

Vale to OHA Life Members

*Ros Bowden (1940–2023), Tim Bowden (1937–2024)
and Louise Douglas (1952–2024)*

Janis Wilton

Ros, Tim and Louise were the first OHAA members in NSW to be honoured as life members: Louise in 1999, and Tim and Ros jointly in 2001.¹ Their careers were impressive, creative and wide ranging. Ros and Tim as ABC journalists, radio broadcasters, oral historians, authors and activists. Louise as an early oral history researcher and advocate, and later as curator and manager at the Powerhouse Museum and the National Museum of Australia, and as an advocate for locally based museums. All three were committed to enhancing and supporting community engagement with voices, memories and the many ways in which the past can be interpreted and presented. Books, radio broadcasts, exhibitions, collections. All three were early and active members of the Oral History Association of Australia, and all three practised the core oral history values of ensuring that voices previously silenced could be heard and would be kept for posterity, and that oral history skills and insights should be shared.

¹ <https://www.oralhistorynsw.org.au/life-members>

Louise Douglas was a founding member of OHAA NSW in 1979, and editor and co-editor of early issues of the Journal. At the same time she was the anchor for the 1938 volume of the bicentennial history that innovatively placed oral history interviews as the core of the perspectives offered about that year; chair of the management committee for the NSW Bicentennial Oral History Project; and co-author of two oral history handbooks. Her lasting oral history legacies are also evident in the bicentennial oral history collections housed in the National Library and the State Library of NSW.

Australia 1938 oral history project:

<https://catalogue.nla.gov.au/catalog/1308792>

NSW Bicentennial Oral History Collection:

<https://collection.sl.nsw.gov.au/record/npAd3Xb1>

<https://catalogue.nla.gov.au/catalog/1361367>

The LinkedIn page of the National Museum of Australia has tributes to Louise's subsequent work in the museum sector:

https://www.linkedin.com/posts/national-museum-of-australia_it-is-with-great-sadness-that-we-share-the-activity-7164083516350160896-rXxA/

Ros Bowden was also a foundation member of OHAA NSW. Trained as a nurse, she turned to journalism in the 1970s. She conducted interviews and created programs and books for the ABC, especially for Radio National's Social History Unit. She was particularly concerned to record, present and preserve the voices, memories and experiences of women.

The Australian Women's Register provides an overview of some of her work:

<https://www.womenaustralia.info/entries/bowden-rosalind-ros/>

Both the State Library of NSW and the National Library of Australia hold her papers and oral history recordings. The SLNSW has a number of listings:

<https://www.nla.gov.au/collections/guide-selected-collections/bowden-collection>



Figure 1 Photograph of Tim and Ros Bowden with Niles Elvery (from Queensland State Library) at 'Oral history in the sun', OHAA (Queensland) Inaugural Conference, Magnetic Island, May 1994

In 2022 husband and fellow journalist Tim published his account of her life. The book title, *Ros Bowden: Trailblazer*, is evocative of Ros's achievements.

Tim Bowden joined Ros as an early member of OHAA. His wide ranging and long-term commitment to journalism has created a rich and diverse catalogue of broadcasts, publications and collections. Significantly, underpinning all his work, was his commitment to ensuring that those often sidelined in mainstream histories were given space and recognition. This is well captured in the tenacity with which he continued to lobby the Australian War Memorial to accept the Neil Davis collection in the 1980s, and with which he deposited his oral history interviews and research materials in cultural institutions. The Australian War Memorial, for example, holds over 120 oral history interviews conducted by Tim across a number of different projects.

Vale Tim Bowden, Australian War Memorial, 5 September 2024:

<https://www.awm.gov.au/articles/blog/vale-time-bowden>

Former ABC broadcaster and author Tim Bowden dies, *ABC News*, 3 September 2024:

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-09-03/former-abc-broadcaster-and-author-tim-bowden-dies-aged-87/104305872>

This brief listing of the achievements of Louise, Ros and Tim indicates their significance in the oral history world and beyond, hopefully captures a sense of the values that guided their work, and perhaps hints at their personalities and generosity.

On a personal level, I have a grateful and wry smile invoking memories that include Louise providing me with paid work to catalogue some of the 1938 material at a time when I was in need of a paid job; Ros and Tim at an OHAA Conference on Magnetic Island sharing their skills and experience, with Tim mischievously adding asides and jokes; and Tim sending me (in an outdated audio recording format) a BBC interview with 'The Last Last Maker' that he said would provide my students with plenty of examples of how not to interview!² I used that recording for many years.

Thank you to three outstanding OHAA life members for your support, generosity and deeply appreciated trailblazing work for oral history in Australia. Our access to diverse voices and experiences from the past is greatly enriched by what you have done over many decades.

Vale Louise, Ros and Tim.

2 This was an interview conducted in London with one of the last makers of shoe lasts.