuss how personal memories of

Displaced Persons from Central and Eastern European often differ from dominant, public narratives. Nadia Johnson kindly filled Jayne's place, and recounted her mother Valentina's migration from war-torn Europe during the 1950s in the style of a classical fairytale. Having crafted the story for her mother's 80th birthday party, her contribution exemplified the special role oral history plays in preserving treasured family memories as well as supplementing official records.

A panel session, chaired by Janis Wilton, Joanne Scott, Alistair Thomson and Alan Harris Stein, reflected on the future of oral history in universities. Concerns were expressed about postgraduate students who want to conduct oral histories as part of their research, in spite of having little or no knowledge of the associated practice, theory or interpretative methodologies. The panel stressed the importance of such students becoming well versed in all aspects of oral history. Throughout the conference, other concerns were repeatedly raised that Research Ethics Committees at universities sometimes group oral historians in with a disparate body of researchers and fail to understand the unique, ethical guidelines to which we already adhere. For some, this has caused delays in research. It was suggested that the OHAA formulate a uniform plan to increase Research Ethics Committees' awareness of the role and practice of oral history.

During the conference, Janis Wilton, from the University of New England (UNE), was awarded the prestigious Hazel de Berg Award for Excellence in Oral History. Her outstanding contributions to oral history include many publications and exhibitions on immigrants, memories associated with objects, and architect Harry Seidler. She has undertaken significant public history projects, such as *Golden Threads*, a study of the Chinese in regional NSW from 1850-1950. From 2000 to 2004, Janis served as Vice President and then President of the International Oral History Association. Not only is Janis a leading light in oral history, she is also incredibly generous in her support of others. Through 20 years of teaching oral history at UNE, Janis has shared her wealth of experience. I have personally benefited from this contribution, having been privileged to have Janis as one of my lecturers at UNE through to now being my PhD supervisor. On behalf of the Queensland branch, I extend our warmest congratulations to Janis for this truly deserved recognition.

As there were parallel sessions, this is just a glimpse of the many wonderful speakers. We often wanted to be in two places at once, so as not to miss anything! One that I missed was Jen Brown's 'Blitz', which creatively explored the cacophony of political and public rhetoric about the so-called 'War on Terrorism' during 2004.

Her work was also featured at the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery. On Saturday afternoon, we were treated to excerpts from Stella Kent's play *New Tasmanians*, which explored experiences of post-World War II migration and resettlement. Later, dinner at the Cataract Bistro, with a chilly evening outside, gave us a chance to relax and chat to other delegates. The bistro was located a few minutes' walk from the spectacular rapids of the Cataract Gorge, which I was lucky enough to see during a few free hours before the conference started.

Finally, I sincerely thank the Queensland branch for granting me a bursary to attend the conference. I was grateful to also have this opportunity to deliver my paper on the stories of Hazara refugees from Afghanistan, now living in Brisbane. The Hazaras numbered largely among the boats of asylum seekers arriving on Australian shores over the last ten years. I drew on French philosopher, Paul Ricoeur, to show how past injustices can create a *wounded memory* over time, in which some aspects of the past are repeatedly emphasised while others are forgotten. Ricoeur argues, however, that we should encourage people to 'remember fully'. I refuted this, advocating instead the need to understand the complex ways in which traumatic memories are recalled. It is here that the impact of the past and the intimate human experience is gleaned. In the case of the Hazaras, the repetitions, the silences, and the forgetting hold clues about both their profound suffering and resilience.

In closing, congratulations to the Tasmanian branch for an exemplary job in hosting the conference. Although there were technological glitches at times which were disappointing for some speakers, this was outweighed by the greater opportunity for learning and establishing new contacts. These conferences expose us to the diverse uses of oral history. They can also prompt us to reflect on what sort of oral historians we are - whether we favour a narrative approach or close analysis, or a combination of both. I detected that while analysis of subjectivity has become an integral pillar of oral history, the traditional narrative was nevertheless alive and well. With the close of the conference on Sunday 20th, I came away with my already firm love of oral history reinvigorated. Oral history's ability to give voice to others and to hold 'all lives valuable' is the hallmark of a discipline in which I am proud to participate.

This report was first published by the Queensland branch of the Oral History Association of Australia in *On Tape*, vol. 9, no. 4, October 2009.

OHAA President's report 2009-10

At the Biennial General Meeting (BGM) held in Launceston in September 2009 Tasmania took over the role of Executive Committee of the OHAA. Many thanks are due to the Western Australian executive for their hard work over the previous two years. The Executive Committee now comprises Jill Cassidy, President; Rosie Block, Vice President; Margaret Eldridge, Secretary; and Lana Wall, Treasurer. I thank them all, along with the other members of the National Committee, for their support over the last twelve months.

One of the major achievements of the previous executive was to work towards OHAA incorporation to protect individual committee members from being responsible for any debt. As most states require incorporated bodies to have annual general meetings, during the preceding twelve months a new constitution had been developed to replace the BGM with an AGM. The new constitution was passed in Launceston and the OHAA was immediately incorporated in Tasmania and then registered with the Australian Securities and Investments Commission (ASIC), the only body which can give Australia-wide recognition.

As the new constitution was being debated it became clear that a more thorough-going review was in order, so the constitution was passed subject to a working group being established to make recommendations for further changes. The resulting Working Group comprised Jill Cassidy, Beth Robertson (SA), Francis Good (Vic) – later replaced by Sandra Blamey (NSW) – and Dorothy Rosemann (Tas). The group is continuing to work through each clause of the current constitution in detail; it is hoped that the results of their deliberations will be available for comment later in 2010.

Another result of the BGM was the decision to raise membership fees. It is regrettable that this was found necessary but some states were facing a shortage of funds because of steadily-increasing costs. The increase has been kept to a minimum.

As always, the national conference proved a most enjoyable occasion for those in the oral history community to renew old friendships, listen to enthralling papers, discuss and argue and in general show the continuing vitality of this most vibrant of activities. Victoria has agreed to host the 2011 conference in Melbourne; the title is *Communities of Memory* and all members should plan to attend if at all possible. There will be another presentation of the Hazel de Berg award, and we hope to receive many nominations for this prestigious award.

It was with great pleasure that we saw the Hazel de Berg award for 2009 presented to Janis Wilton, who for many years has been so influential in the oral history community. Her courses at the University of New England have been attended – sometimes at a distance – by hundreds of students from around Australia so ensuring that the highest standards of oral history practice have been maintained. She also played a significant role in bringing Australia's attention to the International Oral History Association, so it is noteworthy that at least 27 Australians attended the latest IOHA conference in Prague.

Following conversations with New Zealand delegates to the 2009 conference, moves were made to offer reciprocity to our trans-Tasman neighbours and this has now been confirmed. As a result, our members can now take advantage of member rates at conferences put on by the National Oral History Association of New Zealand (NOHANZ). On a separate matter, to mark the 21st anniversary of the award New Zealand also allowed Australians (for this year only) to apply for a grant under the Australian Sesquicentennial Gift Trust Award program.

Work has been proceeding on a much-needed update of the OHAA website. When it finally comes online there will be much more information available to members and we are working to ensure the site is easily navigable. The executive will also be able to make changes so that it will be easy to keep the site

up to date. Many thanks are due to Sandra Blamey for her role in drawing up the brief for the new site.

There have been a number of changes in the production of the *Journal*. Jan Gothard had a very hard act to follow when she took over as editor from Francis Good in 2007. He had spent many years at the helm and through his work, including as designer, had brought the *Journal* production to a new level. Jan proved an excellent replacement during her two years as editor and when Francis resigned last year as designer and Convenor of the Editorial Board, Jan stepped in to fill the latter position. She will stand down this September and I thank her for her hard work, as well as bid a final farewell to Francis who played a most significant role on the national committee over many years. Meanwhile, Terry Whitebeach quickly volunteered to become the new editor and has smoothly slotted in to this most demanding job.

In short, for this first annual report to members I am delighted to report that it has been a most satisfactory year for the National OHAA and another busy year is planned. I look forward to seeing you all in Melbourne next year.

Jill Cassidy
President

OHAA Treasurer's report 2008-9

Our main source of income is from capitation of \$15 per member. Supplementary income is from bank interest and journal sales. The greatest expenditure was for production of the journal. In 2008/09 the cost of printing and postage was \$9,661.90 and capitation was \$9,658.36. The audited financial statements show that funds in hand as at 30 June 2009 was \$28,531.80 with an outstanding loan of \$2,000 to Tasmania Branch for the conference

Bank interest has decreased significantly and when reinvesting the term deposit it is not known what the rate will be until the date of renewal. Currently interest on our term deposit of \$10,152.05 is 1.5% compared to 4.6% previously.

The Association has never had a budget and it has been proposed that one be prepared. As outgoing treasurer, I feel it is preferable for the new executive to prepare one, as it will be the monitor.

Following adoption of the constitution and incorporation, a change is required to the title of our cheque account from 'The Co Oral History Programme' to 'Oral History Association of Australia Inc.' Our term deposit only needs 'Inc.' to be added. These accounts are held in the Commonwealth Bank, 48 Martin Place, Sydney, BSB 06 2000.

Marolyn Hamilton
Treasurer OHAA

Audited Statement of Receipts and Payments 1 July 2008 to 30 June 2009 Passed at the OHAA Biennial General Meeting, Launceston, 18 September 2009

Receipts

Conference	304.15	
Standing Orders	80.00	
Capitation	9,658.36	
Journals	135.00	
Interest	544.42	
		10,721.93

Payments

Postage/print/stationery	38.00	
Teleconferences	1,235.99	
Website	318.00	
Journal/print/post	9,661.90	
Transfer to term deposit	900.00	
Grants	2,000.00	
Bank fees	14.00	
		<u>14,167.89</u>

Loss \$3,445.96

Cheque Account	30/06/2004	21,825.71
Term Deposit		<u>8,906.75</u>
		30,732.46
Loss		<u>3,445.96</u>
Cash balance		\$27,286.50

Cheque Account	29/06/2005	18,379.75
Term Deposit		<u>10,152.05</u>
		\$28,531.80

OHAA branch reports

OHAA Queensland Branch President's report 2009/2010

2009/2010 was a busy and exciting year in Queensland. Our committee, comprising President Lena Volkova, Secretary Suzanne Mulligan, Treasurer Kate Roberts, Editor and Webmaster Karen Barrett, Loans Officer Maxine Kendall and Dr Helen Klæbe, our main workshops' facilitator, worked very hard. What's more, our partnership with the State Library of Queensland Oral History & Digital Storytelling Coordinator, Gavin Bannerman, proved to be very fruitful and productive. It became a good practice working together with Gavin on preparing and conducting workshops.

We started last year by creating a website as a way of establishing an information portal and a forum for everyone interested in oral history with some aspects of the website assigned specifically for the OHAA Qld financial members. At present our website provides access to the current and archived Newsletters and to a selection of papers presented at the 2007 National Oral History Conference hosted by the Queensland branch. We obtained an ISBN which enabled this publication and received written permissions from the authors who were willing to feature their papers on our website.

Another new feature of our website is absolutely delicious. That is – 'Delicious'. Introduction of the 'Delicious' to our website was instigated by our member Ariella van Luyn who described this free web resource as 'an online library of web resources'. In most web browsers, you can 'bookmark' or save your favourite pages. The same thing happens in Delicious. The difference is that you can access your bookmarked pages online from any computer; search through your bookmarks using 'tags' or keywords; share your bookmarked pages with people with similar interests and search for 'tags' in other people's collections of bookmarks on Delicious. It's called 'social bookmarking'. Any member of the OHAA Queensland can now access the Delicious account and we believe that it will greatly benefit their oral history projects.

Ariella van Luyn has become a very valued contributor to the Queensland branch and in February she was incorporated into the committee as a vice-president. She brought in her genuine enthusiasm, resourcefulness and expertise in oral history, creative writing and workshop facilitation and we are excited to work with Ariella on the future committee projects.

This year we continued working on providing better workshops for our members. Many of them were eager to obtain the necessary training but could not afford the fee or were unable to travel to the training venue. Following the discussion among them we decided to apply for a grant to enable us to run a workshop program across the State.

In our application to the Jupiter's Casino Community Benefit Fund we stated that the series of workshops that we planned aim at training members of the Queensland community in the skills vital to producing an internationally acceptable oral history project. The workshops will focus on collecting, recording, transcribing and editing oral histories. In addition, the workshops will encourage participants to produce oral histories in highly accessible formats, such as digital stories. The workshops will also explore how oral history can be used in the contexts of museum exhibitions, television or radio programmes and web pages. We also hope to train participants about the requirements for depositing oral histories in appropriate public and research libraries where they will be preserved for present and future generations and will enrich Queensland's history. Our application is currently being reviewed.

In the meantime we had a number of successful workshops. Dr Helen Klæbe facilitated three workshops in the basics of oral history and oral history community projects. One of these workshops was tailor-made to meet the requirements of the QAHC LGBT History Group (Queensland Association for Healthy Communities Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender). It included the standard oral history basics module, practice in photography, practice in

the recording of short interviews and introduction to the sound editing software Audacity.

A very productive workshop in digital storytelling was led by a professional storyteller and narrative consultant, Daryll Bellingham. It introduced the concepts of story circle and story boards and focussed on working with digital images, recording and editing a voiceover, adding sound effects and music and working with the Movie Maker software. Although we received a lot of positive feedback we realised that the two days that we allocated for this workshop was not enough. The amount of material that was introduced to the participants required at least a week in between two weekends to complete digital stories.

One of the most exciting events of the year was a workshop and master class with Dr Betty Belanus. Dr Belanus is a respected folklorist, author, education specialist, co-curator of a number of travelling exhibitions, a director of the Folklore Summer Institute (1989-90), and a curator for several programs at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival. She is currently a curator at the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage. The workshop was attended by the members of our branch, non-members interested in oral history and students of Creative Industries, Queensland University of Technology. It introduced participants to the oral history and ethnographic research methods used at the Smithsonian Institution's Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage and Museums; engaged participants in a 'cultural marker' exercise which encouraged them to explore their own histories – oral and otherwise – and explored innovative ways of using oral history and other ethnographic research materials while being aware of protocols and ethics.

The workshop was followed by a panel that focussed on the evolution and role of digital stories in the oral history landscape. The panel brought together experts in the field: Dr Betty Belanus, Dr Helen Klæbe (QUT, Creative Industries), producer Hamish Sewell (ABC Audio Arts, Radio National) and Oral History and Digital Storytelling coordinator Gavin Bannerman (SLQ). It took place in the State Library of Queensland and was recorded and placed on the Library website.

Our latest workshop 'Know Your Tools' concentrated on hands-on training in recording interviews, understanding of the sound editing process, transcribing and the ways of turning transcriptions into a completed project.

Through the year we continued supporting our members in their professional development. Last year we provided three scholarships to attend the National conference in Tasmania and one scholarship to attend

a conference 'Talk about Town: Urban Lives and Oral Sources in Twentieth Century Australia' in Melbourne. This year our committee offered one scholarship of \$1,000 to attend an international conference in oral history in Prague. The scholarship was offered on a competitive basis.

This year is my last year as the president of the Queensland branch. It was an exciting and very rewarding time for me. I learned a lot about our craft and met many extraordinary people. Some of them became my friends. I am very grateful to them for their support and persuasion, the laughter and inspiration that we shared. In the years to come I am going to concentrate on further studies in the Queensland University of Technology and to continue my work on the committee of the Queensland branch.

Lena Volkova

President, Queensland Branch

OHAA New South Wales Branch President's report 2009/2010

My first remarks are as usual a tribute to my committee and as always it is a pleasure to put them into this first spot. Members of the committee are Sandra Blamey, Roslyn Burge, Michael Clarke, Joyce Cribb, Frank Heimans, Diana Ritch, Sue Rosen, Peter Rubinstein, Frances Rush and Berenice Evans, our Treasure. I have congratulated them in the past – and do so now again - for their being a marvellous 'think tank' with great ideas which are then put into action. They continue to conduct their friendly 'welcomes' to those attending the seminars at the State Library.

Voiceprint, our NSW newsletter, attracts the interested attention of the membership and continues to appear regularly under the able editorship of Joyce Cribb. She is assisted in this by Roslyn Burge.

George Imashev, Sue McClean and Frances Rush addressed our 25 July 2009 seminar – George on his family, with particular focus on interviews with his mother, Sue on Burdekin House and Frances on Bea Miles. It was a wonderful mix! An eager group attended a fascinating session on 8 August as guests of Historic Houses Trust where Megan Martin, their senior librarian, gave us a talk and showed some of their treasures.

A goodly number of NSW members attended the successful national conference in Launceston, Tasmania in September 2009. Janis Wilton was awarded the Hazel de Berg Award for Excellence in Oral History and she received Honorary Life Membership as well.

Our 7 November seminar featured Margo Beasley on the City of Sydney's oral history program, which

is gathering pace under her guidance. Anna Cossu gave us an up to date and loving report on Susannah's Place which continues to rely on oral history for its 'furnishing'. Bill Bunbury presented his master class to a capacity, enthusiastic and appreciative group on 20 February 2010. On 8 May Beth Robertson presented her challenging session, 'Oral history: moving from analogue to digital recording – the race against time.' No compromise here – we cannot say we are not warned!

The NSW branch offered two scholarships of \$1000 each to help members towards attending the IOHA conference in Prague in July this year. These were won by Denise Phillips and Barbara Karpinski, who will present their reports on their experiences at our seminar on 6 November.

Our membership numbers in New South Wales hold steady, some of the applications being due to the excellent website fashioned and kept up to date by our webmaster Sandra Blamey. She is also on the panel to redesign the national website, as well as being part of a working party to amend the national constitution. The NSW website www.ohaansw.org.au is in continual expansion mode and we have just had some sound files added. Do visit!

Elsewhere I have written an obituary for Jenny Hudson (1933-2010) whose sudden death took us all by sad surprise.

This is my last branch report as president of OHAA (NSW). I am retiring from the presidency after nearly twenty years, but mean to continue as membership secretary, working with our treasurer Berenice Evans, so I am not folding my tent – yet! My thanks are all the warmer spanning as they do these couple of decades of acquiring knowledge, being stimulated and inspired by oral history - and by you all throughout Australia.

Rosemary Block

President, New South Wales Branch

OHAA South Australia Branch President's report 2009/2010

The Branch held our 2008/2009 AGM at the Flinders University. A dozen members met at Special Collections at the Flinders University Library on 3 July to hear a terrific talk about the collections at the Library with an overview of the Borrow Collection. Special Collections comprises material not on open access for various reasons such as rarity, fragility and uniqueness. It includes antique furniture, an embroidered dress, archives, prints, drawings and maps, theses, limited editions and serials.

There are six hundred oral history recordings in the Borrow collection of people talking about their research and family history. The Library wants to reformat

these in the future. For the Borrow Collection launch snippets of the oral history interviews were digitised and put up for people to access as an example of what can be done. There are also oral history recordings in the Evatt and Dunstan collections. The Evatt papers came to the library when Dean Ashenden was doing his Ph.D. on H.V. Evatt. He borrowed the papers from Mrs Evatt and she eventually decided to donate them to the University. The Don Dunstan collection came to the Flinders University in 1988. It includes the safari suits but not his pink shorts. An oral history project is underway and three of the interviews, with the transcripts, are on-line. Access can be gained by accessing the Flinders University Library website and linking to Collections then Special Collections then Dunstan Collection then Don Dunstan O.H. Project.

The OHAA (SA Branch) committee for 2009/10:

June Edwards –President and Treasurer

Catherine Manning – Secretary and membership

Alison McDougall – newsletter editor

Karen George

Catherine Murphy (handbooks)

Madeleine Regan

Activities

The Nuriootpa Library asked for a branch member to talk at a seminar in the Barossa about running an oral history program. Karen George gave the talk along with David Armstrong who has been doing interviews in the region. Eighteen people came so that was positive for oral history in the Valley.

In June 2009 we ran another 'How to do oral history' workshop with twenty participants from Mt Lofty, Gawler, Two Wells, Ayers House, the Migration Museum and individuals working on their own projects. Karen ran the session with her usual professionalism. Silver Moon from the State Library explained the equipment and came up with a wonderful crossword for participants based on the session, which was fun.

In July I went to the History Conference at Kadina. Catherine Manning put up the oral history display boards and I put out brochures and the handbooks so oral history was promoted at the event. I also did some work for the Port Augusta School of the Air and discovered they had a recording of the first school lesson and various interviews with rural women so that was an excellent discovery.

On 1 September I gave a lecture on oral history to students from the University of South Australia doing the Business Information Management course.

On 8 September I attended the launch of *Garden memories: Celebrating 30 years of the Friends of*

the Botanic Gardens of Adelaide. Susan Mann and Meg Butler completed twenty-one interviews with members of the Friends. They received grants from the 'Lizzie Russell Oral History grant scheme' and the History Trust of South Australia, so were able to create transcripts of the interviews. There was a large turnout of members including the Governor Kevin Scarce and Mrs Scarce.

The branch had a visit to Port Adelaide for the *Long Distance* tour on 15 October. The project organised by the Migration Museum and put together by Heidi Angove was part of the Port Festival. It was described thus:

Bridging the distance between old and new, yesterday and today, Long Distance is a unique on-location oral history of the Port. Given new life with new media technology, purpose-built old rotary-style phones will be placed in four Port landmark venues - Lighthouse, Railway Hotel, Port Mall and Visitor Information Centre. Just wander by, pick up the receiver and hear great yarns from the past in the places they originally unfolded. You can even leave a story yourself during the Port Festival... and watch out for the phones randomly ringing!

We went to the phones in the visitor's centre and the lighthouse and had fun dialing up and listening to the oral history excerpts. Heidi talked about the technology behind the telephone points.

A 'how to do oral history' workshop was held on 4 November and it was well attended once again by people from community groups and public libraries. Karen George and Silver Moon ran the workshop with their usual easy style. Karen incorporated different things she had learnt from the recent oral history conference in Tasmania, so that was interesting.

On 1 December 2009 a few oral history members attended a Collections Australia Network (CAN) forum called Allsorts Online: the collecting sector, academia, the arts and the media. Thirteen speakers covered topics such as Web2.0, access to collections, digital storytelling, the media and collecting institutions, and the relationships between collecting institutions. It was interesting to hear Gavin Bannerman from the State Library of Queensland talk about their digital stories project to capture 'Queensland memory'. CAN should be congratulated on this excellent forum. Videos of some of the sessions can be found at <http://keystone.collectionsaustralia.net/publisher/Outreach/?p=3882>

The OHAA (SA Branch) was part of a successful campaign to stop the closure of the National Archives of Australia offices in SA, the NT and Tasmania. The archival and historical communities in SA combined with interstate colleagues to lobby ministers, get

articles into the press and demonstrate at events such as the community cabinet meeting in SA on 20 January. The Branch committee wrote to various politicians and Bernie O'Neil represented oral historians when he met with Senator Ludwig at the community cabinet meeting. The intended protest in front of the NAA office in Angas St on the 23 February against the closures turned into a celebration.

The SA branch ran an advanced workshop on 22 April called 'Storytelling in the Digital Age'. Jenny Scott from the State Library, Heidi Angove from the Migration Museum project, and Tom Young from Film Studies at Flinders University gave sessions covering issues arising from using the digital medium to tell stories and the practicalities of how to create digital stories. About thirty people attended this excellent event.

Lizzie Russell Oral History Grant

The 'Lizzie Russell Oral History Grant' was awarded in 2009 to John Mannion to interview Gil Coulthard who is an Adnyamathana man. A smaller grant was also awarded to Dale Durie for her project to interview key people who were involved in the arts in the 1960s and 1970s.

Handbooks

Catherine Murphy has taken over from Karen the responsibility for sending out the *Oral History Handbooks*. Thanks to Karen and Dave Smids for their 5 years' unstinting work distributing this great book. There are now only 4 boxes of handbooks left so Beth Robertson is revising the handbook and a new printing will be organized shortly.

Newsletters

Alison McDougall needs to be thanked for producing two excellent editions of *Word of Mouth*.

SA 175th Anniversary Project

Members have responded to the call for interviews for the 175th anniversary project. Madeleine Regan has a good list of interviews which relate to people such as a Ghan train cook and piano player, an Adelaide photographer, a child removed from her Aboriginal family, and an Italian market gardener. Wildfire Design has been contracted to develop the website. The OHAA (SA Branch) website is being upgraded to accommodate a framework that will integrate audio files, transcripts, logs and photographs. The website project will be launched in 2011 and will include 20 one-hour interviews in digital form. It will also include links to interviews on other websites such as the National Library of Australia. This website is intended as an inaugural project with the ability to add new interviews over time. Madeleine Regan is doing a good job as the project co-ordinator and the State



Rally outside the community cabinet meeting January 2009.
Photograph provided by Helen Onopko

Library of South Australia is kindly providing support to digitise the recordings and create MP3 copies to go up on the site. The branch will be applying for grant funding to support the project.

June Edwards

President, South Australia Branch

OHAA Western Australian Branch

President's report June 2010

It has been a pleasure to see the OHAA (WA Branch) Inc. continue to grow and extend our membership and our networks into regional Western Australia. There has also been a noticeable increase in the numbers of people who come to oral history events who are using oral history as part of their academic research method as well as people who are expressing an interest in the sounds of oral history and the significance of voice in recorded interviews. This shift away from transcripts as the major form of oral historical record is in my opinion, a welcome one that will increase the relevance of oral history and provide a rich resource for a wide range of projects including books, audiovisual exhibits and broadcasts. It also encourages people to listen to the primary source; the voice of the person being interviewed.

While it is too soon to say it is an oral history led economic recovery, Oral History in Western Australia is a growth area. Oral histories are increasingly made available at libraries, schools and universities for a wide range of projects. Oral History interviews or extracts of interviews can be heard at library 'listening posts', on walk trail sound tracks, via podcast and on

the web. As recording equipment becomes cheaper, smaller and more accessible, the sounds of recorded conversations become a familiar part of our everyday culture (trains!). In this environment of increased ability to record voices, it is more important than ever to continue to discuss oral history practices and standards in oral history.

Without a paid executive officer or a permanent home to hold our records and equipment, the Association relies entirely on the participation and efforts of the committee and volunteers. Their contributions ensure that the Association runs smoothly and provides a range of products and events to raise the profile and standards of Oral History in Western Australia.

Grant scheme

Whilst we have only a small grant scheme, the \$500 can be useful for promoting oral history in WA. In the 2009/2010 financial year the Branch provided grants of assistance to Dr Jan Gothard to attend the National Conference in Tasmania where she gave a paper, and literally delivered the National Journal which she edited, and contributed to the Princess Margaret Hospital volunteers' 50th anniversary oral history project.

Workshops

The WA Association has conducted regular workshops for beginners to introduce them to oral history practices and standards. OHAA WA members Julia Wallace and Doug Ayre lead the workshops in Perth, with assistance from Gordon Hamilton, and Doug Ayre ran one in Geraldton. Each participant receives

a copy of Beth Robertson's *Oral History Handbook*, which continues to be an invaluable resource, as well as our locally produced DVD, *Capturing the Past: an Oral History Workshop*.

An oral history workshop was also held in Broome, run by our Association regional committee member, Dr Elaine Rabbitt. These workshops as well as the forums and conferences are important to regional Western Australians.

The Branch also provides regular Digital Workshops to introduce participants to the Marantz 660 and 671 recording equipment. Denise Cook and I have run these workshops for two years. Over that time there has been a noticeable increase in the numbers of people who are using oral history as part of their academic research method and an increase in people's knowledge of digital equipment in general.

Hire equipment

The WA Branch bought two recording machines, a Marantz 660 and 671, and a set of good quality microphones to hire to members to encourage them to make the shift to quality digital recordings. There has been an increase in the use of these machines in the 2009/2010 period and although we have yet to hear the results, it may well result in an increase in the quality of recordings also.

Conferences 2009 and 2010

Over eighty people attended the Branch Forum, 'Taking Oral Histories off the Shelf', held at Notre Dame University Fremantle campus on Saturday November the 7th 2009. The day began with OHAA (WA Branch) life member Adjunct Professor Bill Bunbury interviewing Dr John Troy about the influence of the Fremantle wharves on his life. Several people commented afterwards on the importance of the information recorded in that session and how educative they found it to see an experienced oral historian in action. Excellent presentations throughout the day showed how important oral history is for community histories, museum displays, in court cases like Native Title and for generally ensuring a complete historical record in Western Australia.

The 2010 State conference 'Voices of Change: Tracking Communities Using Oral History' will be held on the 18th and 19th of September in Jarrahdale, 50kms south of Perth. The Jarrahdale Historical Society is co-host. Video recording workshops will be included in the week-end due to the many requests we have had about the pros and cons of using video recording for oral history.

OHRRG – rescue of state's taped oral history collection

The Association is playing a key role in the project to rescue through digitization, the taped oral history collection held by the Battye Library at the State library of Western Australia. The grant from Lotterywest for over \$800,000 is overseen by OHRRG (the Oral Historical Records Rescue Group), a combined stakeholder group. This group includes the Friends of Battye Library, the Oral History Association of Australia (WA Branch) Inc., the Professional Historians Association and the Royal Western Australian Historical Society. OHAA (WA) Inc. continues its involvement with members undertaking the roles of President and Secretary of OHRRG. The sound studios needed for the digitization are currently being installed. The digitization is primarily a preservation and conservation project, with some very exciting possibilities for making some of our state collection available through the web. Once permissions have been given, the voices of some Western Australians can be more easily made available to the public through such means as the State Library's website. The subsequent increase in access to oral histories held in the State Library via the web helps to include regional Western Australians and especially Indigenous Western Australians living in remote regions.

The Association is pleased to have the support of the State Library of Western Australia, which provides a venue for our monthly and general meetings.

Dr Mary Anne Jebb

President OHAA (WA Branch) Inc.

Reviews and book notes

***Marrying Out*, by Siobhan McHugh, a two-part feature broadcast on Radio National's Hindsight, October 11 and October 18, 2009
Reviewer: Adjunct Professor Dr Bill Bunbury, Murdoch University.**

In this double feature Siobhan McHugh recalls the experience of numerous couples who encountered Protestant-Catholic opposition to their marriages, with bigotry and dogma affecting both denominations. As Siobhan McHugh suggests in her introduction, 'marrying out' today connotes 'mixed marriages' between people of different nationalities or races. However for much twentieth century Australian life 'marrying out' often meant denominational divide and almost equally ethnic divide.

As the series vividly illustrates, the Irish presence in Australia was for long deeply resented by many English Protestant settlers, fed for the most part on dismissive stereotypes of the Irish character. The Irish were a troublesome race with their annoying aspiration to be free of centuries of English rule. It was a long-standing prejudice, matched on the Irish side with long memories of English cultural and religious oppression, and in nineteenth century Australia by transportation of Irish political prisoners and the English Government's indifference to the devastating effects of the potato famine - a factor that in itself drew many Irish emigrants to Australia.

In the early twentieth century the Irish struggle to be free of English rule brought merciless reprisal after the Easter Rising. Here in Australia Cardinal Mannix's opposition to conscription in World War One, at the height of this struggle, was a reminder to Australia that the Empire did not send a bugle call to all its citizens. Against this background Siobhan draws out persistent threads of mutual dislike and intolerance which lingered for another sixty years.

Siobhan comments in this context that the Irish were Australia's first ethnic minority. It is easy to forget that Indigenous Australians had already qualified for

this role but it is interesting to note the significant number of Aboriginal-Irish marriages or relationships in nineteenth century Australia, perhaps personal testimonies to a solidarity forged by exclusion.

My first reaction as a listener was to find the feature grimly entertaining. As initial examples of bigotry and ignorance emerged I could only laugh, but perhaps more with incredulity than amusement. It was salutary to be reminded of an era not that long ago when two branches of one religion and two ethnic groups, Anglo-Saxon and Celtic, were in such violent and unforgiving conflict. But as these stories evolved they told tales of rejection by family, disinheritance and severance of relationships between parents and adult offspring, stories that are deeply moving. They are also tales that draw out the human capacity to cope and sometimes forgive or at least accept ignorance and prejudice.

Siobhan draws attention to the Anglo-Saxon belief in Empire as the basis of identity and consequently their sense of superiority to 'bog-Irish'. I would also suggest that Protestant hatred and contempt for Catholics perhaps reflected their own brittle insecurity about their identity as dwellers in a new land. They might have seen themselves as part of 'empire' but the English establishment undoubtedly saw them as mere 'colonials'. 'Back Home' any Australians were often seen much as Protestant Australians saw the Irish.

Paradoxically non-Irish Australians would become much more aware of Ireland and the Irish than their counterparts in England. Both had to live in proximity in new surroundings. Devoid of religious conflict those relationships could be and often were peaceful and productive.

The texture of the broadcasts make them compelling listening. Subtly reinforcing the intimate and revealing interviews, readings, including religious ritual and a sensitive use of music, enrich this picture of a now thankfully rejected era.

At the same time there is a contemporary resonance. Siobhan McHugh evokes the Cronulla riots between

Lebanese and now 'Anglo-Celtic' Australians as a recent manifestation of ethnic if not religious intolerance. Today, when Muslims are the focus of much distrust and dislike, old antagonisms between different religions are still alive and shouting. 'Marrying Out' tells the history of just one religion with seemingly irreconcilable faces and scarring personal consequences.

Peter Robinson, *The Changing World of Gay Men*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2008

Reviewer: Francis Good

This book sets out to challenge the author's perception of 'particularly nasty' stereotypes of gay male life that pervade public discourse, literature and art, to demonstrate that 'few gay men conform to these stereotypes' (xi), and that men who identify as gay or homosexual come from all classes, belong to all religions, are found in all forms of human settlements, work places and environments, and, importantly, they age and grow old (xi).

It is a big ask, and overall what emerges is a very detailed, widely sourced and thoughtful analysis of an era of very significant change and ongoing development in social attitudes and historical context through which Western homosexual men have lived in recent times. Over roughly 50 years or so, many radical shifts of social context occurred, such as attitudes to sexuality, marriage, contraception and abortion 'and a marked decline in hostility towards sexual difference' (xii), and this book charts much of this evolving scenario and its effects on the life courses of gay men, how those in this study saw themselves and the meanings they attribute to these contexts.

Extended interviews with 80 men are claimed as the 'main source of information' (xii), and analysis of these is facilitated by division into three 'cohorts'. Men aged 60 and over became part of the 'old' cohort, while men aged between 40 and 59 constituted the 'middle' cohort, and men aged 22–39 made up the 'young' cohort (xii). The oldest was born in 1922 and the youngest in 1980 (xiii).

As rough guides to the public narratives that existed at the time the men were in their early twenties, three periods of homosexual social history are proposed as coincident with the experience of these three cohorts – 'camp', 'gay' and 'post-liberation'. These are useful conceptual pegs to anchor discussion of age-cohort-related contrasts and developments in subjects' life courses, attitudes and experience.

Commendably, appendices provide the interview schedule in full (181), and significant detail of their ages, social status, incomes etc., with pseudonyms

(183). A six-page index is included, as are comprehensive, numbered endnotes for each chapter. As the latter show, the contextual discussion draws on much material published, both in Australia and overseas, mainly but not exclusively in the English-speaking world, providing a necessary, though Western-oriented, global context for the period under study.

Three initial chapters discuss the coming-out stories of each of the three cohorts in turn, and a detailed picture emerges of distinct differences which are rationalised in terms of the social history period prevailing for each during their early and formative years. A chapter follows on the 'scene', a site of physical and youthful display, where young men are to be found in greatest number and are valorised for their youth and beauty (72). Another chapter is devoted to subjects' involvement in, and/or the value, understanding and meaning to them of the gay 'community', defined as 'a loose collection of organisations with a sense of public service and social awareness' (95), which can include support services, local social groups, parades, festivals and even, for some, the 'scene'. In this area, a significant, dissident minority is identified, who 'rejected the version of gayness available and have no wish to understand it' (113).

One of the strongest contrasts, both with other published research and with general stereotypic understandings of gay life, emerges in a chapter on couple relationships, which were 'notable in their longevity' (132). Here, the possible explanation that the majority of the sample were middle-class is recognised; oddly, a recognition that does not appear to have surfaced in other important sections of the book's analyses, as discussed below.

Of the two final chapters, one focuses on friends and family, where differences and similarities between the cohorts and contrasting models for family and partnerships are discussed. Finally, a chapter considers experience or views of what old age is like for a gay man. Here, stark contrasts emerge.

Age segregation is a dominant feature of the gay milieu...very few young gay men seem to have knowledge or evidence of old gay men being treated well in the social spaces they inhabit...old gay men are treated with contempt or as invisible and ignored'. (173)

Contrary to popular belief though, older men

did not seem to experience any sense of loss because they were not welcome on the scene. Instead, many had no desire to be part of it, and, on the whole, seemed content with their lives and to anticipate the future in a positive spirit (174).

There are both great advantages and yet real dangers

in the use of oral history in developing broad historical narratives. While the prose style of the discourse is lucid and often compelling, it is in the language and expression of interview extracts provided to point up and summarise key elements of the discussion that we feel direct human contact that deepens understanding beyond the necessarily summative, prosaic discourse of description and explanation through which the book's thesis develops.

Nevertheless, the underlying premise of the book's introduction, that gay men are found in any social category we care to construct, is a serious challenge to finding a representative sample of individuals, and this study falls far short in several significant aspects. For example, in the description of social conditions through which the older cohort developed, we are left in no doubt about the context of extreme hostility and repression in the Western world, with facts and data to show how frequent police and military crackdowns, substantial numbers of arrests, persecution and discrimination abounded. In Australia,

a six-fold increase occurred between 1938 and 1958 in the number of people convicted of unnatural offences in Australia, and...more than 3,000 people were convicted between the end of World War II and 1960 (24).

Endnotes cite a wide range of sources attesting to this situation. Yet the summation of this cohort's coming-out stories states:

While historians...argue that...the state oppressed gay people in the USA and elsewhere, there is little evidence from the private narratives of the men in this Australian sample that they suffered at the hands of police or believed that they were being oppressed. There was no evidence from their coming-out stories of extreme suffering. While there were accounts of rejection by family or friends, none reported being bashed, pilloried or gaoled (35).

One would have expected some comment on such a profound silence about what must have been the negative experience of very many gay Australian men of this age group, perhaps attempting to give meaning to it in the social context that had been described.¹ Although stopping short of claims that the experience of this sample was generally representative of the underlying population from which it was drawn, the book's narrative implies that it was.

[The middle] cohort reveals a greater range of difficulties associated with the act of coming out than do the other two cohorts (52)...The picture of the men in the middle cohort is of individuals whose experiences of coming out were less consistent and less uniform than were those of the men in the other two cohorts (53).

Analysis of these differences then ignores the limitations of the sample of interviewees chosen, although there is later (as mentioned above) a brief acknowledgement of this problem in discussion of couple relationships.

Australia is a vast country, with strong contrasts in values and life experience between urban, town, rural, outback and regional life, but the interviews were all with men from capital cities and country towns in south-east Australia (2). Further, their characteristics, as shown in the appendix, reveal a high degree of uniformity in 'class' as inferred from education and income levels. By contrast, for example, an oral history study of pre-Stonewall lesbian history found important differences in response to suppression between working class and middle-class interviewees.² Are there no significant class differences in construction of gay identity in Australia?

Of other aspects mentioned in the book's introduction, religion is not included, and there is little information on 'work places and environments'. Australia has a significant indigenous population and a large proportion of immigrants or people whose parents were born overseas, but ethnicity is a factor rarely considered in the book's discussions.

Given the likely outcomes of persecution and discrimination, examples of very different experiences of older men may not have been easy to find, but would have led to a more meaningful analysis. It may be fair to say that much of the discussion of life courses and identity that involve this cohort, in avoiding a profound silence from the unrepresented, begs vital questions that could arise about their identity and relationship to both the gay and straight worlds. At the least, in discussion of identity construction, acknowledgement of absence in this study of men who were cowed into silence, or were silenced by murder or suicide and thus would tell a vastly different story would have paid respect to their memory.

Endnotes

¹ For example, writing in the 1970s, Luisa Passerini 'showed how the influences of public culture and ideology upon individual memory might be revealed in the silences, discrepancies and idiosyncrasies of personal testimony.' (Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (eds), *The Oral History Reader*, second edition, Routledge, London and New York, 2006, p. 3.)

² Kennedy, Elizabeth Lapovsky, "Telling tales. Oral history and the construction of pre-Stonewall lesbian history" in Perks and Thomson (ibid.), p. 275.

Matthew Higgins,
*Rugged Beyond Imagination:
Stories From An Australian Mountain
Region, 2009, National Museum of
Australia Press, Canberra*
Reviewer: Malcolm Allbrook

No visitor to the Australian Capital Territory can fail to be moved by its setting. This is indeed a different Australian place, the ever-present mountain vista a reminder that you are in high country, a place of legend and folklore, and one that has come to define much about Australian identity and character. Even without leaving Canberra, one is always aware of an alpine environment, the far off snow-capped mountains, forested peaks of Black Mountain, Red Hill and Mt. Ainslie, the thriving introduced 'cold country' species of oak, spruce and pine. Outside the confines of the city and its suburbs, the Tidbinbilla and Namadgi National Parks provide wonderful ground for the bushwalker or day hiker, revealing the wondrous scenery and natural environment of this spectacular and rugged land.

It is a country largely unknown even to permanent residents of Canberra, as Matthew Higgins in his recent book *Rugged Beyond Imagination* remarks, a matter both 'regrettable and fortunate' in the sense that few appreciate its 'rich offerings' and rarely visit the mountains leaving them a place of natural beauty where it is easy to escape the populated spaces of the capital. Higgins sets out to correct the lack of public knowledge and appreciation of the mountain lands of the ACT, promising to take his readers on a journey 'to enter those divine blue distant ranges for ourselves' (p.19). This handsome book, richly illustrated by maps, historic images and the author's photographs, illuminates the ACT as a place with a rich history whose residents have always had their lives shaped by a mountain landscape. Focussing on a series of 'defining themes' such as grazing, brumby running, water harvesting, timber extraction, scientific exploration and skiing, Higgins' subjects are often those who lived in the place before it became the ACT and the home of Australia's capital city. He is interested particularly in how 'people came to terms with the mountains and the nature of their experience there', the way in which they 'interacted with and [were] shaped by this special part of Australia' (p. 5). Utilizing a significant body of documentary and oral evidence, Higgins describes the way people responded to the 'sheer physicality' of the mountain country, the hardships of trying to make a living as a grazier, brumby runner or wood cutter, the immense task of preparing the land as the future home of a new capital city by conducting surveys, building dams and lakes,

and developing a forestry industry. We are taken on a broad sweep of ACT history and after noting that Aboriginal people used the land for at least 21,000 years before the present, are quickly immersed in the world of sheep and cattle grazing, an enterprise which dominated the first 150 years of the colonial record. By the latter part of the nineteenth century, the ACT was covered by pastoral runs, some large and prosperous, others managed as smaller operations. A tight knit but widely dispersed community grew up, and some of Higgins' oral history subjects express memories of a time of community cohesion, the way families used to help each other, the many social events and outings peppering the calendar. A life on mountain land was certainly hard and sometimes unforgiving, but the rich community life provided some compensation, and many of the stories in Higgins' narrative recall this time with fondness.

The construction of Canberra was to have a profound impact on the grazing way of life, but graziers continued to occupy parts of the ACT right through until the proclamation of Tidbinbilla and Namadgi National Parks late in the twentieth century reserved nearly half of the ACT land area for conservation purposes. Higgins goes on to tell the story of those who planned and built the infrastructure for the new city, the surveyors, firefighters and foresters, those who built the Cotter and Bendora dams to supply the new city with water, and the pioneers of skiing as a popular recreational pursuit. The book concludes with an account of the efforts of a determined group of enthusiasts to have the Tidbinbilla and Namadgi National Parks proclaimed, many of them 'born out of bushwalking. It was walkers who had been out in the bushland and could see good reason for protecting Australia's remaining natural places' (p. 215). Their success with the proclamation of Namidgi National Park in 1991 ensured that large areas of the high country would be protected for all time, but at the same time sounded a death knell for the livelihoods of the old grazing families, some of whom were removed from the land and had their houses demolished (p. 216).

The 2003 bushfires had a devastating impact on the mountain country, removing a 'great swathe of our mountain cultural heritage' (p. 223). Apart from the destruction of houses in Canberra suburbs, large tracts of land in the Tidbinbilla and Namadgi National Parks were burned, the natural vegetation and forests largely obliterated and many historic places including homesteads and huts, the Mt. Franklin chalet, the old brumby trapyards, survey marks and survey huts were lost. The fires were a vivid reminder of the sometimes unforgiving world of the mountains. Just as the lives

of those who feature in this book were shaped by the landscape, as those living in the comparatively closeted world of the suburbs found in 2003, their mountain environment still had the capacity to reassert itself, to turn nasty and make their lives a misery.

It is this landscape that is the true protagonist in the book, the focus on mountain country as place both defining and limiting the narrative. A panoply of characters troops across the pages, but one gets the impression that their presence is always temporary and that they occupy the country largely as guests. We come, through the pages of this book, to learn a great deal about the breadth of ACT history, but in the wide sweep of the subject matter some of the narrative drive is lost. Some readers will no doubt be left frustrated, as I was at a number of points, at the rapid progression through a succession of subjects, the times in which fascinating characters and stories are introduced and then discarded. The author uses a large number of oral histories, almost all of which he recorded, to corroborate, illuminate and enliven, but the subjects are rarely allowed to define the course of the narrative. Some will find the author's treatment of the Aboriginal past in ACT mountain country unsatisfactory. In an early chapter Higgins acknowledges that Aboriginal people occupied the country for centuries before the arrival of white people, and that sites of significance and the continuing use of Aboriginal place names exist as a reminder of this presence. Rather than the local Aboriginal people 'dying out' during the colonial period, the author finds 'a form of continuity, despite great loss and dislocation, brief glimpses of which are found in the following chapters' (p. 16). As Mark McKenna reminds us in *Looking for Blackfellas' Point* (UNSW Press, 2002), simple acknowledgement of an Aboriginal past and present in local history can result in a sanitization of that history. By glossing over the obvious though unacknowledged history of loss and dispossession which must follow from a story that begins with 21,000 years of continuous occupation and progresses quickly to a world in which few Aboriginal people feature, Higgins risks falling into the trap of 'the great Australian silence'.

This book does not answer all the questions of ACT history but neither does it claim to. It is in many ways a book to delve into, to consult for the wealth of information and data on a large range of subjects. One certainly emerges with a far greater appreciation of the richness of ACT history and a broad knowledge of the characters that have played a part in its development. More importantly, the book opens up and provides a foundation for further research and it is easy to imagine historians using it as a reference for a whole range of possible topics, including the Aboriginal

past. Particularly important is the oral historical material behind the pages of the book. The fact that the stories, the voices and the sounds of the ACT have been preserved through this project suggests that future historians will have access to a wealth of material, much of it untapped, and that this will have an important impact on the way future histories of the ACT are told.

NEW BOOK

SINGAPORE: ORAL HISTORY

Eds Loh Kah Seng & Liew Kai Khiun, *The Makers and Keepers of Singapore History*, Ethos Books/Singapore Heritage Society, 2010

In exploring the past, researchers labour in the present to locate the archival document which is located somewhere behind a gate with its keeper or to find that elusive participant who will throw light on a gap in our knowledge, and convince them to speak. *The Makers and Keepers of Singapore History* meditates on this relationship between past and present in a developmental city-state. It discusses how researchers seek to gain entry to archives and memories, endeavours which crucially shape the imagination of Singapore as a nation and the identity of its people as citizens.

The Editors:

LOH KAH SENG is a Visiting Research Fellow at the Institute of Southeast Asia Studies, Singapore, and an Adjunct Assistant Professor at the Nanyang Technological University. He has published on little-studied subjects on the urban social history of Singapore and Malaysia. His book, *Making and Unmaking the Asylum: Leprosy and Modernity in Singapore and Malaysia*, (SIRD), was published in 2009, while his work on the role of the 1961 Bukit Ho Swee fire in the making of modern Singapore and the history of the University Socialist Club (co-authored) are under review for publication. He also explores the linkages between past and present in contemporary Singapore, in issues such as the official use of history, oral history, memory, and heritage.

LIEW KAI KHIUN obtained his BA and MA from the National University of Singapore and was awarded his doctorate from the Wellcome Trust Centre for the History of Medicine. He has served as a Postdoctoral Fellow at the Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore, as well as a Visiting Fellow at the university's Sociology Department. His research interests on Singapore cover topics on the country's social, medical and labour histories. He is currently Assistant Professor at the Wee Kim Wee School of Communication and Information at the

Nanyang Technological University where he teaches cultural studies.

Of particular interest to oral historians is part Part 4: 'Memory Gates', which includes such chapters as: 'Singapore Memories: Remembering, and the Makers and Keepers of Singapore History', by Ernest Koh Wee Song, 'Oral History as a Product of Malleable and Shifting Memories in Singapore', by Kevin Blackburn, 'The Women I Met', by Lai Ah Eng, 'A Personal Journey in Search of Art and Society in Singapore', by Lim Cheng Tju, and 'Coming to Terms with Relocation and Loss: Interviews on Diminishing Memories', by Eng Yee Peng.

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Ronnie Summers with Helen Gee, *Ronnie, Tasmanian Songman*, 2009, Magabala Books, 2009, Magabala Books, 2009

Reviewer: Terry Whitebeach

Ronnie, Tasmanian Songman, the life history of renowned indigenous musician and cultural teacher

Ronnie Summers, written collaboratively with Helen Gee, Tasmanian environmental activist, writer and editor, and published by the Indigenous publishing house, Magabala Books, was launched to great acclaim in 2009, with celebrations reminiscent of the old time dances on Cape Barren Island, where the rafters had rung, as Ronnie recalls, with 'Geoff Everett on the uke, Hubert Maynard on the fiddle, Grandfather Ben on the accordion, the Brown boys and Uncle Devony on guitar, and Les [who] could play mostly any instrument'. (p. 48) It was from those 'old fullas' Ronnie Summers learned he 'was a musical fellow cut out to be a singer'. (p.47)

Those old fullas were the drive of my life ... we always had music going.... From the age of ten I told Dad, "I'm not a farmer; I want to play music." We had a big battle over that. (p. 47)

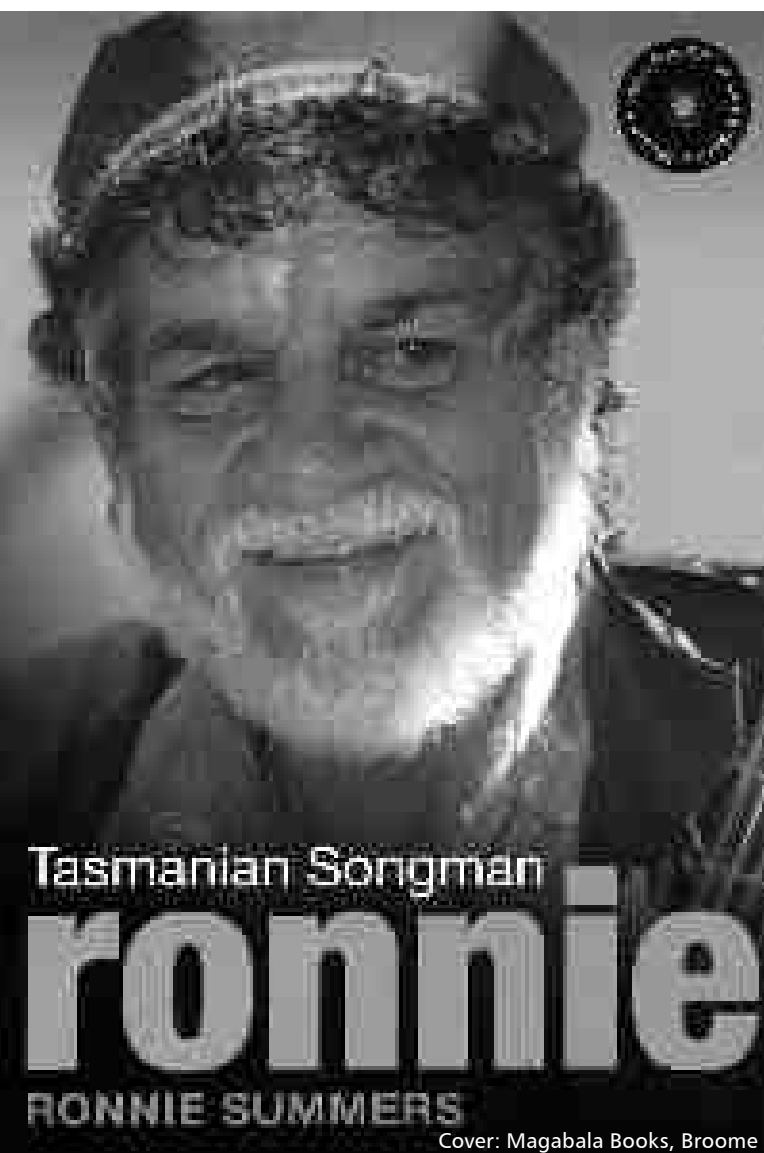
Ronnie performed his first real song on Babel Island at age twelve, to his mutton birding cohorts. It was Hank Williams' 'Take these Chains from my Heart and Set me Free'. He was so shy he hid under the table to sing it! But ever since, by his own admission, 'I've been singin' and singin' for me people'. (p. 48) Appropriately, the print text of his life history is accompanied by a CD, a fine example of Cape Barren Music, with its mixture of Cajun, Blues, Country and Irish Folk. In recent years, the National Library of Australia has added recordings of Ronnie and cohorts to its collection. These recordings, Dr Fred Pribac writes, are one of the 'few recorded examples of Australian musical folklore that have developed under such cultural isolation and harsh treatments. The result,' he concludes, 'is something truly unique that embodies a spirit of endurance and a love of community, culture and place.' (Foreword)

Born in 1944, a descendant of the Trawl-wool-way and Palawa people of North East Tasmania, Ronnie Summers grew up on Cape Barren Island, in Bass Strait. His has not been an easy life: his mother died of tuberculosis when he was seven, and although surrounded by family and community, his young life was soon shadowed by racism and violence, from which he eventually took refuge in alcohol, which led him onto risky, self-destructive paths. Helen Gee writes in her introduction:

I reckon that this gentle fun-loving man has lived all his nine lives, but he's a survivor.... In the lines of his fine old face you can see the reliving of hurtful memories; memories of the ugly fights generated by verbal torments.

These memories still have the power to haunt Ronnie: 'I think about them sometimes and I go downhill'. (p. 40) Racism was at the heart of all his troubles. As a naive young man he and his mates 'knew we was





branded half-castes but we didn't know there was anything wrong with us'. (p. 54) They were soon set straight in a violent and abusive manner which they were ill-equipped to handle. 'It was a little bit harder for us fullas from the island,' Ronnie reflects, 'because we were brought up so free'. (p. 58)

As for many Aboriginal men, his break came through football, and through getting a decent job. He was thirteen years at APPM in Burnie – "the pulp" – it was always changin' its name'. (p. 58) But life was still far from easy for this young islander and the death of his young son proved one blow too many, and, with his marriage in tatters, Ronnie took solace in alcohol. 'You don't know how I drank', he told Helen Gee. (p. 73) His life went downhill fast.

After time in gaol, Ronnie had a spell of working on fishing boats.

That was like being in Heaven, out there at night, layin' in the bay... in a world of me own – just nothin' to worry you. (p. 75)

In the late 80s he formed a band, but the big turnaround in his life came with his marriage to Dyan and his growing understanding of his cultural heritage, gained

through their time in Albury and through walking country, taking part in archaeological site surveys. Finally, he was able to stop drinking. 'I was given an ultimatum,' he recalls, 'drink and die or give the grog away and live'. He decided on the latter, but it was not easy, he admits. 'The hardest thing I have ever done was restructure my life entirely'. (p. 100) Predictably, some of his former drinking mates disappeared as he sobered up, but support came from other sources, as his cultural and personal identity grew stronger. 'I was lucky with family', Ronnie admits. Teddy Shaw, his wife Dyan's father, was a great ally:

[He] was a good man. Teddy, he loved Aboriginal people and he did so much... he was right behind our Aboriginal carnivals, pushin' us all the way to do as best we could. (p. 103)

As Ronnie himself does, to this day.

Now I talk to the kids in schools and tell 'em the story how the grog nearly killed me. I just hope these kids listen and don't go down the same road as me. I hope I can make a difference. (p. 102)

Although he has lived through some grim periods in his life, Ronnie maintains an optimistic outlook.

I still say I've been lucky through life. I'm a very happy man to be here. (p. 102)

He reflects on his ancestors and how they lived.

You sit sometimes and you think of how it was in the old times ... think back a couple of hundred years how the old people must have lived in this wonderful land here.... (p. 110)

I began to learn more about my own ancestry and the great warrior and tribal chief, Manlargenna. Dyan and I are very proud that this great man was our ancestor and to this day whenever we talk about him at home we call him 'grandfather'. (p. 118)

Of the steps he took to walk proudly in this lineage he admits:

I've come so far... Since 2007, I'm on the Senior Council of Elders for the University of Tasmania, advising the School of Community History...I'm proud to be involved in that research... and you never stop learnin'. (p. 140)

Ronnie Summers' life history is an important addition to the growing body of indigenous Tasmanian biography, focussed as it is on the historical continuity of the Palawa peoples, and affirming the personal and cultural identity of their authors: books like Auntie Ida West's *Pride Against Prejudice* and Auntie Molly Mallett's *My Past Their Future*, and the collection of South East oral histories by Robyn Friend, *We Who Are Not Here*, speak directly into the lies and secrets and silences of Tasmania's history.

Helen Gee's careful and respectful weaving together

of the many strands of Ronnie's story is a triumph of story telling and impeccable oral history practice: hers is an engaged, fully present but modest voice in the text that embodies a celebration of the oral occasion, and of connection and community. She presents us with the warp and woof, strand upon strand, layering the complexities into the vibrant garment of the complex life of an individual: 'Ronnie can tell a story against himself with a twinkle in the eye and a wicked infectious laugh; the child in Ronnie endures' - and the life of a people and an island: 'Ronnie's story mirrors that of a people uprooted, with the profound grief that loss of place provokes'. But when you have set down the print text, play the CD, for this will reveal Ronnie Summers' truest and most authentic self – *Ronnie: Tasmanian Songman*.

***Diggers and Greeks* by Maria Hill, UNSW Press, Sydney, 2010**
Reviewer: Dr John Yiannakis, Murdoch University.

The engaging and evocative photograph by George Silk reproduced on the dust-jacket of this book showing an Australian soldier with his rifle and slouch hat and a Greek *evzone* soldier with rifle and cigarette informs the reader that this book is more than just a military history. It is a book that blends cultural and military history to portray the human dimensions of war by examining the relationships between Australian soldiers and their Greek allies.

Author Dr Maria Hill (born Costadopoulos) is a Greek-Australian and a professional historian. In her second major publication, which is basically divided in two halves, she writes passionately in a free-flowing manner about the 1941 campaigns of Greece and Crete. The military aspect of the campaign is covered competently but the recurring theme of *Diggers and Greeks* is the interaction between Australian soldiers and the Greek people. In places this interaction is conveyed so comfortably that it reads like an adventure story rather than a critical inquiry.

Sub-titled, *The Australian Campaigns in Greece and Crete*, this near 500-page hardback deals with what Hill and others have called, with a degree of hyperbole, Australia's 'second Gallipoli'. Yet the doomed campaigns about which she writes have received little of the attention paid to Gallipoli. 'The silence on the subject Greece and Crete by Australian historians remains perplexing, given that Australia had committed a considerable number of front-line troops to these campaigns'. As Hill herself points out, many writers have tackled the campaigns where Australian troops served during World War II. The Asia-Pacific region has received special attention, notably Kokoda,

because of its closeness to Australia. The victories of two divisions in the Middle East, and the defence of Tobruk, too, have been well chronicled.

However, the role of the AIF in the valiant but somewhat pointless campaigns in Greece and Crete has received little consideration. When there has been an examination of the Greek and Cretan campaigns the focus unsurprisingly has been very much from a military, particularly British, perspective. Hill seeks to address this bias by looking more at what was happening 'on the ground' in the exchanges between the Australian servicemen and the Greek people. She contrasts this generally positive relationship with the strained relations between the officials of Greece, Australia and Britain.

Hill is assiduous in her condemnation of the Greek leadership and in praise for the ordinary Greek soldier. She gives clear reasons for the British intervention in Greece and the political chess-playing that resulted in the expected disaster and defeat of the Allied troops by the German army. The degree of distrust and lack of communication between the Allies uncovered by Hill is surprising. The book is an eye-opener, revealing how wartime propaganda helped create myths about Anglo-Greek co-operation: myths that Hill proceeds to de-bunk. Deception is a word accurately used by the author to describe the relationship between the officials of Greece, Britain and Australia at the time. There was no serious military strategy but rather 'the decision to send troops to Greece was a knee-jerk reaction by the British ... The British had no real intention of assisting Greece' and had never systematically collected information about the country. The British don't come out of Hill's analysis in a particularly positive light.

The campaign in Greece was doomed from the start. Plans for evacuation of troops were being drawn up even as they were landing. German strategy always dominated; the attacking German troops relentlessly breached each defensive line before it was properly manned. The Greek Army, exhausted after their successful defence against the Italian invasion eight months earlier and short of ammunition, transport and supplies, crumbled under the German onslaught. The Greek Generals and politicians were frequently German sympathisers and many were keen to see their Allies ousted from Greece.

Germany gained control of the air, and forced the Allied soldiers to withdraw from the Greek mainland. Maria Hill has unearthed facts that are contrary to some long-held beliefs about the Greek resistance to the Germans. She makes it clear that not all Greeks wanted to fight the Germans. The existence of this fifth column contributed to the Australians' rapid

retreat from Greece to Crete—to become involved, along with New Zealanders, in another catastrophe.

The Cretan campaign that followed was as disastrous. Fighting troops had little equipment, Germany controlled the air, the defence plan was flawed, and the withdrawal, once more by the British Navy, resulted in many soldiers being abandoned. The Cretans fiercely resisted the Germans; many fighting with antiquated equipment bravely aided Allied soldiers.

While Hill acknowledges that the wartime role of the left is downplayed, in Greece's war literature little is done to address this oversight. The role of non-Greek ethnics in the Greek campaign is noted, but is deserving of more attention and probably warrants further research by scholars. The role of Australian soldiers in the Greek resistance, well discussed by Hill, is another area worthy of further research. She is a little repetitive on some matters, unnecessarily driving home her point. The inclusion of psychological explanations to justify various social/cultural behavioural norms is not necessary and at times annoying.

After the withdrawal from Crete and during the ensuing occupation there were many Allied soldiers hiding out in the hills, aided and supplied at great risk by locals until they could escape the island. It was these circumstances in particular that built the close bonds between the Greeks and Australians. Many pertinent stories about the interaction between the Australian soldiers and the 'ordinary people' of Crete are included. Those of Bruce Vary and Herbert 'Slim' Wrigley are good examples. As with the Greeks on the mainland, these bonds have endured for many years. In Western Australia, the establishment by a former soldier of the 2/11th Battalion, Geoff Edwards, of a Greek Orthodox chapel at an estate he named Prevelly Park near Margaret River in gratitude to those monks at Preveli in Crete who assisted him and other soldiers escape is one such example. Other examples are the cases of family migrations, marriages and returns to Crete of old soldiers. Hill also highlights the fact that the veterans of these campaigns were never issued medals, something that still infuriates the few who remain.

Hill effectively incorporates the written memoirs and recollections of soldiers into her narrative. The use of her own original oral sources is commendable, but limited in her text. So too is the explanation of Hill's methodology. She provides an excellent literature review in her introduction, but there is little explanation of the historical underpinning of her work. Why there is the occasional reference to psychology to explain attitudes and actions, for example, altruism is not clear. Examining the Greek campaigns from a 'relational' point of view is fine, but a little more about the how

and why would have helped the reader. Some of this appears in the Afterword. It may have been better had this information been considered earlier in the book. Hence, there seems to be no need to verify on occasion the reasons for relationships with psychological narrative unless there is a methodological purpose of which the reader is unaware. For this reader, it is an unnecessary distraction in the text.

Hill's last chapter is poignant and insightful in many regards. The impact of the campaigns she has discussed on Australia's decision making thereafter was telling. Additionally, the final section of the book presents thirteen useful statistical appendices detailing the structure and strength of the forces involved in the campaigns. The author's bibliography is commendably extensive.

The book is well presented. It is neat and easy to read, with plenty of relevant images embedded throughout. Its many photos supplement the text. Maps are plentiful, and are included as endpapers, as well as sequenced maps of individual actions detailing troops and movements. Although some of the maps could have been less cluttered they are most helpful in assisting the reader to understand the unfolding events.

Diggers and Greeks is a well researched and well written book that brings a new and important dimension to our understanding of Australia's campaigns in Greece and Crete. Maria Hill has done very well in telling not only great stories about the interaction between the Greek people and Australian soldiers, but in conveying that interaction as part of a bigger military undertaking. In doing so she has made an important contribution to Australia's World War II historiography.

Kathleen Kemarre Wallace with Judy Lovell, *Listen Deeply, Let These Stories In*, IAD Press, Alice Springs, 2009

Reviewer: Terry Whitebeach

'The stories in this book are for learning from and they are for sharing,' Eastern Arrernte elder Kathleen Kemarre Wallace tells us in the introduction to her beautiful work of autobiography, art and cultural knowledge, *Listen deeply, let these stories in*.

They're stories from my grandparents' country, our homelands... about some of those places, the ancestor days, the spirits of those places, and something of my life as I grew up.

From the first word of the print text, and from the initial front cover image, which depicts Kathleen Wallace walking in country, the strength of the connection to culture and country of the speaker/author/artist is apparent. Hers is a strong and authentic voice and a



Cover photo: Judy Lovell

strong vision. The aural and visual inhabit and inform the print narrative, as the unseen, the unknowable and the numinous coexist with, inform and imbue the local, the particular, the specific with a resonance and presence that help locate the narratives simultaneously in timelessness and within very specific historical events and circumstances.

The book is a work of cultural maintenance – one of the primary briefs for the books IAD Press publishes – and cultural and personal renewal; both a deeply personal and strongly communal narrative which bears witness to the enduring ties of country, culture and family: ties that are fragile and may be broken, but which are capable of being renewed and reinvigorated if the listener/ reader/ viewer will allow the stories to do their healing work, as Kathleen Kemarre Wallace has done, throughout her life.

I let these stories come into me... They taught me many things... They kept me going, surviving, knowing my family and my culture... When we lost our bush life, they held me together through all the changes.

Kathleen Wallace is a well known and respected keeper and transmitter of Eastern Arrernte culture, in Central Australia, a renowned visual artist (perhaps the most renowned of the Keringke artists) whose childhood experience of being close to country and

culture, and of overcoming threats to the integrity of both, have made her fully cognisant of the enspiriting and life saving qualities that close knowledge of country and receptivity to the stories that arise from it may yield. Her modestly transmitted wisdom and her talent in visual, print and oral media enable her to share what she knows with others.

This beautiful book was created in close collaboration with Judy Lovell, a community artist, arts therapist and Keringke arts advisor whose integrity and long-held regard for the people of Ltyentye Apurte Community, east of Alice Springs, shine through the text. Judy Lovell is a member of OHAA (SA Branch) as a NT resident, and the oral history recording project was assisted by the NT Archives both through a History Grant and with support and advice from the NT Archives Service Oral History Unit under Francis Good's directorship.

Impeccably illustrated with photos of family and country, traditional story telling scenarios and stunning plates of Wallace's brilliant art work, the integrity and production values of the book are impeccable. The text is both Arrernte and English, and the CD accompanying the book gives the reader the next best experience to sitting down in country with Kathleen Wallace and listening to her tell stories

in person. Each of the seven *altyerre* stories was recorded at the location where the Dreaming story took place. Birdcalls complement the speaker's voice on the hour long CD, which contains more complete versions of each story summarised in the print text.

The story teller moves easily between the *altyerre*, recent 'history' and country. Like most indigenous life histories, *Listen deeply* is the repository of important historical information, much of it the sorrowful recounting of losses suffered by indigenous people, such as in the account below:

1955 the last time the big travelling ceremony took place across that particular Arrernte country. The elders dreamed the dances... Now days, everyone's too busy to follow the dances, and we aren't allowed on all the country anymore either, so mostly we just remember all that has passed.' (p.18)

Kathleen Wallace, a survivor and member of perhaps the oldest continuously practised culture on earth, is able to look history straight in the eye, unflinchingly recounting the losses and pragmatically assessing the value of what remains:

No-one was left alive to replace Atyelpe [grandfather] properly. No-one was left to inherit from him in the old way. It was a huge problem and in that grief from our old people we almost lost everything we know about ourselves. We have inherited pieces and some details but not all the knowledge of our elders. Our culture is not intact any more but we have some strong pieces of it. (p. 49)

Those 'strong pieces' are, in Kathleen Wallace's able hands, delivered to the reader / viewer / listener as a nourishing brew of practical know-how in surviving in and caring for country, *altyerre* stories, family and community histories, personal wisdom, and an astonishing and sometimes confronting creative vision. Long a lover and admirer of her art I was taken aback when attending an exhibition of her paintings in Alice Springs, shortly after I had recovered from a severe and prolonged neurological condition, to be confronted by a vibrant silk painting in which were representations of stylised beings that strongly resembled the neural cells that had mysteriously self destructed and caused my months of (thankfully temporary) paralysis. The painting bore the caption: *these are dangerous spirits: stay away from them*. The knowledge the painting imparted struck me at both a visceral and a transpersonal level, as I gazed and gazed at this powerful work, listening deeply and letting in an important complementary story, from a different vantage point of understanding, of an illness whose aetiology has western medicine bewildered.

At the level of autobiography, the book is fascinating: left in the care of nuns at the former Santa Teresa

mission in 1959 after a severe drought had forced her parents to seek a livelihood in Alice Springs, this shy young girl is almost overwhelmed by learning to speak English, sew and behave in a manner that seems to her inappropriate and sometimes shocking. Nevertheless she grew to successful womanhood, marriage and the fostering and adoption of many children. And despite the shock of her grandfather's death, and all it represented, Kathleen Wallace never succumbed to despair.

When my grandfather died in 1984, many people were very sad. The elders were very sad. They felt his death symbolise the end of our knowledge and our cultural practices. The changes to our culture and our way of life had been happening so fast and Atyelpe was one of the last who represented the old way, one who had held ancient knowledge from the ancestors. The family he left behind was deeply sad and some of them did not want to pass on our cultural knowledge anymore. They didn't want to teach me or the younger people about the old days, the culture., stories, songs or dances. They wanted to forget what we had all lost. There was so much grieving, we were always in sadness thinking about the past (p. 158)

Luckily for generations of readers and listeners to come, Kathleen Wallace was determined to maintain what she had learned as a young girl, and committed herself to passing along the story of her land and her people to others.

Listen deeply is a book to treasure, to dive deeply into, to sit quietly with, to be companioned by, to return to again and again: a heady brew, but also a quietly medicinal book, rich in history, an encyclopaedia of knowledge, the sum of one life contained in the wisdom and continuity of community, of life, loss, survival, earthed in pragmatism, informed by the unknowable, its roots into the here and now, its wings into eternity. 'There are more things Horatio...' and you will find many of them in this fine oral history, faithfully recorded, beautifully illustrated, if you *Listen deeply, let these stories in*.

Contributors

Dr Malcolm Allbrook completed his doctorate in history at Griffith University in 2008 with a thesis entitled 'Imperial Family: the Prinseps Empire and Colonial Government in India and Australia'. His research interests include colonial Australian and Indian Ocean history, trans-national history, collaborative community history, research and design of heritage and historical interpretive displays and exhibitions, and biography. He has published articles on Indian Ocean and Western Australian history. He is an honorary research fellow at the University of Western Australia.

Fabri Blacklock is a descendent of the Ngarabal people from Glen Innes and Tingha and the Biripi people from Dingo Creek in New South Wales. She graduated from the University of Technology, Sydney in 1999, with a BA in Communications, majoring in Aboriginal Studies and Film and Video. She was Assistant Curator of Koori History and Culture at the Powerhouse Museum from 1999 to 2008. She is a contributing author to the *Bayagul: contemporary Indigenous communication* book and the *Our place: Indigenous Australia now* catalogue. She is also an artist who has recently exhibited in Sydney and Paris and is currently studying at the University of Western Sydney for a Doctorate of Philosophy, based on the history of her family.

Bill Bunbury is a broadcaster and documentary maker of forty years experience. He has received five international and national awards for his work, including the United Nations Peace Prize in 1986 for his documentary on the Vietnam War. He is also the author of eleven books based on his radio work. Bill is currently Adjunct Professor of History and Communications at Murdoch University, WA, and still doing part-time production for the ABC and the National Library of Australia. He was Artistic Director of 'Voiceprints' for the Perth International Arts Festival in 2009. In 2010 he has worked with Community Arts WA to assist Central Wheat Belt Nyungar communities to tell their stories, in a three-part radio series.

Christine Garnaut is Senior Research Fellow and Director of the Architecture Museum in the School of Art, Architecture and Design at the University of South Australia. Her research focuses on Australian twentieth century planning and architectural history.

Helen Gee is one of Tasmania's leading conservationists. Her life as an activist began when she was still a schoolgirl, during the campaign to save Lake Pedder. She was one of the founding members of the Wilderness Society. She is also a writer and editor and has edited three books, *The South West Book*, *For the Forests* and *River of Verse*, an anthology of 200 hundred years of Tasmanian poetry. Her most recent book is the collaboratively written life story of Ronnie Summers, *Ronnie, Tasmanian Songman*.

Francis Good was editor of the OHAA *Journal* from 2003 to 2007, reviews editor in 2008 and convenor of the OHAA's publication committee (now Editorial Board), 2006–2008. With a background in tertiary education, research project management and radio current affairs, he was Manager, Oral History, at the Northern Territory Archives Service in Darwin from 1985 to 2006, developing oral history collections of over 2,000 recorded hours. Now living in Victoria, he continues to provide training and consultancy services to projects and individuals. Published articles include 'Voice, Ear and Text: Words, Meaning and Transcription', in R. Perks & A. Thomson (eds), *Oral History Reader*, second edition, 2006. He has been active in OHAA for many years, was a co-convenor of the 1997 OHAA national conference *Crossing Borders* in Alice Springs, and was awarded life membership of OHAA in 2007.

Jan Gothard, convenor of the Editorial Board and past editor of the Oral History Association of Australia *Journal*, is associate professor of History at Murdoch University in Perth, where she teaches Australian history. She is the author of *Blue China: Single Female Migration to Colonial Australia* (2001), general editor of the *Historical Encyclopaedia of Western Australia* (2009), and editor of a number of other collections. Her forthcoming oral history-based book, *A different way of looking: living with Down syndrome in twenty-first century Australia*, will be published shortly by Fremantle Press.

Christine Guster is the Coordinator of the National Film and Sound Archive Oral History Program. She is based in NFSA's Head Office in Canberra.

Pete Hay is an Honorary Fellow in the School of Geography and Environmental Studies at the University of Tasmania, having recently retired as

Reader in the same School, and is Chair of Environment Tasmania, the umbrella organisation for the island's environmental activist groups. He remains research active, his foci of interest being place theory, island studies, and the conflict dynamics of Tasmania's conflicted timber towns. He is also a poet and essayist, and a commentator on current affairs. His most recent books are *Main Currents in Western Environmental Thought* (UNSWP/Edinburgh University Press/Indiana University Press), *Vandemonian Essays* and a collection of poetry, *Silently On The Tide*.

Emma Hewitt is keenly interested in the stories behind histories and the way in which the minutiae of personal narratives are negotiated within the process of recording history. She has worked in Heritage since 2002, firstly in Perth and, more recently, in Melbourne. Apart from her work as a Heritage consultant, Emma is also a Masters candidate at the University of Melbourne. She presented a paper at *Islands of Memory*, the Oral History Association of Australia's National Conference, 2009.

Ronda Jamieson is the President of the Professional Historians' Association (WA) Inc. and a life member of the Oral History Association of Australia.

Dr Ross Laurie taught Australian history at the University of Queensland. His research interests included the history of working life, race and gender relations, popular culture and celebrations. He was a Chief Investigator on the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet project. Ross died in February 2010.

He was the author, with Joanne Scott, of *Showtime: A History of the Brisbane Exhibition* (University of Queensland Press, 2008).

Dr Margaret Leask is a theatre and oral historian. She conducted an Oral History Project at NIDA for four years and is currently researching and recording Oral History interviews for the National Film & Sound Archive. She is preparing her doctoral thesis on actress/manager Lena Ashwell for publication by the Society for Theatre Research in the UK in 2011. She has written entries for the *National Dictionary of Biography* and has published articles in *Australasian Drama Studies* and *Theatre Notebook*. She is a member of the NSW Branch of the OHAA.

Jan McCahon Marshall is the immediate past National President of the Oral History Association of Australia.

Alison McDougall is a freelance Researcher and Oral Historian. She was a member of the research team for the *South Australian Architects and their Works* project conducted through the Architecture Museum

in the School of Art, Architecture and Design at the University of South Australia. A committee member of the OHAA (SA Branch), she is editor of their publication *Word of Mouth*.

Lindsay Marshall is a Brisbane-based freelance journalist and a member of the executive committee of the Queensland Chapter of the Don Dunstan Foundation.

Ben Morris graduated from the Royal Military College, Duntroon, in 1965 and was posted first to Papua New Guinea and then to Vietnam where he served as a platoon commander in 1967/68. On returning to Australia he served in a number of training, regimental and staff postings, and finished his service in the regular Army in 1983. He immediately joined the Army Reserve and was awarded Reserve Forces Decoration for long service in that organisation. When he left the regular Army, he joined the Commonwealth public service and worked in the Department of Health, the Department of Defence and the Australian Taxation Office. Post-public service he worked as a tax agent.

Ben graduated from the Australian National University in 1983 with a Bachelor of Economics, and received a Master of Taxation from the University of New South Wales in 1993. He is currently enrolled in a Master of Arts at Wollongong University. He has contributed articles to a number of publications, mainly regimental and army associations. He has an interest in veterans' affairs and in taxation reform.

He was invited to present his paper 'Permission to Speak, Sir - Official History, Whose Reality?' at the 16th International Oral History Conference in Prague, July 2010.

Esther Ottaway is a poet. Her poetry has been widely published, commissioned for the Sydney Writers' Festival, featured on Radio National programs, and set to music for the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra. In 2006 she released *Blood Universe*, a collection of poems on pregnancy, and poems from it appeared in *The Australian* and the major anthologies *Motherlode* (Puncher & Wattman 2009) and *Swings & Roundabouts* (Random House 2008). Esther has won the Tom Collins Poetry Prize, the Australian Young Poets Fellowship, a residency at Varuna, The Writers' House, and a number of Arts Tasmania grants. She is a member of the Board of *Island* and is employed part-time at the Tasmanian Writers' Centre. Esther lives in Hobart with her musician husband and daughter. Her poem, 'Roy 1936', won First Prize in the 2009 Tom Collins Poetry Prize run by the Fellowship of Australian Writers.

Bruce Pascoe edited *Australian Short Stories* magazine for many years. He was the winner of an Australian Literature Award 1999, and the Radio National Short Story award in 1998. His published works include *Night Animals*, *Shark*, *Ocean*, *Cape Otway*, *Convincing Ground*, *Little Red Yellow and Black Book*. Of Kulin heritage, he is presently a board member of Aboriginal Corporation for Languages. Bruce lives in East Gippsland. His latest novel, *Bloke*, was published by Penguin in 2009.

Denise Phillips is currently working on a PhD at the University of New England. A desire to hear the silenced voices of asylum seekers arriving by boat led Denise to become closely involved with Hazara refugees from Afghanistan in 2004. While completing a BA (Hons) degree, she recorded Hazaras' recollections of persecution and analysed the impact of trauma on their memory. Through oral histories, her thesis will explore the often-ambiguous, interwoven experiences of grief and hope among Hazara refugees in Brisbane, and examine how their mourning traditions may have changed in response to their resettlement within Australia.

Dr Joanne Scott is professor of history and Head of the School of Social Sciences at the University of the Sunshine Coast, Queensland. Her research interests include the histories of events and institutions and she is a Chief Investigator on an ARC-funded project on the history of the Australian Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet.

She is the author, with Ross Laurie, of *Showtime: A History of the Brisbane Exhibition* (University of Queensland Press, 2008).

Maree Stanley is currently working part time as a research assistant on the *Queensland Speaks* project at the University of Queensland. She has a Degree in Sociology from Southern Cross University, a Graduate Certificate in Higher Education from the University of Canberra and is completing a Masters of Governance and Public Policy at the University of Queensland.

Ronnie Summers is an Indigenous Tasmanian elder, musician, educator and consultant. He is active in Indigenous affairs and has made significant contributions to the archives of Australian folk music.

Dyan Summers is a poet, songwriter, activist, craftswoman and educator. She is active in Indigenous affairs and education.

Ariella Van Luyn is a PhD student working on a practice-led research project at the Queensland University of Technology (QUT). Her project will consist of a novel based on ten oral histories she has

collected from residents of Brisbane and surrounding areas. The novel will be accompanied by an exegesis investigating some of the narrative and linguistic markers present in fiction that are not generally present in oral history.

Ariella presented a paper on her honours thesis in 2009 at the Australian Historical Association's *Constructing the Past* Conference held at the University of the Sunshine Coast. In 2010 she presented a paper at the IOHA Conference *Between Past and Future: Oral History, Memory and Meaning* in Prague as well as a joint paper with Dr. Helen Klæbe at the IABA Conference *Life Writing and Intimate Publics* at the University of Sussex.

Terry Whitebeach is a writer, oral historian and teacher of creative writing. Her PhD thesis, 'Someone Else's Story', examined the process of collaborative cross cultural life writing. Her published work includes two collections of poetry, *Bird Dream* and *All the Shamans Work in Safeway*, two novels for young adults, *Watersky* and *Bantam*, three documentary radio plays, *Antarctic Journey*, *Mill Ends* and *Bantam*, *A Real Book by Mick Brown & Terry Whitebeach*, and a life history, *The Versatile Man: The Life and Times of Alexander Donald Ross, Kaytetye Stockman* (which is presently utilised in history courses at Griffith University and the University of Barcelona, Spain.) Her work has received a number of literary awards. Terry has collected and edited a number of collections of oral histories for the Migrant Resource Centre and other community organizations. From 1999 to 2003 she coordinated Batchelor Institute's inaugural indigenous creative writing course in Alice Springs. Her life-writing course for seniors, 'Writing Memories', has been running for more than twenty years.

Dr John Yiannakis was born and educated in Perth, Western Australia. For many years he lectured in History at Tuart College where, from 1998 to 2001, he was Head of the Social Sciences Department. Since then Dr Yiannakis has worked as a Research Fellow at Curtin University and now Murdoch University. While he has a wide range of historical interests, Dr Yiannakis has published extensively in the field of Greek migration, settlement and adaptation to Western Australia. He has written numerous books and articles, including *A History of Dentistry in Western Australia*, *Greek Pioneers in Western Australia* and *Odysseus in the Golden West*.

Contributions are invited from Australia and overseas for publication in the OHAA Journal No. 33, 2011

Communities of Memory

Contributions are invited in the following 3 categories:

A Articles on the following themes (limit: 5,500 words):

- Papers to be presented at OHAA's Biennial National Conference, October 2011, Melbourne, *Communities of Memory*, or others addressing the themes of the conference.
- Issues arising from the 2010 International Oral History Conference in Prague.
- Ethical, methodological, legal and technology challenges being met in the practice, collection and usage of oral history both in Australia and abroad.
- Critiques/analysis of strategies and protocols in projects, the perceived value and meanings attributed by oral historians to their work, or the way in which projects and agencies handle their involvement.

B Project reports: articles describing specific projects, the information gained through them, and principal outcomes or practice issues identified in the process (*limit: 4,000 words*).

C Reviews of books and other publications in Australia or elsewhere that are of interest to the oral history community (*limit: 1,500 words*). This may include reviews of static or internet-available exhibitions, or any projects presented for a public audience.

Photographs, drawings and other illustrations are particularly welcome, and may be offered for any of the above categories of contribution.

Deadline for submissions: 1 April 2011

Forward to: Dr Terry Whitebeach
General Editor, OHAA *Journal*, 2011
Email: twhitebeach@skymesh.com.au

Peer Review

If requested by authors, papers offered for publication in the OHAA *Journal* may be submitted to the OHAA Publication Committee for peer review.

However, note these important points:

- Papers for peer review must show a high standard of scholarship, and reflect a sound appreciation of current and historical issues on the topics discussed
- Papers for peer review may be submitted at any time; however, if not received by the Editorial Board by 31 December 2010, they may not be processed in time for publication in the 2011 issue of the *Journal*; furthermore, regardless of when offers are forwarded to the Committee, the review process may not necessarily be completed in time for publication in the next available *Journal*
- Before being submitted for peer review, papers will first be assessed for suitability by the OHAA Editorial Board, and authors will be advised of the outcome.

Papers for peer review should be forwarded to:
Ariella Van Luyn

Convenor, OHAA Editorial Board

Email: a1.vanluyn@qut.edu.au
mobile: 0401925228

Communities of Memory

Biennial Conference of the Oral History Association of Australia

7 October to 9 October 2011,
State Library of Victoria Conference Centre, Melbourne

Call for Papers

In recent years memory has been an increasingly significant resource for many different types of communities: for survivors of natural catastrophe and human-made disaster; in country towns dealing with demographic and environmental change; for cities and suburbs in constant transformation; in the preservation of special places or the restitution of human rights; for the 'Forgotten Australians' and 'Stolen Generations'; for migrants and refugees creating new lives; among virtual communities sharing life stories online. Memories are used to foster common identity and purpose, to recover hidden histories and silenced stories, to recall change in the past and advocate change in the present, to challenge stereotypes and speak truth to power. The concept of 'community' can be enlisted for change or conservatism; 'communities of memory' can be inclusive and empowering, or exclusive and silencing.

Oral historians, in a variety of guises and combining age-old listening skills with dazzling new technologies, play important roles in this memory work. Our conference welcomes participants who use oral history in their work with and within communities of memory across the many fields and disciplines that contribute to community, public and academic histories. We invite proposals for individual presentations, workshops and thematic panels.

The conference will include history walks and tours that introduce participants to Melbourne's rich and diverse communities of memory. Oral history training workshops will be held on the Thursday prior to the conference (6 October 2011).

Conference sub-themes will include, but are not limited to:

- Memory and Catastrophe
- Memory Work for Human Rights
- Indigenous Memory
- Place, Community, Memory
- Communities of Identity
- Contested Communities
- Communities of Gender and Sexuality
- Migrants and Refugees
- Communities of Work or Leisure
- Activist Communities
- War Memories
- Generational Communities
- Theories of Collective and Community
- Memory
- New Approaches to Recording Lives
- Memory Work in Creative and
- Fictional Writing
- Ethical Issues in Memory Work
- Training Community Oral Historians
- New Technologies for Documenting
- Memory and History

We welcome proposals for presentations in a variety of formats and media, including standard paper presentations (typically 20 minutes); short accounts of work in progress (typically 5 minutes); participatory workshops; and thematic panels comprising several presenters. Presentations should involve oral history. Contact the organizers at ohaa2011@gmail.com if you would like to discuss the format or focus of your presentation before you submit it.

Proposals for presentations / papers / panels should be no more than 200 words (single space, 12 point font in Times New Roman) and must include at

at the top your name, institutional affiliation (if applicable), postal address, phone number and email address, the title for your presentation / panel, the sub-theme/s your work best connects to, and the presentation format (standard paper, short account of work in progress, thematic panel or participatory workshop). Presenters will be encouraged to submit papers to the refereed Journal of the Oral History Association of Australia (ranked in the ERA journal list), which aims to produce a theme issue about Communities of Memory.

Proposals should be uploaded to <http://www.easychair.org/conferences/?conf=ohaa2011>

To use this online system you will need to create an author account (a simple process) and then submit your proposal either by attaching it (with full details as listed above) as a PDF or by using the copy/paste function. If you are unable to use this system please email your proposal to ohaa2011@gmail.com

Closing date for proposals: 31 October 2010

The 'Communities of Memory' conference will take place at the State Library of Victoria in Melbourne's city centre. It is organized by the Oral History Association of Australia (Victoria branch) in partnership with ABC Radio National Social History Unit, the Australian Centre for the Moving Image, the Institute for Public History at Monash University, Museum Victoria, the National Film and Sound Archive, the Professional Historians Association and the State Library of Victoria.

For conference information or to join the conference mailing list please visit the conference website at <http://sites.google.com/site/communitiesofmemory/home> or email kerrie.alexander@monash.edu

Or visit the Oral History Association of Australia site (<http://www.ohaa.net.au/>)

Conference Mailing Address:

Communities of Memory OHAA 2011 Organising Committee

c/- Kerrie Alexander

Institute for Public History,

6th Floor, Building 11, Clayton Campus

Monash University VIC 3800

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Email: kerrie.alexander@monash.edu

Keynote speakers: Stephen High: Chair in Public History and co-director of the Center for Oral History and Digital Storytelling at Concordia University, Montreal

Nathalie Nguyen: Australian Research Fellow, University of Melbourne

Peter Read: Australian Research Council Professorial Fellow, University of Sydney.

Membership information

Oral History Association of Australia

The Oral History Association of Australia (OHAA) was established in 1978.

The objectives of the Association are to:

- promote the practice and methods of oral history
- educate in the use of oral history methods
- encourage discussion of all problems in oral history
- foster the preservation of oral history records in Australia
- share information about oral history projects

Branch seminars and workshops are held regularly throughout the year while a National Conference is held every two years. Many of the papers from the conferences appear in the *OHAA Journal*.

Members receive a copy of the *OHAA Journal*, and newsletters and publications from their individual branches.

OHAA Website: <http://ohaa.net.au/>

OHHA Branches

Tasmania

Jill Cassidy (National President)
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Incorporated in the New South Wales Branch

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Incorporated into South Australian Branch
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