



## ORAL HISTORY AUSTRALIA PRESIDENT'S REPORT TO AGM, OCTOBER 2023

### Alistair Thomson

Oral History Australia (OHA) is a national committee with membership comprising each State and Territory association, and a representative from each State and Territory association serving on the OHA Committee.

Firstly, many thanks to all our national committee members, who meet bi-monthly via Zoom and undertake a range of roles: David Sweet (Secretary), Kyra Edwards (Treasurer), Jill Cassidy (Tasmania and Vice-President), Elisabeth Gondwe (Queensland), Maria Savvidis (NSW and Public Officer), Christeen Schoepf (South Australia), William Martin (Northern Territory), Judy Hughes (Web Officer), and myself representing Victoria. Voluntary organisations only thrive because of volunteer time, effort and imagination, and in this regard OHA continues to be blessed.

Most of the activity of Oral History Australia occurs at the level of the state and territory associations, each of which has an active committee that runs state-based events and activities. Indeed, one of the most gratifying segments of the national committee meeting involves reports from each state and territory about their innovative, inclusive and inspirational activities at the regional level – which are often adopted and adapted by other states and territories.

Over the past year, the main activities at the national level have included:

### Biennial OHA Conferences

- After Covid restrictions required us to postpone our 2021 conference, we met in **Launceston** on 14-16 October 2022, with the conference theme **Oral History in Troubling Times: Opportunities & Challenges**. We were privileged to hear an inspirational opening address on the conference theme by US oral historian Mark Cave, and a wonderful closing plenary by a panel of Tasmanian Indigenous historians. Oral historians from around the country and across the Tasman were delighted to at last meet face to face again and to enjoy an excellent program, with 84 registered for pre-conference workshops, 102 for the full conference and 16 for single days.
- At the conference, OHA awarded the **Hazel de Berg award** to Gwlad McLachlan; the **OHA Book Award** to Mia Martin Hobbs; and the **OHA Media Award** to Jeannine Baker.
- The conference made a profit of \$11937.04, which was split equally between OHA and OH Tasmania and thus makes a significant financial contribution to future activities at a local and national level.
- As noted in my previous annual report, many thanks to Oral History Tasmania, led by Jill Cassidy, for three years of work as host for the Launceston conference (in partnership with OHA, the College of Arts, Law and Education at the University of Tasmania, and the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery); to OHA webmaster Judy Hughes for her work promoting the event; to Annmarie Reid for managing the Easychair conference proposal system; and to

members of the National Program Committee: Jill Cassidy, Carolyn Connors, Elisabeth Gondwe, Linda Hunt (of UTas), Elaine Rabbitt, Scott McKinnon and Alistair Thomson.

- Oral History Victoria is hosting the next OHA national conference, **The Power of Oral History—Risks, Rewards & Responsibilities**, at Trinity College Gatehouse, University of Melbourne, 21-24 November 2024. The Call for Papers is available on the OHA website, with a deadline of 1 April 2024. Alessandro Portelli, one of the most influential oral historians in the world for more than 50 years, has agreed to join us as a keynote speaker. An OHV conference planning committee, comprising Alice Garner, Jen Rose, Eve Lester, Kirby Fenwick, Claudia Craig and Al Thomson, is developing a program of conferences activities, including training workshops, tours and a musical conference dinner event. Kirby Fenwick is managing the Easychair conference proposal system, and in 2024 each state and territory association will be invited to propose members of the National Program Committee which will review proposals. We encourage state and territory associations to offer conference bursaries.

### OHA Journal

- Editors Skye Krichauff and Carla Pascoe Leahy have continued to work hard making *Studies in Oral History* a terrific oral history journal. They note the challenge of attracting peer-reviewed article submissions and have concluded that theme issues are most successful in that regard, and that graduate and early career researchers, in particular, should be encouraged to respond to calls for submissions.
- Issue 44, 2022 ('Migrant Voices: Community Collaboration and Telling Migration Histories', theme issue editors Alexandra Dellios and Maria Savvidis) was launched at the Launceston conference in October 2022.
- The theme for issue No. 45, 2023, is 'Oral History in Troubling Times; Opportunities and Challenges', the same as the theme of the 2022 OHA Biennial Conference. Issue 46, 2024, is on the theme, 'Working Lives & Workplaces', with guest editors Paul Sendziuk and Nicholas Herriot.
- National Committee continues to pay the cost of a copy editor, Katie Connolly, to ease the workload of the journal editors, and the journal designer Karen Wallis.
- Thanks to our journal editors Carla and Skye, Reviews Editor Gwyn McLelland and Reports Editor Alexandra Mountain, to theme issue editors, to OHA webmaster Judy Hughes for her work on production and dissemination, to chair of the Editorial Board, Alex Dellios, and to new and continuing members of the Editorial Board (which has recently been joined by Indira Chowdury from India).
- And a special thanks to Carla, who is stepping aside as co-editor after the launch of this year's journal in November. Carla and Skye took on the editorial role in 2019. Together they have refashioned *Studies in Oral History* into one of the world's leading oral history journals. Carla has been (and will continue to be!), generous, thoughtful, super-smart and wonderfully collaborative, and we wish her well in exciting new ventures.

## **OHA website**

- Judy Hughes continues her terrific job keeping the redesigned national website up to date; coordinating with state and territory association websites to ensure shared resources and to avoid too much overlap or repetition; and coordinating national communications.
- The 2022 and 2024 biennial conference websites were developed by Judy as part of the main OHA website, and now include recordings of keynote presentations.
- The WA association website uses the same design as the national website, and the Victorian, Tasmanian and SA / NT state and territory associations are currently planning to adopt the common design.

## **Finances and Capitation fee**

- OHA Committee agreed in 2021 to reduce the capitation fee from \$15 per head to \$10 per head, and thus enable state and territory associations to use more of their resources for local activities. At the 2023 AGM, the Committee will discuss the current financial situation and agree on capitation fees for the next financial year.
- OHA agreed that Honorary members of state and territory associations would not be included in the count for capitation fees (and amended articles 6.1 and 6.2 of the OHA Constitution). We also confirmed that state and territory associations set their own membership fees.
- I want to thank our Treasurer Kyra Edwards for all her efforts, including the difficult task of moving the OHA accounts from the CBA to ANZ, which provides more flexible and appropriate support for a small national voluntary organization.

## **Oral History Handbook**

- Beth Robertson is working on a new, 6<sup>th</sup> edition of this Australian handbook, which will be published by the South Australian / NT association and should be available in 2024. In the meantime, the 5<sup>th</sup> edition of the Handbook is available as a print-on-demand hard copy.

## **Training**

- OHA committee has confirmed that members of OH state and territory associations should receive the member concession rates for events, including training, run by other state and territory associations. This agreement makes excellent sense now that many events are offered online, and the availability and range of national training opportunities has improved significantly in recent years.

## **Membership Survey**

- In 2023 Judy Hughes for OHA surveyed each state and territory association about membership. The survey revealed that in half of the associations, membership has been steady or has increased, but in the other half membership has decreased, with the reduction in activities and meetings during the Covid crisis a significant factor. The survey concluded that training activities and other events are vital for generating and retaining membership, and noted the value of state and territory associations sharing activities (such as online workshops) and resources (for example, through the national website).

## **Technology Survey**

- OHA web master Judy Hughes also recently surveyed state and territory association members about oral history technology, with a view to updating information and advice, and useful links, available via the national website.

## **Public Fund**

- At the 2022 AGM it was agreed that the OHA would work toward developing a 'Public Fund' for donations that would then be available to support OH national and state and territory association activities, such as conference bursaries. Al Thomson agreed to work with Eve Lester from OHV, with a view to getting a Public Fund set up by the time of the November 2024 conference.

## **Advocacy – the Voice to Parliament**

- In September 2023, OHA agreed to a public statement in support of the Yes campaign for a First People's Voice to Parliament, to be placed on the national website and disseminated through state and territory associations.

## **Saving our Stories**

- Since I started as OHA President, I've been highlighting the issue of community, professional and academic oral history recordings that may be lost because they are not preserved in a secure, future-proof state or national repository. I've tried, without much success to date, to drum up support from the state or national libraries (and the National & State Library Association) to develop a 'Save our Stories' project along the lines of the well-funded British Library 'Save our Sounds' project. In my last report I noted discussions with academics involved in The Language Data Commons of Australia (LDaCA) and the Australian Research Data Commons (ARDC) about the possibility of a pilot project which might locate, document and preserve oral history recordings in a specific locality, with a view to developing a process and protocols that might be used in a more ambitious project. I'm sorry to report no success to date.

Alistair Thomson, President OHA, 2 October 2023