

# voice print

Newsletter

of the New South Wales Branch

of the Oral History Association

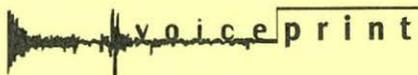
of Australia

# 31

October 2004



*... is a  
- attention  
- form, issue  
as the result  
ned interview  
means of finding  
the past by asking  
ons of people who*



**Voiceprint** is the newsletter of the NSW Branch of the Oral History Association of Australia and is published quarterly

ISSN: 13224360

**Issue No. 31 – October 2004**

Oral History Association of Australia  
(NSW) Inc. c/ – State Library of  
New South Wales, Macquarie Street,  
Sydney, NSW 2000

Tel (02) 9273 1697 • Fax (02) 9273 1267  
email: rblock@ilanet.sl.nsw.gov.au

**Editorial Committee:** Joyce Cribb,  
Diana Covell, Sue Georgevits

*Please send articles and correspondence*

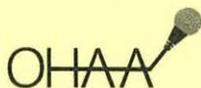
**to:** Joyce Cribb, 48 Bungalow Avenue,  
Pymble 2073, email:  
ivancribbo1@optusnet.com.au

**Layout and Design:** Vanessa Block

---

The statements made and opinions expressed in this publication are those of their respective authors and are not to be understood as necessarily representing the policies or views of the OHAA(NSW) or its editors. Members notices are included solely for information as a service to members and are not to be understood as carrying any endorsement on the part of the OHAA(NSW) or its editors.

---



# Editorial

---

*This is Voiceprint No. 31. As I have been editing this I have been watching some of the television footage of the Olympic games from Athens or rather the highlights – not that keen for early morning viewing! How time does fly, and the events of today become the history of tomorrow. It seems no time at all since we had all the fun and joy here in Sydney, now part of history. The games in Athens add another chapter to Olympic history.*

*There is so much to reflect on as we look back. Knowing what has gone before is the key to finding the way in the future. Keys are very valued, even treasured and at times presented with special ceremony (some of us I am sure are old enough to have been given a special 21 key brooch). Thus oral historians have control of the keys to unlock memories and stories that will inform the future generations. Have you a story to share?*

*This June the IOHA conference was held in Rome (see report this Voiceprint) and the next conference will be in Sydney in 2006. Time to think about a paper for Sydney – an exciting time that will come round quite quickly now. Do note that little PS from our reporters in Rome! A story from which legends are made!*

*Meanwhile, I hope that some of you will have a report or a story for our next Voiceprint. Please send in your contributions before Christmas so the editing process can be done through January.*

*Enjoy the reports in this Voiceprint. Thank you to Virginia Macleod for Jack's story. Think about the challenge from Barbara Harris. Do you have a challenge for members? Look forward to receiving your contributions. Thank you.*

**Joyce Cribb**

# Contents



## News

New Members 3

## Nuts and Bolts

About the Committee 6

## REPORTS

President's Report, July 2004 8

IOHA Conference 2004 10

Seminar Report 8 May 2004 14

Seminar Report 31 July 2004 16

## ARTICLES

Jack – *Virginia MacLeod* 18

A Challenge to Oral History – *Barbara Harris* 21



## Book Review

25



## Diary of Events

26

## Noticeboard

27



## New Members from February 2004

---

This is a wonderfully long list – many of you, I know, came to seminars and we are delighted that you wish to continue to be reliably in touch with oral history. You all bring such different skills and interests to the OHAA. We cannot but be the richer for your contribution – many thanks and we look forward to staying in touch.  
**Rosie Block**, President

<b>Hugh Watt</b>	Student
<b>Kerrie Barnett</b>	Farmer
<b>Robyn Hanstock</b>	Student
<b>Lucy Buxton</b>	Retired, interested in oral history
<b>Elizabeth Atkin</b>	Clinical coder
<b>Pauline Evatt</b>	Retired, interested in hockey and local history
<b>Evangeline Galettis</b>	Archivist
<b>John Hamer</b>	Retired police officer
<b>Suzanne Whyte</b>	Retired, interested in oral history
<b>Nadia Johnson</b>	Teacher/librarian
<b>Gail Foran</b>	Interested in oral history
<b>Elizabeth Suggit</b>	Administration officer
<b>Kim Honan</b>	Student
<b>Jill Levy</b>	Interested in oral history
<b>Wendy McGlynn</b>	Interested in oral history
<b>Faye Williams</b>	Accountant
<b>Helen Tierney</b>	Social history curator
<b>Rhonda Boxhall</b>	Retired, interested in oral history
<b>Wendy Morgan</b>	Self-employed
<b>Winona Byrne</b>	Researcher/writer
<b>Leola Jacobs</b>	Freelance writer
<b>Yvonne Reitsma</b>	B & B operator, interested in community history

**Joan McDonald**  
**Dianne Hosking**  
**John Campbell**  
**Sydney Jewish Museum**  
**ACT Heritage Library**

Retired, interested in oral history  
Archives director  
Paediatrician

## Nuts and Bolts

---

### **Future Member disrupts Annual General Meeting.**

Rosie was in the middle of her report when right in front my phone rang. I must admit to having it on as we were anxiously waiting for word from London. The word was – Chloe Stella, granddaughter number three had arrived! Now, for ever, the way Grans do, I'll tell her how her arrival interrupted our meeting – her first oral history story! **Joyce Cribb**

### **Oral History Independent List Serv**

There are times when the best of plans – etc! I am sorry that the email address published in the last Voiceprint sent your enquires regarding the email discussion list for oral history practitioners to the wrong person – my apologies for the mistake. If members would like to subscribe please visit:  
<<http://www.oral-history.com/mailman/listinfo/oh-indeps>> and fill in details and hit subscribe. Members of the OHAA will be joined up.

### **Tim Bowden Monograph**

*Shaping History Through Personal Stories*  
*Annual History Lecture 2002*

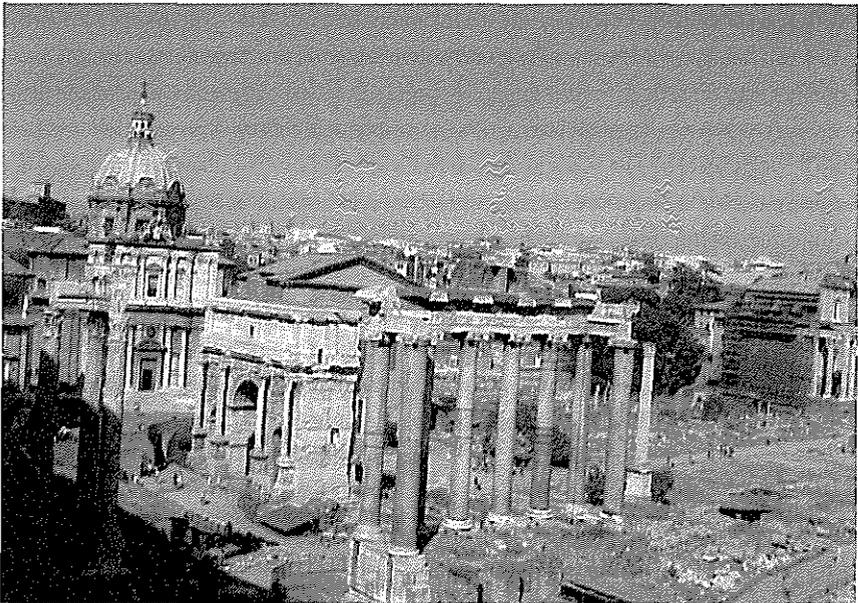
"I began in journalism as a cub reporter on The Mercury newspaper in Hobart, and I recorded my first freelance interview for the ABC on a wind-up, clockwork-driven tape recorder in 1958. The interview was a colour piece with a wool buyer, recorded in the Hobart Town Hall against the background of the yips and yelps of an auction. I was

instantly hooked on 'actuality'-the ability to take the listener into a situation where the natural sounds were more evocative than any descriptive words I could ever write. Combined with that was the personality of interviewees revealed through their voices and layered with emotion, humour, cynicism, sadness, or excitement. It was an instant love affair with the tape recorder as I instinctively grasped its potential as a superb vehicle for the power of anecdote. First in journalism, and later in documentaries and oral history. On reflection any recorded interview is technically 'oral history'. I resigned from The Mercury and headed enthusiastically, but financially precariously, into this brave new audio world."

**Tim Bowden, Annual History Lecture, 2002**

*The monograph of the 2002 Annual History Lecture is now available for purchase from the History Council of NSW for \$10.00. Orders may be placed by contacting the office of the History Council of NSW: ph: (02) 9252 8715, fax: (02) 9252 8716, email: [office@historycouncilnsw.org.au](mailto:office@historycouncilnsw.org.au)*

---



**A view from the conference venue, the Campodoglio on Capitol Hill over the Imperial Roman Forum (photographed by Helen Klaybe at the IOHA Conference, Rome, 23-26 June 2004)**

# About the Committee

---

*We thought members may not know all the NSW committee members or know of their work and interests. We continue with brief biographies of members, who have been with the Committee for some time (Ed).*

## **Alan Veenstra**

Alan Veenstra has a background in building, industrial, commercial and leisure. He joined the Committee a number of years ago when he found he was at a loss to fill his time after retiring. An active historian from Goulburn suggested that he make Oral History his interest.

After just one teaching seminar in Sydney, Alan became fascinated by the comment made by a senior resident in a retirement complex located on the Central Coast. This gentleman "Tom" revealed that at sometime in the past he had jumped ship! Thereby began a series of oral history sessions with Tom culminating in a modest history which appeared subsequently in Voiceprint. Several difficulties were addressed during the preparation of Tom's story. It became evident that Tom was suffering Parkinson's Disease and it took time to sort out times and places to meet.

A further story on the life of a grocer's wife "Gwen" ( and therefore) business partner was undertaken. Having been requested to submit typed transcriptions to "Gwen" Alan was astounded to receive copperplate quality written copies from Gwen with corrections – these were produced by Gwen without the use of spectacles when aged in her eighties. Further stories show that oral histories from senior citizens are subject to their availability, but also loss of memory and illness influence the quality of the story.

Alan's training in architecture has been useful in that an orderly procedure in Oral History is a requisite, just as it is in producing accurate working drawings for various buildings. When the histories are (finally) completed Alan finds his new found hobby rewarding and satisfying.

### **Dr Margaret Park**

Margaret Park is the author of several publications, some of which feature her oral history work, including *Doors Were Always Open: Recollections of Pyrmont and Ultimo*, *Voices of a Landscape: Planning North Sydney* and *Designs on a Landscape: A History of Planning in North Sydney*.

Margaret was the first North Sydney Council Historian, a position she held from 1998 to 2003. Prior to this she was responsible for Stanton Library's Historical Services and Collections from 1988 to 1998. It was in this role as Manager of Historical Services that Margaret's interest and skills in oral history enabled her to develop Stanton Library's Oral History Collection from a smallish and unfunded aspect of collection development work, to a substantial and integral part of North Sydney's historical collections and resources. It was also at this time that Margaret embarked upon her first formal study of oral history theory and practice under the expert and enthusiastic guidance of Janis Wilton at the University of New England.

Even Margaret's PhD from the University of Technology, Sydney, (awarded in 2003) is a testament to her interest in and skilful use of oral history in historical research and analysis. Margaret now lives in Canberra and is a freelance historian and researcher, specialising in social and place history and oral history work. She is currently a research assistant with the Australian Dictionary of Biography at the Australian National University. Living and working in Canberra is a historian's paradise with research and collecting institutions at one's fingertips. Margaret is working as a contract oral historian for the National Library and the Institution of Engineers through the Canberra Panel of Engineering Heritage Australia. She has also conducted an interview for ACT Parks and is working on several projects for the ACT National Trust.

Margaret has been a member of the OHAA (NSW) for over 10 years and a Committee member for more than 5 years. Apart from remaining on OHAA(NSW) Committee, she is also a committee member of the Engineering Heritage Panel (Canberra), the Friends of the National Library of Australia, the ACT National Trust's Heritage Committee and is a Councillor on the ACT National Trust.

## President's Report July 2004

---

Our 2003/2004 has been a most encouraging year. We have kept our membership numbers up to the 300's, but are keen to enlarge this number even further. There will be a strong drive to interest participants at the seminars to join the branch.

These seminars have been well attended and very well presented. Diane Armstrong gave her 'Oral History to Best Seller' to great acclaim in July 2003. 'Turning Professional' in November 2003 was presented by consultants Louise Darmody, Bob Mitchell and Laurel Wraight. These were full of practical advice, frank discussion of pitfalls and challenges, some wonderful outcomes and all very generously shared. In May 2004 we listened in fascination as Siobhàn McHugh related her experiences in interviewing leading architect, Harry Seidler. She gave us a practical lesson in the importance of very extensive research and of patient persistence leavened with her own brand of delicious humour. In addition her guide to interviewing at this level is unparalleled.

The Public History Interest Network (PHIN) is still going with its good circulation keeping members advised of interesting meetings and events. Since

Margaret Park's departure to Canberra we feel the lack of specially organised activities by our PHIN members, but we hope these may resume. Margaret herself gave a talk in March 2004 in Leichhardt on 'The rise of the Residents' Action Movement and its effect on North Sydney's Urban History and Development'.

Voiceprint continues on its informative and reliable way. Many thanks to editor, Joyce Cribb, for her tireless pursuit of contributors. Her full reports of the seminars are particularly valued by those who could not attend and have proved a valuable resource for everybody.

At the National Conference in Perth in September last year New South Wales proposed Richard Raxworthy and Judy Wing for Honorary Life Membership. Both felt very pleased with this richly deserved recognition, although sadly Richard died at Christmas. The WA branch organised a wonderful conference with a large participation by NSW members both in attending and giving papers.

There is an OHAA national conference due in 2005 and because Sydney is hosting the International Conference in 2006 and no other branch could hold a

meeting we have arranged the following. Our panel discussion groups will be included in the Australian Historians Association conference in July. This means that we will have the opportunity to meet as part of a very interesting conference of the AHA who are combining with the International Congress of Historical Sciences, the most important general association of historians, from 3-9 July 2005. To know more about this CISH conference you might like to consult their website at: <[www.cishsydney2005.org](http://www.cishsydney2005.org)>

Our panels will be held on 5-6 July and the topics are in brief:

Handling ethics and ethic committees; Talking communities; Oral history and its challenges – 1978 to date; Oral history and technology: the way forward. We shall be circulating information about the conference shortly.

As many of you know the International Oral History Association (IOHA) Conference will be hosted by NSW in Sydney. The proposed dates are Wednesday 12 (registration and welcome) to Sunday 16 July 2006. The theme is 'Dancing with Memory: Oral History and its Audiences'. More anon!

Rosie participated in a session of the 2004 AHA conference. This was on university ethics committees and their being presently still based on medical research and therefore largely inappropriate to history researchers.

This session flagged an important movement toward change.

As a result of the 2003 conference Lesley Jenkins has established an Independent Contractors Network which is very successful and much supported.

South Australia branch has for many years looked after the servicing of institutional members who subscribe through subscription agencies. NSW has now taken this over at their request. OHAA is much indebted to SA for their past endeavours.

My thanks as ever to our NSW committee – Stephanie Coleman (secretary), Berenice Evans (treasurer), and Margo Beasley, Michael Clarke, Joyce Cribb, Frank Heimans, Mary-Jill Johnston (Canberra), Margaret Park (Canberra), Diana Ritch, Peter Rubinstein and Alan Veenstra.

And thanks to all our members for their enthusiasm and support during the past year. **Rosie Block, President**

# IOHA Conference

Held in the Campodoglio, Capitoline Hill, Rome 23-26 June 2004

The theme: Memory and Globalization

---

This was a conference full of surprises and many delights. The biggest delight was to find ourselves part of the largest Australian contingent ever and under the (Australian) International President of the International Oral History Association (IOHA), Janis Wilton. The convener was Alessandro Portelli, who is a legend in the oral history world and held in visibly high regard by those there who knew him. Congratulations to him in having the city of Rome as a principal sponsor so that the marble floor, august portraits, hideously uncomfortable chairs and glorious view of the principal meeting room, the Sala della Protomoteca, were ours for these days. Congratulations also for attracting around 400 conference participants from over 40 different countries, and for scholarships available for a small number of participants who otherwise could not have attended the conference.

The first surprise was that the 'breakout' sessions (11 parallel sessions) were to take place in rooms around the base of the Capitol Hill and we spent a

delightful first few hours researching their whereabouts. The map furnished was hopeless, but 'You must understand Alessandro is a man of words' so the printed directions were reasonably clear with the odd lacuna of unnamed streets.

The opening address by Carlo Ginzburg focused on the conference theme and offered a taste of Italian intellectual life as Ginzburg took us on a Eurocentric journey from Plato to the internet. Acoustics were challenging and it is a pity that this paper is not included in the conference proceedings (available on CD-Rom as part of the conference package).

After this opening plenary session, surprise, surprise, the curtains in the lovely room were flung open and below on the terrace overhanging the Imperial Roman Forum was a delicious and totally (until then) unannounced welcome reception prepared. Much greeting and mingling followed and the conference was back on a high note.

The Conference is officially bilingual – Spanish and English. However, the bilingual, and sometimes multilingual, nature of the 'breakout' sessions, although expected, brought its own surprises. Rosie chaired 2 sessions, one

entirely in Spanish, and attended another where there was little attempt to translate the proceedings. An Italian presenter gave an interesting précis in English and then read his whole paper in Italian! By report very few of the 'breakout' sessions managed to field their full complement of speakers, and in one case they were refused the room and took refuge in a pub! However, the spirit was very positive and luckily the audiences (sometimes there was only one person) were good natured and often helped with the translating. There is a lesson here already learnt – in 2006 we shall have every speaker supply a single page précis translated in either Spanish or English.

Lesley attended a session entitled 'Families and Generations' and she was pleased she disregarded the advice proffered by Italian staff sharing the venue that the session was in another location. She soldiered on and eventually found the room along a labyrinthine corridor, but unhappily only three other attendees (including the third speaker) were as intrepid. But it was worth the effort as Kim Lacy Rogers from the United States provided a fascinating insight into the civil rights movement in Mississippi before proceeding to analyse the current grief, mourning and rage

felt by Black elders at developments since the 1960s. This complex series of reactions is evident despite statistics which point to a range of improvements in health, education and opportunity within the Black community.

Simultaneous translation took place in the main venue and this was wondrous. Almost all the sessions held here produced their full complement of speakers and topics included methodology, narrative, digital technologies and new media, religion, memory and history, digitisation (mainly editing for multimedia documentaries and a virtual archive of analogue recordings). Many of these papers begged for a 'hands-on' workshop to flesh out the detail and we have taken note for the Sydney Conference.

Some sessions attempted to challenge the boundaries of oral history and Paula Hamilton's paper, 'Shark! Oral History and Fear' was one which raised fascinating issues. The Australians were grateful that this paper was given after the decision to go to Sydney in 2006 – and that she made no mention of crocodiles and snakes!

Ever hopeful we were surprised at how little technical support (outside of the main room) was supplied. Even overhead projectors failed to make their humble appearance. However, the speakers tended to make do and the audiences were generally good natured

and the waiting was usually worthwhile. One of the sessions on film, for example, included a viewing of Nirmal Puwar's look at the important role local cinemas played as social gathering points for Indian immigrants in Coventry, England, from the 1940s to 1980.

There were also sessions where talking, sharing and discussion dominated. Examples included the panels entitled 'Telling to Live'. Here the participants explained their collaborative effort in constructing their own lifestories for the book of the same name, read excerpts from their work, and invited discussion about memories, audience responses (including family members), and the ways in which their experiences had informed their oral history practice.

Other sessions allowed experimentation with performance, explored urban spaces, remembered war and violence, connected oral history with health and healing, described and dissected diasporas and migration, presented the words and sounds of music and musicians, compared social movements, confronted changing and complex identities, contemplated the worlds of work and deconstructed laughter in recordings. Throughout, the emphasis was on comparing experiences across nations.

The final session on archives of repression proved a fitting conclusion to the varied emphases and power of the conference. It included an overview of the international Mauthausen Survivors' Archive, a look at the war in Sierra Leone during the 1990s, and a particularly powerful presentation from the last speaker, Estela Carlotto. Estela Carlotto spoke as part of the Madres de Plaza Mayo, a group of mothers and grandmothers of the 'disappeared ones' in Argentina. Her daughter, then pregnant, had been taken away by the military at the end of 1977. Later her body was returned to her mother for burial, but of the child, a boy, no trace at all. There is recently an attempt to make a DNA bank for future identification purposes. In the meantime these mothers and grandmothers make recordings of their family history and other stories so that should these lost children ever come to find their families there will be a voice, a connection. Her grandson would be 26 now and she lives in hope that before she dies he will find her, but if not, then she has left him her voice and his family. It was no surprise that we were all deeply moved. She was matter of fact – we were in tears.

We noted that the most poignant papers are often the ones best remembered because they fully utilise the enormous power of the first person narrative. Although Estela's story was a

painful one to hear she summed up the importance of her work for herself and others by saying, "You can't build a society without a memory" a reference to the early attempts to silence the group, and in closing, "love can do everything and essentially is everything".

In conclusion, if it is true that people remember conferences only for the food and the venue, the Rome conference will last as long as Trajan's Column (a near neighbour of the Campodoglio) and therefore etched forever on the consciousness of the participants! And even easier to read than the Column will be the collection of papers preserved on that handy CD. Memorable also were the

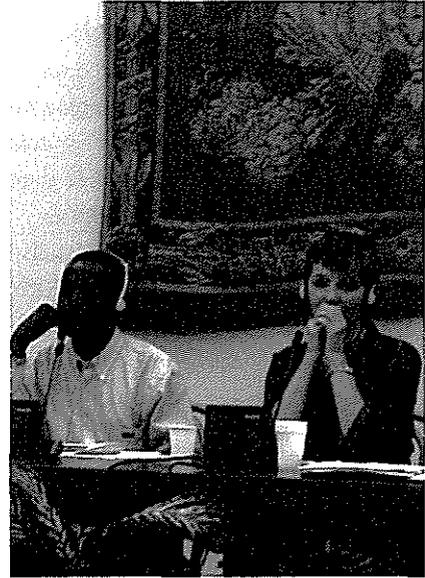
cultural tours offered as part of the conference package: visits to Rome Museums, a bus tour around the city, visits to sites of repression during World War II which was a powerful way to experience the context of Alessandro Portelli's latest book, *The Order has Been Carried Out: History, Memory and Meaning of a Nazi Massacre in Rome*

'PS The young volunteer staff wore t-shirts printed with the conference name and place – and the date read 26-23 June 2004. Well time does go backwards for oral historians we suppose!

**Rosie Block, Lesley Jenkins and Janis Wilton**



**Rosie Block & Lesley Jenkins at the Trevi Fountain (photographed by Helen Klaybe)**



**Simultaneous translation: Janis Wilton (right) at the final session of the conference (photographed by Helen Klaybe)**

## Seminar Report 8 May

A History of Convictions: Revisiting an interview with Harry Seidler – conducted by Siobhàn McHugh.

---

At our May seminar Siobhàn McHugh shared a wealth of information, a fascinating story. Siobhàn related the highs and the lows of the processes she followed in organising and conducting an interview with a famous and high profile personality. Members who were able to attend this seminar had an interesting, enlightening and most enjoyable morning. Siobhàn is a very experienced oral historian, writer, broadcaster and storyteller – all told with her delightful Irish accent! She obviously enjoyed meeting Harry Seidler and conducting the interview and the audience on that morning also enjoyed listening to her talk!

I afraid I am not able to relate to you all the whole story, especially with an Irish accent, but I did note some details of the processes and some of the advice and hints from Siobhàn's talk. I am sure this information will be of interest to members who may have the opportunity and the challenge to conduct a similar type of interview. This interview which Siobhàn conducted was commissioned

by the Historic Houses Trust of NSW. The interview was to be the definite interview – prompted by the fact that Harry Seidler was turning 80.

In her expression of interest to the Trust, Siobhàn made these points. The interview would reveal the man as well his architecture, would elicit opinion as well as information, analysis, reflections and above all passion (Siobhàn believes that it is important to find the passion that everyone has!). The interviewer would provide the conduit for the interviewee to tell his own story and reveal 'what makes him tick'. As an interviewer she could provide focus, empathy, engagement and keen attention. She also undertook to facilitate but to also probe where appropriate and overall to look for the 'big picture'.

The interview was programmed for 2 sessions and 4 hours of time. Siobhàn admits to only knowing about architecture and her interviewee in very general terms when she began the process. However she did know that if she was to hold the interest and attention of Harry Seidler for 4 hours she had to be very well prepared. In her budget for the project she allowed for

three weeks full time research. She indicated that it took all of that time to read books and articles, watch and listen to recorded material, confer with colleagues, friends and previous interviewers and visit the buildings which Harry Seidler had designed and constructed.

From all this information Siobhàn developed some 21 pages of questions, 200 in all. These she organised and grouped into themes. She had also noted 'quotes' and earlier published opinions to use in seeking current views on particular topics. As the interview was being conducted for the Trust the questions and planned outline of the interview was submitted to the Trust seeking further direction or input into the plan. Once the plan was prepared Siobhàn was able to memorise it sufficiently so she could concentrate on her interviewee and not her papers. Siobhàn feels that it is important to have sufficient knowledge to be able to engage your interviewee with a genuine interest. This also allowed her to follow where the interviewee lead the discussion and to have sufficient confidence to return to the plan when appropriate. The interview was filmed, a whole technical crew in attendance,

which provided a further distraction, thus, knowing her material well allowed her to maintain the all important eye contact required. Siobhàn explained that she would prefer to be in control of the equipment herself, as on this occasion the crew ran late and the lights blew out three times! With such distractions she found she has to work hard to overcome them – time to tell her Irish joke! She explained that at times you feel like an entertainer or performer and have to 'fill in' to keep the interview in focus.

It was obvious to those present that even a very experienced interviewer like Siobhàn found the process a challenge, but it was also obvious just how much she had enjoyed meeting Harry Siedler and how she had come to respect the man and his work – a learning experience. Thank you to Siobhàn for sharing with us!

**Joyce Cribb**

## Seminar Report 31 July

Alternative Views – Oral History with Indigenous and Ethnic Communities  
presented by: Roslyn Burge, Dr Heather Goodall and Lucy Porter.

---

The seminar held on 31 July featured three speakers, Roslyn Burge, Dr Heather Goodall and Lucy Porter. The speakers had experience with different indigenous and ethnic communities but in reality they described experiences and stories with a similar theme. Roslyn Burge, Centre for Public History, spoke of the project, *The Tamils and their Neighbours*. This was commissioned by the Strathfield Public Library and funded by a development grant from the Library Council of NSW. Heather Goodall told us of her experience in working with Isabel Flick an Aboriginal woman, who wanted to write a book about her life experiences so her knowledge would be passed on to future generations. The book *Isabel Flick: The Many Lives of an Extraordinary Aboriginal Woman* has now been published by Allen & Unwin. Heather is still working on a project to record the story of the Vietnamese community and their experience in this country. She shared a number of these stories with us. Lucy Porter of the Older

Women's Network spoke of the Support Circle the Network formed for Aboriginal women to tell their stories. These stories have now been published by the Network as a book *Steppin' Out and Speakin' Up*.

All speakers spoke of the memories that their interviewees recalled of life and events in another land as was the case for the Tamil and Vietnamese people. For the Aboriginal interviewees their memories were attached to places important to their cultural heritage as well as past experiences. It was most interesting how the speakers found the different cultural groups treasured and struggled to nurture their cultural traditions in new and different environments. They also told of the way people changed and adapted some of their past traditions to a new environment.

Roslyn told us how many of the Tamils felt they were connected to two homes or two lands. Most had left Sri Lanka because of the riots in the 1980's and the continuing racial tensions meant that opportunities for their children were limited. The majority had settled in and around Strathfield as it was close to good schools providing opportunities for their children. The centrality of the

suburb provided connections for the community to meet and develop their cultural identity.

Heather said the connection to place was important in invoking memories – this was especially so for Isabel Flick. Isabel wanted to be at the place she was talking about while she was speaking about the place and its meaning for her. Heather also felt that the order in which people choose to introduce others to places has a particular significance for them. There is a need to reflect on how people are engaging with a place. “Memory work is not only looking backwards but engaging and looking forward.”

Lucy Porter of the Older Women’s Network (OWN) told how the aim of the OWN Aboriginal Support Circle was to “understand Aboriginal initiatives and concerns and support Aboriginal women especially in areas of social justice, health and education. To comprehend and understand what Aboriginal people were saying our motto became LISTEN,LEARN AND UNDERSTAND.” Aboriginal women were invited to speak at the group – they have had more than 40 women tell their stories. Three years ago they decided that the stories should be known to the wider community and a

decision was made to publish them in a book. The story of gathering the stories on tape, and the whole process of finding the money, the work involved in finally getting to publication was in itself another fascinating story!

A rewarding and enjoyable morning – a wealth of information shared! Thank you to Roslyn, Heather and Lucy.

**Joyce Cribb**

## ARTICLES

### Jack – By Virginia Macleod

---

*I was working as curator of a local studies collection, which included about thirty or forty oral histories recorded on audio-cassettes. I had a time when I drove right across Sydney regularly and took the opportunity to get acquainted with the collection. It was fascinating. I hardly registered my journey or contemporary Sydney, but was immersed in the past of the Northern Beaches and met a whole new range of people. It was also a practical lesson about the power that such recordings have to bring the past to the present, not so much events, but language and individuals. This article is an attempt to introduce someone who had a particular impact on me and to try to capture the flavour of his language. VM.*

I feel I know Jack although I never met him. I could have as I was surprised to see his funeral notice in the local paper recently. It gave me a pang of regret that I could have known him and questioned him more about his life. I'd heard his recorded story several times with increasing interest and affection for this unknown hero.

For Jack was a hero, not world famous, but an important part of ordinary local life. His was the generation that grew up in the shadow of the Anzacs and lived through the darkness of the Depression. He and his fellows were young in the brightness of the 1920s and became new icons of Australia.

Jack's is a story told by a man of seventy-five recalling his youth. A story coloured by both his modesty and confidence.

Jack grew up in Pymont and Bronte. At fourteen, like almost everybody did, he left school and started work. By the time he was seventeen he was working as a joiner's assistant in Pymont travelling to and from Bronte everyday, giving 25shillings (half his earnings) to his mother. Jack's older brother wanted to do something for the North Narrabeen Surf Club, bring in extra swimmers, so he suggested that Jack join. Jack realised his brother wanted to keep an eye on him to see that he didn't do the wrong thing, but for Jack it was a weekend away from home.

On Friday after work Jack would buy a baked rabbit, if he could afford the tenpence, or alternatively a cheaper

pound of peanuts. He was happy to catch the ferry to Manly and then the tram to Narrabeen.

He would spend each weekend at Hillcrest, a camp for men only. The camps were rented cottages, carefully maintained by their young tenants, who even polished all the brass taps and light fittings. The other men's camps had more remarkable names – Dante's Inferno, Tres Bon, Bachelors, This'll Do, Why Worry, Why Not. There were women's camps, Audley End, Farmers, Pom Pom. Segregation was strictly maintained with the police even enforcing it at times.

His brother and friends would go to the local store for a breakfast of three eggs and bacon costing one shilling and sixpence. Jack's funds were limited, so saying he was needed on the beach early, he'd buy half a loaf of bread and a tin of beans and head off.

The weekend revolved around the beach and swimming. Surf life saving was for men. The lifesaver swam out with a belt attached by a cord to a reel and supported the person in distress, while the team wound them in to shore. The belts were cork and very heavy, the cord when wet weighed a man down, it was struggle to swim out with them.

Jack was a swimmer, not a belt man. He swam in the surf, a separate event, helped wind in the belt and manned the surf boat.

Surf carnivals and competitions brought together clubs from along the Northern beaches. Competition between clubs was keen and there was often punching and fighting under cover of the surf. Although they would all have a beer together afterwards. Some of the events sounded more light-hearted, different races – sack, obstacle, caterpillar, wheelbarrow, musical flags, pillow fight and bun-eating contests! There was even a ladies race, open to any one, the prize – a sunshade!

Women were excluded from the action as Jack said, "It was man's world. In our day they weren't even allowed to sit on the steps." The story was different when there were competitions and functions then women were needed, "to get cups of tea ready and cut sandwiches and that sort of thing... jolly good workers they were too."

On Saturday nights the barriers were down and men and women mingled. Jack's cousin a good pianist was invited to Ocean House to entertain thirty or forty guests, including girls, and the others (men) went to see "what the population was like". The highlight was the Saturday night dance. Etiquette was clear, strictly no drinking and all dancing, with men dressed up in their

blazers and creams. Men and women came by bus, tram or occasionally car, from as far away as Palm Beach and Manly. The Rivoli and the Masonic Hall at Collaroy were eclipsed by North Narrabeen Club. For the first month of the summer each week a different band auditioned, playing without charge, and the one considered most popular played for the rest of the season.

When Jack lost his job during the Depression he moved to North Narrabeen doing odd jobs in return for a hot shower and a feed. Mostly he collected and chopped firewood, but a highlight was French polishing a sideboard for which he was paid five pounds. He was offered a job at a surf club on the northern coast of NSW, but the local community valued him too highly and arranged a job which would keep him at Narrabeen. He lived there for the rest of his life.

Jack was a member of North Narrabeen Surf Life Saving Club for 72 years, 61 of them as an honoured life member. During those years he was club champion, club captain, club president and chief instructor. He was also a member of the 1948 Olympic water polo team. I only discovered this when I read his obituary, the man I knew from his own story merely said: "Being a life saver

was harder in those days. In the old days it was just a man and his belt. Nowadays with their rubber duckies and their little speed boats hopping around they can do all that while a man's still getting a belt on, and they've got the rescue boat and the helicopter if they need them. If it's too big for the rubber duckies along comes a chopper and picks them up..."

When he was eighty one his comment was: "There was certainly an enormous sense of pride involved. You shoulder a great responsibility for the public and their safety. The thing I remember most was the friendliness and peacefulness. Weekends doing nothing else but being together."

*Jack King, interview recorded by Josephine Tait, 1984, Local History Resource Unit. Bibliography: Manly Daily, 20/5/1991, 7/3/2000. North Narrabeen Surf & Life Saving Club Official Programme, 2/4/1923.*

# A Challenge to Oral History

By Barbara Harris, Co-ordinator, Emmanuel Self Help Centre for Disabilities.  
Western Australia

---

*(This article was first published in Play Back , Newsletter of the Western Australian Branch of the Oral History Association of Australia; Volume 25 Number 3, August 2004. We acknowledge the assistance of Play Back and its Editor in enabling Voiceprint to present this article for the interest of NSW members) Ed.*

What makes the past come alive is the sense of immediacy that only an eyewitness can give. Those who were there can electrify us; totally consume us by their stories about things that influenced their lives. These stories explain to us ourselves. How we become who we are now. If we do not keep our history, we will remain stunted in our growth. The Roman writer Cicero said, "Where experience is not retained... infancy is perpetual."

What is it that we historians do? In simple terms history is gathered as a collection of facts, events, experiences of people or times that a person (the historian) or group of people (historians) deem to be significant. This raises questions about what are our criteria for significance?

There is often a suggestion that those of us involved in oral history offer something different, more real than printed text, more in touch because oral history focuses on ordinary stories. But there is a danger that our modis

operandi is the same. We can be as selective as anyone.

How does one select?

How is oral history expressed?

How do we deal with people who are not able to articulate? What significance is there in silence?

In counteracting tendencies toward individualism that encourage loneliness and foster a sense of alienation, a first step is to connect with one's history, to discover one's place in the larger community. We as oral historians can be important channels for enabling this understanding to occur.

Oral history has the ability to provide an added dimension to a black and white printed text by the "real" voice, intonation, inflections, use of grammar, choice of words.

While the spectrum of experience is broadened with an oral history, let's not kid ourselves that we are necessarily doing a complete job because to take part in that process a person needs to be somewhat articulate in what is deemed

to be “normal” language. The “norm” for oral history projects seems to cover, listening, talking, writing and reading – but my experience is that this is not for everyone.

Having worked in the area of disability for the last 27 years I quickly began to question the definition of “normality”. While I have no definitive answers, I offer some observations.

Involving the total community in our oral histories can help us to demystify difference and to break out of our parochialism. It is a way of realising in some way that we share a common planet and history. It has a way of enlarging our sense of life, of wonder, a way of connecting ourselves to people whom we would never have known. Nevertheless, they have played a role in shaping our history. It can turn out to be quite an adventure. These stories can take hold within our psyche and contribute to our image of who we are and how that happened.

To begin to understand ourselves, we must delve into our history. I see this as twofold:

- the personal, familial history and
- the social, cultural history.

The latter is based in our community, actually the many communities of which we are a part. For example, we can have a family community, a work community, a social community, a religious community and a sporting community to mention just a few. Family history and community histories together lead to world history.

### **What is Community History?**

Community is made up of individuals and to get a truer picture of any community perhaps we need to explore who are still being missed out in an oral history project; for example: people who are deaf; have English as a second language; and those who find it difficult to articulate.

An easily overlooked point is that oral history storytelling, to keep its authenticity, must be reciprocal. People feel secure when another welcomes them through attentive listening. That is, the interviewer and the interviewee must establish some rapport. Each time one or the other shares in the event created by an oral historian, a rapport is established and a sense of the other is communicated that can lead to further eventual sharings. This openness to each other acts as a key to unlocking treasures that might otherwise remain hidden.

A particular area of concern for me is that people with disabilities have a view of history that others will never share in unless that history is made available. At the same time formats need to be encouraged and developed to ensure maximum reciprocity. I get worried when I hear suggestions that the "tape" in oral history isn't necessary if you have the "text" and vice versa. I believe that we need the tape, the text, the video, the photo, the...?

In communication with people with disabilities who do not use words to communicate one learns much in the face-to-face situation, the person's body language, the expressions on their faces, the direction of their gaze, their physical agitation or lack of it. The visual, tactile cues we take for granted when accompanied with the spoken word require more attention. Building up a story with people who are non verbal can take time. There is an even greater need to develop a sense of trust. In a world of "instant" these delays can be frustrating.

One issue of reflection that has become very significant to me personally is that of silence. We have all experienced silence. What is to be made of this silence? Silence can be a time for gathering one's thoughts; making a decision to share or not to share; sitting with a painful memory. My experience with those who articulate in a different

way has made me go deeper. Does the question fail to stimulate? Is the question understood? Is the question just too difficult to be responded to? Maybe there is no way that the person can respond. The person may just not have the language in any shape or form to say what could be said. The completely silent response, often passed off as a lack of formal response, can have an even greater more complex meaning.

How best to gather and present oral histories is a dilemma for a group of people belonging to a parish community. For example, a parishioner for 15 years who has greeted the parishioners at the door with a weekly bulletin and has participated in parish socials of all kinds has very little verbal language. Amanda (not her real name) can barely string 5 words together in a sentence. Yet, with limited language and understanding Amanda has been a real sign of welcome for those coming to the church service. Her beaming smile and genuine "glad to see you" attitude lifts all who meet her. At parish social events Amanda lights up the room with her laughter and "give it a go" manner be it dancing or singing or whatever.

The dilemma is, how do we get her story for the parish history? The 'normal'

interview style would not be appropriate. One could ask some relevant easy vocabulary questions. Another approach might be to use pictures and let Amanda speak to them. In any case it would likely take very many sessions spread out over a few months time frame to gather her story.

There have been many changes in technology over the last twenty years. One man who is profoundly deaf tells the story of how he was looking for a job. The man was very intelligent but was unable to read English and of course unable to use the telephone. He became significant in the community as a statistic in the area of unemployment in Western Australia. His predicament however, was noted by a hearing person in the community who happened to be able to communicate in Auslan. (Australian Sign Language for Deaf People). Through his sharing of his story to one hearing person in Western Australia, the story became part of the events that shape world history. It was through this one man's challenge to Telstra that Deaf people in Australia have access to telecommunication devices today. The significance of this man's challenge in Australia had implications for the whole community. Deaf and

hearing people now had a means for direct telecommunication not only in Australia but throughout the world. World history was made.

One way of telling the deaf man's story is to video him telling his story in Auslan. Sharing his story in the wider community could mean translating it or captioning the video with printed text. Generally it will be a hearing person that would do the interpreting. If his story remains only within the deaf community then the neighbour in the flat next door to this profoundly deaf man would never suspect that the deaf man in his silent world helped to shape world history.

These are only a few observations. They perhaps bring up more questions than answers. I believe that as more historians become aware of a whole body of most interesting and vital resources the richer will be our collective histories.



# Maths, Marbles, Mates & Mischief: A History of Lindfield Public School. 1903-2003

Tracey Fiertl and Jane Oakshot; Published by Lindfield Public School Centenary Committee 2003; ISBN 0 646 42608 7.

---

The major input or perhaps the driving force behind this publication to celebrate 100 years of education at Lindfield Public School was made by two oral historians and current parents at the school, Tracey Fiertl and Jane Oakshot. The book of almost 200 pages traces the history of the school and the Lindfield community for over 100 years. Tracey and Jane commented in their forward that the Department of Education advised that 'their records were limited, particularly after 1945 and that they should contact former students to help them'. The current students interviewed many former students and quotes from these interviews form quite a delightful oral history commentary to the historical text and illustrations in the book.

The history has been compiled from a rich variety of sources and the finished publication is greatly enhanced by the wealth of illustrations. There are copies of letters, documents and newspaper cuttings, some over 100 years old related to the establishment of the school, and photographs of many of the pupils and

events that illustrate the activities of the school over its 100 year history and lots of photographs of the current pupils and parents and staff. I am sure all current pupils will in time come to treasure their copy of the history with its array of photographs and list of names of 2003 pupils. The past and the present day all feature.

Overall it is a very interesting and enjoyable book 'to read,' 'to look at' with 'words' from 'the past' and from '2003', that tell the story of 100 years of history of Lindfield Public School. **Joyce Cribb**



## Committee Meeting Dates for 2004

12 October; 30 November.

Members are welcome to attend the Management Committee meetings held at the State Library 5.30pm.

## Next Seminar, 6 November, CISH Conference, Sydney

3-9 July 2005

<[www.cishsydney2005.org](http://www.cishsydney2005.org)>

## IOHA Conference, Sydney

12-16 July 2006

## Noticeboard



Noticeboard  
Noticeboard  
Noticeboard  
Noticeboard  
Noticeboard

---

### Oral History Transcription Service

Professional transcriber.

Reasonable rates.

Contact Gabrielle Godard on

Ph: 9331 8864. Fax: 9331 8863

<[karvan@bigpond.com](mailto:karvan@bigpond.com)>

Urgent work accommodated.

---

---

### Memory Moments

Life stories recorded on

Video / DVD

Contact Laurel Wraight

Ph: 9688 1151

[wraight@bigpond.com.au](mailto:wraight@bigpond.com.au)

---

---

**Treasure your family stories?**

Louise Darmody, former ABC radio journalist can record your family's precious stories with sound effects and music on a beautifully presented CD.

Call "*Sound Memories*".

Tel: (02) 9925 0492

Mob: 0408 630 803

E-mail: [louised@bigpond.net.au](mailto:louised@bigpond.net.au)

---

---

**Family Chronicles**

- > Life Story interviews for families
  - > Talks for seniors & community groups (Probus, Hostels, etc) on:
    - Oral History & life stories
    - Reminiscence & memorabilia
    - Memory therapy
- Call Bob Mitchell Ph: 9520 9232  
mobile: 0421 521 6638
- 

---

**Oral History Audio and Video services.**

Film your story or subject!

Transfer your audio tapes (micro and standard) to CD or to DVD, the best archival format, and keep audio at best quality for years.

Digital editing of tapes also available – make your radio documentary.

Call Sandra at *Why Documentaries*

Ph/Fax: 02 4285 3545

Po Box 28 Bulli 2516

[sandra@whydocumentaries.com.au](mailto:sandra@whydocumentaries.com.au)

---



## Special Offer – Selling out last stocks

---

Oral History Handbook – 4th edition by Beth M Robertson

Available for \$10 per copy

Please send me

Copies of the Handbook.

Payment of (by cheque/money order) enclosed \$.....

Please post to –

.....  
Name

.....  
Address

.....  
Post Code

.....  
*Please copy this order form and send order to: OHAA, c/- Oral History Program,  
State Library of NSW, Macquarie Street, Sydney 2000.*

---