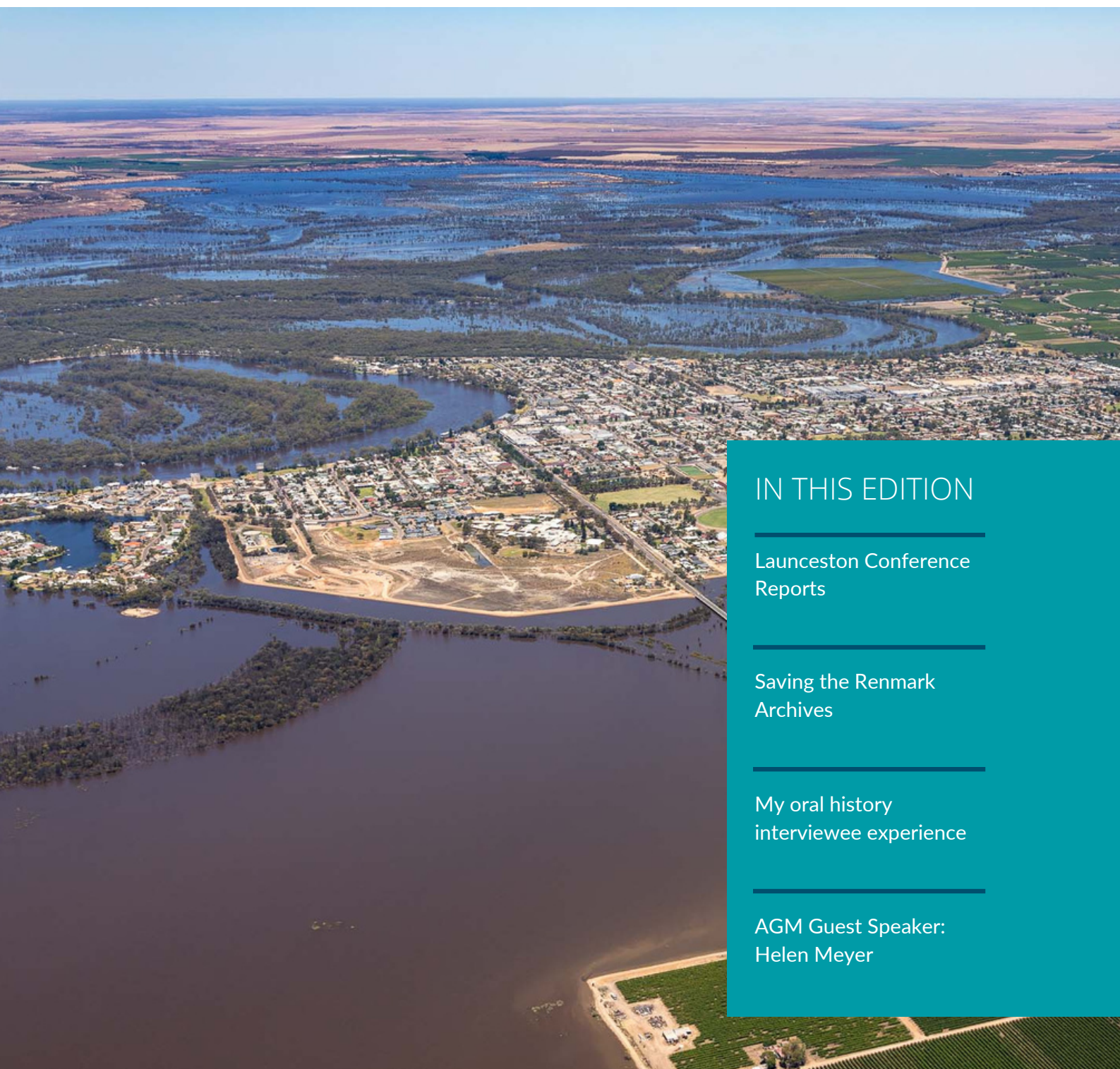




WORD OF MOUTH

AUTUMN 2023 | NUMBER 82



IN THIS EDITION

Launceston Conference
Reports

Saving the Renmark
Archives

My oral history
interviewee experience

AGM Guest Speaker:
Helen Meyer

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Editors' letter

Welcome to the 2023 Autumn issue of 'Word of Mouth' from your new co-editors. We come to you from beautiful Kurna Yarta in South Australia and acknowledge Kurna Meyunna as caretakers of the lands, waterways, skies, and beings of this region. We are so excited to have taken on this role and would like to thank the members of the committee who were so generous with their time and assistance in preparing this edition.

Some highlights from this issue include an article recounting the efforts to save the Renmark Irrigation Trust Archives from flooding last year, quite a touching account of a man's experience being interviewed, and a report from the delayed OHA Biennial Conference that was well worth the wait. There was a great turnout from our SA/NT cohort!

We would like to encourage anyone with a suitable idea to reach out to us at editor@oralhistoryaustraliasant.com.au so that we can share your thoughts and projects in future WOM editions. It is collectively, as the OHA SA/NT community, that we hope to continue filling these newsletters with exciting and relevant content from our valued members.

Happy reading!

Sincerely,
Dante and Carly

About Oral History Australia SA/NT

The objectives of Oral History Australia Inc. are to promote the practice and methods of oral history; to educate in the use of oral history methods; to encourage discussion on all aspects of oral history; and to foster the preservation of oral history records in Australia.

Committee: David Sweet (President); Dianne Korare (Secretary); Carolyn Collins (Treasurer); Christeen Schoepf (Membership Secretary); Judy Bailey (Website); Karen McDonough; William Martin; Sally Stephenson; Enid Woodley.

Annual membership fees:

Individual \$40; Institution \$65; Household \$55; Student/Unemployed/Pensioner \$30

Editors: Dante DeBono and Carly Heinrich, editor@oralhistoryaustraliasant.org.au

Contributions to 'Word of Mouth' (Spring, 2023) should reach the editors by 31 August 2023



Oral History Australia, SA/NT

PO Box 163,
Barmera SA 5345

ISSN 0813-1392

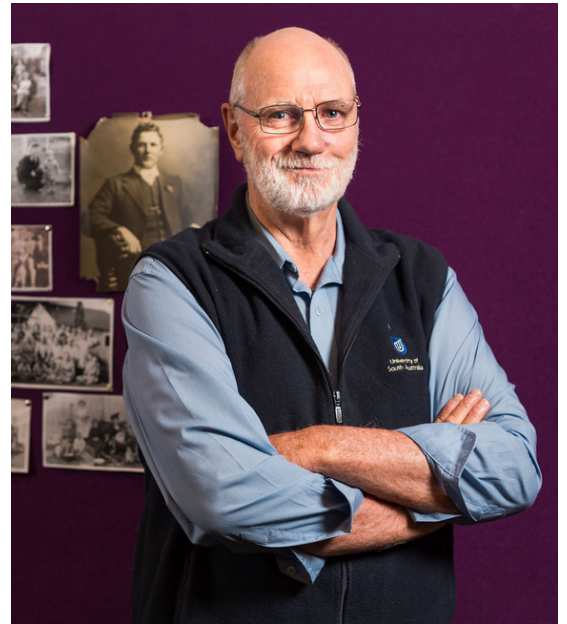
The views expressed in Word of Mouth are not necessarily those of Oral History Australia (SA/NT Association) Inc.

President's Report

David Sweet

This is the first publication of 'Word of Mouth' for twelve months, and congratulations to our new editors Dante and Carly for not only accepting the volunteer role, but producing an interesting and informative Autumn edition.

It is unfortunate that history does not have the same support from the political, bureaucratic, and educational areas it once had. All too often public protesting or the threat of wanton destruction is the only way our heritage is saved from the wrecking ball of ill-considered progress. As the centre State and Territory of Australia we are unique in that our development has evolved with the ability to photographically record the past (almost) 190 years. Yet history is frequently pushed to the background, not recognised for the value it offers current and future generations.



Dr David Sweet, photo supplied

It can be argued that this lack of appreciation and understanding of history and heritage has deeper issues. Recently, the government has had to provide \$400,000 to protect the Koonalda Cave on the Nullarbor Plain. Vandalism had damaged some 30,000 year-old Aboriginal art. Whether our history is only a handful of years or thousands, its preservation is critical. Unfortunately, vandalism of our history takes many forms.

Apparently, Al Capone is the reason we have expiration dates on milk. After his niece became extremely ill from bad milk, the powerful Chicago gangster lobbied aggressively for expiration dates to be put on milk for the safety of children and pregnant woman. Many of us have used the magnificent and unique digital collection 'Trove' for research, or just general interest. There has been significant concern recently that funding for this resource will be significantly cut. The time for lobbying has passed. However, the upcoming May Federal Budget will provide the answers to its survival. Has the lobbying had an impact? And if not, what more can be done?

We know lobbying can work; we just have to do it.

OHA SA/NT is a small, specialist history organisation and gaining support, members, and volunteers is becoming an increasing challenge. It appears one of the outcomes of the COVID years is that people have become a little more introspective and less volunteering has been an unfortunate biproduct. Many other local history-based groups are experiencing similar challenges in membership numbers and in some organisations, falling by up to twenty percent.

Over the past decade our membership has fluctuated, with the largest influx of members in conjunction with the very successful 'she said he said' OHA National Conference held in Adelaide in 2013. The recent National Conference (2022) in Launceston was similarly a wonderful event. The 2024 Conference is already being planned for Melbourne.

The venue is Trinity Gatehouse, Parkville, Melbourne; a beautiful modern venue, excellent plenary, breakout and social spaces, opening onto lawns, alongside University of Melbourne, close to Lygon Street and university cafés, and accommodation. Pencil in the dates of November 21-24. The working title is 'The Power of Oral History: Risks, Rewards and Possibilities'.

It is SA/NT's turn to run the National Conference in 2026, in 43 months' time. This is an early and important call for your thoughts and suggestions. Speak to a Committee Member or email your ideas through to me.

As oral historians we are aware of the power of the voice. Initially orality was remembered through memory and the stories passed on through the generations. Then with technology, the voice could be recorded and now this has expanded into podcasts, video recordings, and one can argue, a reliance on technology. Does an interview have to be perfect to be of value? How much should we rely on the ever-evolving technology? How do we future proof our already ageing collections? How do we capture all those 'other' interviews sitting in people's homes?

Recognition of the great work being undertaken by oral historians is vital in getting the message out into the wider community. Check out the History Council of SA's call for nominations for Excellence in Oral History Award: <https://historycouncilsa.org.au/hcsa-historian-awards/>. The deadline for submissions has been extended until Monday, 17th of April.

The SA/NT Committee is a keen and hard-working group and I thank them for their dedication to oral history and our organisation. Especially as I have been on the recovering sick list for a few months. You, as members, are the heart of oral history in SA and NT so any thoughts, ideas, or help that you can contribute will be appreciated.

David Sweet
State President
OHA SA/NT

STOP PRESS: The ABC reported on April 3 that funding for Trove had been secured. Over the coming four years, \$9.2 million has been guaranteed by the government specifically for Trove. A great result, but complacency must not settle on any historic collection or meaningful project.

David



Launceston Conference Report: 'Oral history in troubling times: Opportunities and challenges'

Christeen Schoepf & Carolyn Collins

After a pandemic induced delay, about twelve members and several partners of Oral History SA/NT travelled to Launceston, Tasmania during one of the most treacherous weather events of the decade to attend the biennial Oral History Australia conference, 'Oral History in Troubling Times: Opportunities and Challenges', held in mid-October, 2022. As I travelled from Crystal Brook in the mid-north of South Australia and was faced with several detours just to get to the airport, I wondered how many would not make the journey because of the weather. It rained, and it rained, and oh, then it rained! And it had been for days across the country. Roads were cut and planes delayed. To my knowledge, however, everyone who was supposed to be there made the trip, and it was so worth the three years wait! Held on the beautiful country of the Panninher and Leterrermairrener peoples at a magnificent venue known as The Tramsheds Function Centre, the conference was preceded by a day of workshops aimed at honing our existing skillsets and introducing us to new ones—from interpreting memories, interviewing and the art of asking questions, to producing finished products such as podcasts and mobile-based audio walks from oral histories. Sessions were well attended with the day culminating in a 'Welcome Reception'. It is always exciting to catch up with friends made at previous conferences and meet and make new ones, and this conference was no exception. Many had not physically seen each other since the Brisbane conference and there was plenty to catch up on. The food was fabulous, and the wine flowed a plenty, but it was the friendships that were reignited and the burgeoning relationships that were the highlight of the evening.

Nine members of the South Australian team spoke on a myriad of topics from the experiences of Australian women educators in Papua New Guinea; using archives and oral history to research



frontier violence; the working lives of Holden employees in Adelaide; an oral history of the South Australian Greens; our colonial past; non-monosexual experiences; and the ethical, moral, and legal ramifications of conducting oral history interviews. All were well received by those attending.

The OHA SA/NT cohort at the Biennial Conference in Launceston, October 2022
Photo supplied by Judy Hughes

Paul Sendziuk, The end of the line: comparing General Motors Holden's and its workers' perception and experience of employee separation

Paul Sendziuk, a lecturer at the University of Adelaide, examined the closure of General Motors Holden and the experience of employee separation, from both the perspective of the company and the employees themselves. Drawing on oral history interviews undertaken with former workers as well as company documents, he compared and analysed the way in which the two parties understood what was happening and the effectiveness of programs aimed at helping Holden workers transition to new employment. In some cases, as Paul showed, perceptions and reality were poles apart.

Dianne Korare, Entwined lives, divided roles: oral histories of Australian women educators in Papua New Guinea, 1974-99

Di Korare gave us an insight into her fascinating research and former life as an educator in Papua New Guinea, which is now the subject of her PhD studies at Flinders University. Di has been undertaking interviews with retired teachers who are also her former colleagues and she spoke about the challenges and practical implications of conducting oral history projects where the researcher is both participant and observer. Di was awarded the OHA SA/NT's bursary to attend the conference, and you can read her full report on page 8.

Skye Krichauff, 'Reconciling with the frontier': Juxtaposing oral histories and archival research

Skye Krichauff, a senior researcher based at the University of Adelaide, explained how archival research and oral histories are being used to map and make publicly available incidents of cross-cultural violence in colonial South Australia. She argued that while historical documents provide details of confrontations long since forgotten and a base through which to demonstrate the extent, nature, and longevity of a broad range of violent events, the oral histories of Aboriginal people and settler descendants provide a means through which to understand how the violence of colonialism has been remembered and made sense of through the generations. Skye along with fellow editor Carla Pascoe Leahy also launched the 2022 edition of the national journal, *Studies in Oral History*, at the Launceston conference. The journal can be accessed here: <https://oralhistoryaustralia.org.au/journal/journal-overview/>



David Faber, Writing Green Light: A brief oral political history of the Australian Greens (SA) 1995-2020 in Troubling Times, 2018-2021

A Tasmanian ex-pat and long-term South Australian resident, David Faber shared some of the issues and challenges in planning and conducting an oral history of the South Australian Branch of the Australian Greens as part of the 25th anniversary of its incorporation against the troubling times of climate change—and climate politics.

Dante DeBono, Exploring non-monosexual experiences using oral history

Dante presented examples from three oral history interviews recorded with young Australians with non-monosexual orientations. She advocated for a holistic approach to research on the LGBTQ+ population that promotes inclusivity and diversity within the queer studies field that enhances the volume of the voices of those directly involved. She argued that past scholarship has been dominated by those who identify as homosexual rendering other sexualities invisible and silent.

Carly Heinrich, 'It's all chat, chat, chat, but no one's listening': Reckoning with colonial pasts to build more just futures

This paper revisited Heinrich's 2019 thesis and explored three oral histories of First Nations peoples who resided on Kurna Yarta in SA. Each had experienced homelessness and used non-Aboriginal services to assist them in their plight. Heinrich explored the disconnects that occur when Indigenous people are spoken over, for, and about, but rarely with, while their ways of knowing, being, and doing continue to be undermined.

Christeen Schoepf, 'A picture of the past in the people's own words'

Christeen works as a Historical Archaeologist and is Membership Secretary of OHA SA/NT. At the 2022 AGM she was elected as the SA representative on the National Committee of OHA. Her paper presented examples of why Beth Robertson's notions of oral history being "a picture of the past in people's own words" do not always provide accurate representations of a locality's history or individual experience. Through the lens of some real, but unidentified case studies, Christeen examined how not all recorded words and memories truly capture the journey.



Sue Anderson and David Sweet, Whose story? A case of possible litigation

Sue and David established the Oral History Hub (nicknamed ohh...) in 2018 at the University of SA to collect oral history interviews that were falling through the cracks and not being deposited at the SLISA or other repositories. This paper discussed an interview David had conducted with a colleague and the events that transpired with the colleague's family upon his death. While the interviewee had consented for the interview and transcript to be uploaded to ohh... one family member was not happy and deemed the interview defamatory. Bitter and aggressive correspondence was received by ohh... who did not remove the interview from the website as the family member had asked. Consideration was given during the paper as to the questions such behaviour raises for oral historians and who has the right to veto an interviewee's story when permission has been given.

The AGM was held on Saturday afternoon. President Al Thomson's report can be found here: <https://oralhistoryaustralia.org.au/wp-content/uploads/OHA-Presidents-report-to-AGM-2022.pdf>.

The 2022 Hazel de Berg Award, Media Award, and Book Award were also presented and the journal Studies in Oral History for 2022 was officially launched. The conference proper began with a fabulous and very poignant Welcome to Country in Palawa Kani, the language of the Tasmanian Aboriginal peoples followed by a welcome from OHA President, Al Thomson, and a moving and most interesting address by the Governor of Tasmania, Her Excellency the Honourable Barbara Baker AC. Mark Cave was the first of the plenary speakers, speaking about how he and his team find ways to capture the experiences of witnesses and first responders in the aftermath of crises. Mark is from New Orleans and has often spoken on his research and interviewing at oral history conferences internationally. Some of his work can be found here: <https://www.wwno.org/people/mark-cave>.

Other plenary speakers took us outside of our comfort zones, and our boxes, and tested our thoughts on many topics relating to oral history. Unfortunately, the planned post conference tours were disrupted by the continued inclement weather and the sheer amount of water gushing through the rivers and gorges flooding the Tamar. Fortunately, I had chosen to venture to the Beaconsfield Mine and Heritage Centre and our excursion proceeded without issue. A bus took about eight participants to Beaconsfield, where we learned of the history of the township and the contribution of the mine to the fortunes and tribulations of the local community. The tour was both emotive and very educational and the bus ride revealed some of Tasmania's most beautiful, splendid visions. Thank you to the Oral History Australia Tasmania team headed by long term president Jill Cassidy, and most ably assisted by Virginia Greenhill Karin Le, Alison Johnston, Jai Peterson, Leonie Prevost, Cindy Thomas, and Lana Wall for a magnificent few days of oral history, oral historians, collegiality and friendship. Victoria will certainly have a lot to consider for their own conference to be held in 2024. I am sure they will deliver the goods! See you all there.



Talking about Teaching: Papua New Guinea

Dianne Korare

I would like to thank Oral History SA/NT for the bursary that they gave me to attend the OHA conference in Launceston last October. It was well worth waiting a year due to COVID to be able to attend a face-to-face conference with such a wonderful group of oral historians.

My PhD research at Flinders University is directed at the working lives of Australian women teachers who taught in international education in Papua New Guinea. Their story is told through the lens of their experiences at Port Moresby International School (PMIS) during the period 1976-1999. PMIS was established in 1960 to cater for the children of (mostly Australian) expatriates working in PNG.

I arrived in Port Moresby, PNG in 1974 as a young teacher. After a short time, teaching at Gordons Provincial High School, I took on a position as sociology lecturer at Bomana Police College. It was there that I met my future husband, Philip, the father of our three children; he was from the West New Britain Province of PNG. After spending a year in Mount Hagen, in the highlands, we returned to Port Moresby where, pregnant with our first child, I took on the position of Maths/Science teacher at what was then called Port Moresby High School (later to be known as Port Moresby International School—PMIS). It took a couple of years before I was given History/Sociology to teach; the subjects for which I was qualified.



Dianne in PNG, photo supplied

Although the focus of this research is international education in PNG, it is important to note that there was a serious lack of development in education for Papua New Guineans prior to independence in 1975. The highly critical United Nations mission in 1961 exposed Australia's failure to adequately prepare PNG for nationhood.[1] Development had been uneven, and schools tended to be built in areas "where modern infrastructure and European settlement had been well established." [2]

I joined a staff consisting of mainly teachers from Australia, New Zealand, Europe, and a small number from other countries such as Africa, India, and the Philippines, teaching the New South Wales curriculum. Over the next 23 years, with the departure of many Australians from PNG, the school changed from an Australian high school to an international school and in the 1980s the NSW (Australian) curriculum was abandoned. A variety of curricula was introduced, such as the International Baccalaureate, IGCSE (Cambridge), ACT (Australia), and an expanded PNG curriculum to cater for a more international student body and a growing number of PNG students.

[1] James Griffin, Hank Nelson, and Stewart Firth, *Papua New Guinea, a Political History* (Australia: Heinemann Educational Australia, 1979).

[2] Lyndon Megarrity, "Indigenous Education in Colonial Papua New Guinea: Australian Government Policy 1945-1975," *History of Education Review* 34, no. 2 (2005).p.16

Australian women played a vital role in the school's development – their experiences also influenced their future careers when they returned to Australia. It is important not only for the history of PNG education but also Australia, that their stories be told. I interviewed sixteen women and, embedded in it, is my own story. Of these seventeen women, seven worked elsewhere in PNG before teaching at Port Moresby International School; seven were employed on arrival in PNG, and three came with their partners as teaching couples. Each one had her own unique experience.

My role as both participant and observer

There were many advantages of being one of the women in this research. Many of the women commented that although they were initially quite nervous about being interviewed, they felt comfortable in the knowledge that I was known to them and that I, having had similar experiences, could identify with them.

However, I had to take care not to steer the interview, but let the women talk about themselves. Flexibility was important and not to take knowledge for granted as people who have had similar experiences often do.

I held several senior roles in the school during our time together as teachers. In the interviews it was critical that the discussion was honest and not just what they thought I might like to hear. Interestingly, the intervening years had removed any reluctance to being honest and straightforward with me.

The selection of participants was crucial to ensure an impartial approach:

- University ethics procedures ensured that the sample of women I interviewed was chosen randomly. Social media and subsequent snowballing were used. I was hesitant about these restrictions at first, but fortunately it worked well. Of the sixteen women interviewed, their time at the school was spread over each decade of the 24 years.
- The random nature of the selection meant that participants were not selected to fit the research objectives.

Women's memories were affected by time

"The past cannot be altered, but memory and history change all the time."[3]

In most cases, it was over forty years since the women I interviewed had lived in PNG and few had ever returned. As Alistair Thomson found when he "explored how the memories of Australian World War One veterans...had been created and recreated over time: as soldiers struggled to make sense of their war and its consequences..."[4] the memories of the women I interviewed had been affected by time. Their lives had changed so much, and their memories were a combination of collective memory (from sharing stories with colleagues, friends, and family and taking on stories of others as their own) and memories influenced by written records. It is likely that their memories were also selective as they constructed their own truths and formed memories that they could live with. It was interesting to compare the oral interviews I conducted with diaries some of the women shared with me.

[3] Alistair Thomson, "'Anzac Memories' Revisited: Trauma, Memory and Oral History," *The Oral History Review* 42, no. Winter/Spring (2015). P.1

[4] Ibid.



Their memories may not have always been accurate, but their emotions were real.

I have chosen three quotes from the interviews that I conducted that display shame, shock, and fear:

Karen now retired and living in Sydney recalls with regret the shame she felt when her sister came to visit her in PNG:

I remember when I was in Lae, my sister came up; she just finished her HSC, and we were living in quite a nice house, expatriate house, given by the company. And I had a lovely family, one was the gardener, and one of the house girls, and her family, that I was very friendly with. But my sister saw the conditions, the different conditions, my house and the Papua New Guinean family, and she broke down in tears. She just thought it was the worst thing she had ever seen, and she more or less said to me; how could you be living this way? That's just not reasonable. So, I was made very aware of the difference.[5]

Diane, a retired marketing manager living in Adelaide, expresses the shock of the heat:

Well, I will never forget getting off the plane and the heat just went boom and I thought "Oh my God, the engine is still going and they haven't switched the engine off," and I honestly didn't think it was the weather and as we got out of the plane and it was still the old airport and everything and the first thing that hit me was, "It isn't the engines, it's the weather, this was it".[6]

Joan, now in university education in Queensland came to PMIS after spending two years at a provincial high school in Manus:

I remember having to find accommodation and all that sort of thing. All of that was a bit of a trauma. It was scary, actually Di, scary to think I was going to live in Port Moresby, after Manus was a synch; maybe it isn't quite so now. But then, Port Moresby seemed so scary. It felt pretty scary to be honest...[7]

The effect COVID had on the research

At the end of 2019, prior to the restriction placed on travel due to COVID, I had arranged to meet several participants in NSW and Queensland. I initially considered delaying the gathering of my data, but decided to conduct the interviews by phone, or via Zoom. Of the sixteen interviews:

- Three face-to-face interviews were conducted with Adelaide residents.
- Three women were more comfortable using the phone. Two were in their 80s and the other was in her mid-70s.
- Ten were interviewed via Zoom, but technology was an issue with some older participants.

Face-to-face interviews were valuable because of the richness of the conversations and evidence of nuances that were not obvious in online interviews. The results tended to depend on how familiar participants were with the technology. The phone interviews were a little awkward and the sound quality was poor. Some technical issues affected the natural flow of the conversations.

Two women gave me sections of their diaries. It was interesting to see how differently they expressed their opinions in writing compared with the interview. One woman is very clear about an incident that made her angry at school in the diary but does not make an issue of it when she is interviewed, despite the interview being face-to-face.

[5] Transcript of Zoom interview with Karen, 20/6/2020

[6] Transcript of face-to-face interview with Diane, 7/3/2020

[7] Transcript of Zoom interview with Joan, 15/5/2020



Another woman was a confident user of Zoom—her interview was three hours long, although at times a little confronting (contradicting my expectation that online interviews may prove less natural). She worked with me for thirteen years and we were friendly socially, but there was some tension at work in the later years. She spoke quite openly about these feelings during the interview and although we spoke of adverse male attitudes in the workplace, there was probably as much 'rivalry' between us as women. We did not compete with regards to promotion, but we had different ideas on education.

I have, at times, had to have a thick skin during this research, but it has not failed to be an interesting journey.

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Thomson, Alistair. "'Anzac Memories' Revisited: Trauma, Memory and Oral History." The Oral History Review 42, no. Winter/Spring (2015): 1-29.

The Lizzie Russell Oral History Grant 2023

Lizzie Russell developed an interest in oral history during her retirement, volunteering at the Migration Museum and attending one of Beth Robertson's training workshops. She recorded a number of oral history interviews in her time that can be accessed through the SA State Library. Joining the SA branch of Oral History Australia in 2001, Lizzie Russell's life and contribution to oral history are now memorialised through the Lizzie Russell Oral History Grant Scheme.

This grant was established to support small oral history projects conducted by financial members or groups of the SA/NT branch of OHA. We hope that the scheme fills a gap left by the closure of many federal and state funding options and helps revive an important means of recording South Australia's and the Northern Territory's history.

The grant is funded by sales of Beth M. Robertson's 'Oral History Handbook', available on our [website](#).

This year, one grant valued at \$500 is on offer. Applications are due by 30th of June, 2023.

How can I apply?

Applications must be made on the official application form, available for download at <https://oralhistoryaustraliasant.org.au/membership/oral-history-grant/>

E-mail submissions to the SA/NT Association's email address:
contact@oralhistoryaustraliasant.org.au

Suitable oral history projects may include:

- recording oral history interviews
- transcribing new or existing oral history interviews
- using new or existing interviews, e.g. for an exhibition, display, website content, multimedia product, arts projects, or
- a combination of these



Saving the Renmark

Archives: The Flood of 2022

Judy Bailey

OHA SA/NT Committee Member and
Project Officer at Renmark Irrigation Trust

The 1956 Flood is etched on the collective memory of the people who live near the River Murray in South Australia. Although all towns suffered in the 1956 flood, Renmark was the worst hit of all the Riverland towns of South Australia. The '56ers are dwindling now, but their recollections of living on an 'island' bounded by Ral Ral Creek, Bookmark Creek, and the endless bends of the River Murray, of perpetual sandbagging of levees, and the despair of hearing the great Hospital levee break in the night, live on. These stories underpin the identity of modern-day Renmark.

Renmark stands on the traditional lands of the Erawirung people, who are one of the First Peoples of the River Murray Mallee Region. It is not known how often this area flooded before white settlement, but since 1870 there have been five major floods (1870, 1917, 1931, 1956, and 1974). Since the 1870s, none have surpassed the great flood of 1956, which saw over 340GL of water flow past the town each day. Another high flooding event in 1974 threatened the town, but this time the levees held and, crucially, the Hospital levee did not break. However, the water slowly rose in the basements of the nineteenth century buildings on Murray Avenue, the main road next to the river.

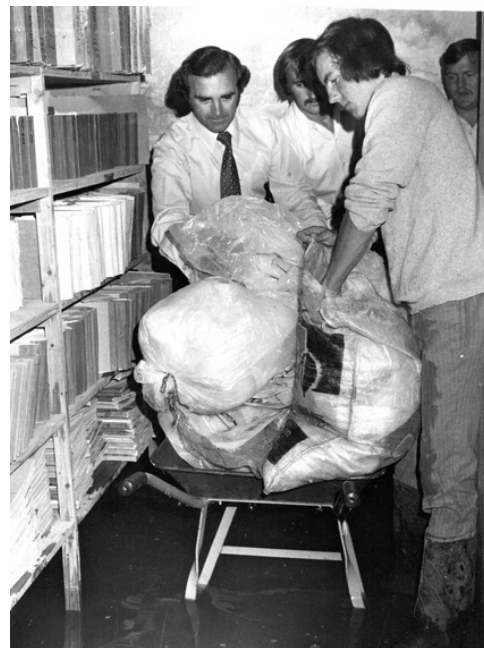
The Renmark Irrigation Trust is housed in the oldest building on Murray Avenue. It is a heritage listed building, constructed in 1893. In 1900, the Trust accepted the role from the SA Government to be the District Council of the Renmark irrigation area. The Trust was responsible for the hospital, children's welfare, sport and recreation facilities, and the upkeep of roads. This was in addition to the delivery of water to the irrigation district, which was the core responsibilities of an irrigation trust. In the 1930s, the Trust generated electricity which powered Renmark and the local towns of Paringa, Lyrup, and Berri. The WWII internment camp at Loveday, near Barmera, was powered by electricity which was generated in Renmark. This infrastructure supported over 5000 internees and 1500 Army personnel from 1941-1946.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the Trust has an archive which stretches back to the late 1890s and includes an almost unbroken run of rate books, minute books, reports, and accounts. It includes maps from the 1920s and 1930s, engineers' reports, and information about repairs to the electricity network in WWII. The archive is extremely important as it documents white settlement in the far east of SA from the late nineteenth century. Most of the archive was housed in the basement of the Trust Building on Murray Avenue, which was flooded in 1956 and again in 1974.



The River Murray rose slowly through the first weeks of October 2022. The Trust continued to operate as normal. No one thought the river would create a real problem for the town. We knew that the 1974 flood had occurred after three consecutive La Niña events; Southern Australia was right in the middle of its third La Niña event, but there was no real sense of urgency in early October. However, by late October, it was clear that a high-water event was likely and the Renmark Paringa Council enacted Section 298 of the Local Government Act which gave the Council emergency powers.

The Trust, as the major supplier of water to the irrigation settlement, supported the Council by removing its pipes and infrastructure from the levees. The 38 kilometres of levees were inspected and most were strengthened. Over 150,000 tonnes of local clay and sand were excavated from a nearby quarry, and trucked in an almost continuous run through the streets of Renmark. For 10 weeks they increased the height of the levees. In some cases, such as the Hale Street, Hospital, and the Bookmark Creek levees, the height was increased again in mid-late November.



The 1974 flood, photo supplied

The belief that this 'high water event' would be different was confirmed by early November. The predictions of the amount of water which would flow past Renmark slowly climbed—135GL, 140GL, 150GL, and then seemingly overnight it was predicted to be 200-220GL per day. At the SA-Victoria border, the river spanned over 15 kilometres in width. The slow relentless rise in Renmark was punctuated by short bursts of increased flow—in one 48-hour period, the gauge at the riverfront rose 15 centimetres. The '56ers were sure that the River was acting in a similar way to the winter of 1956. Many of them retold their memories of that time, which I captured on digital recordings for the Trust.

The floodwaters of 1956 and 1974 seeped up into the basement of the Trust Building. In 1974, the staff were taken by surprise and many records were damaged (see photo above). Although the documents had been retrieved from the basement, they had been returned before the walls had dried out and so had been irretrievably affected by mould and damp. It was difficult to believe it was happening all over again, yet once more we made plans for the relocation of the archives.



*Pallets of boxes prepared for storage in a shipping container, 17th of November
Photo supplied*

On November 2, we prepared the archives to be relocated. A good portion of the archive was not housed in archive boxes. Many boxes contained material which was not related to the archives. It was a huge task to box and sort the material, but in two weeks most of the work had been completed. As big as the task was, it was also ultimately rewarding, with the discovery of items once

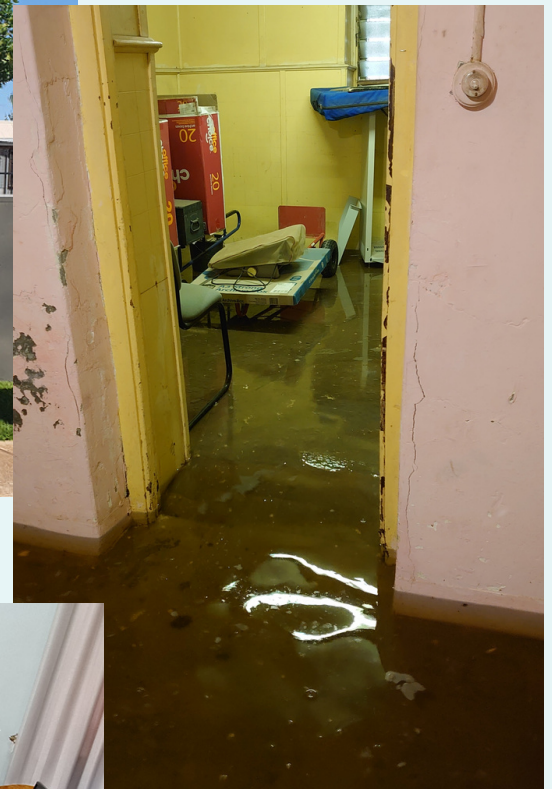


thought lost in the 1974 Flood. These included missing correspondence from WWII, the engineers' reports from the 1920s and 1930s, and correspondence from the 1950s, which documented the desperate state of Renmark after the 1956 flood.

On November 17, the Trust staff removed over 450 archive boxes from the basement to a shipping container at the Trust Depot, which lay on higher ground (see photos). By early December, a Major Emergency had been declared, all boating and aquatic activities were banned, the local ferry at Lyrup was closed, and Renmark was surrounded by water, apart from three roads (see issue cover image). On December 15, the water started to seep up through the basement floor. Two days later a pump was installed and soon after we removed the remaining historical items which were stored on site in the Trust Boardroom (see photos). The flood reached its peak on December 26, with a height of 19.04 AHD (height in metres above sea level) at the Trust's Main Pump Station, and a flow of 200GL per day. This was 50 centimetres above the 1974 Flood and 2.8 metres above normal. It was the second biggest flood in Renmark in 152 years, second only to the great flood of 1956.



*Moving day, 17th of November
Photo supplied*



*Flooded basement with items remaining,
28th of December
Photo supplied*



*Historical items moved to the Board Room, 20th of December
Photo supplied*



Upcoming Oral History Events

23-24 June 2023 - OHS Annual Conference 2023: Making Histories Together

The Oral History Society, United Kingdom, will hold its 50th anniversary annual conference in Nottingham, 23-24 June 2023.

Further information at: <https://www.ohs.org.uk/conferences/>.

3-6 July 2023 - AHA Conference: Milestones

The 41st Australian Historical Association (AHA) Conference will be hosted by the Australian Catholic University on Wurundjeri Land in Melbourne.

Further information at: <https://theaha.org.au/aha-conference-2023-milestones/>.

25-28 July 2023 - IOHA Conference: Oral History in a Digital and Audiovisual World

The 22nd International Oral History Association (IOHA) Conference will be held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The host is the School of Social Sciences of the Getulio Vargas Foundation, the Centre for Research and Documentation of Contemporary Brazilian History (FGV CPDOC).

Further information at: <https://eventos.fgv.br/en/22nd-ioha-international-conference>.

SA History Festival 2023

Renmark Irrigation Trust and the rebuilding of Renmark after the 1956 Flood

3:00-4:00PM, 3 May at Renmark Paringa Library

"Let us never have to suffer again the tragedy of 1956."

Renmark Irrigation Trust (RIT) was the District Council responsible for rebuilding the irrigation settlement in Renmark after the 1956 Flood. It was a momentous task. The costs involved in reconstructing roads, relocating flood levees, rebuilding and reconnecting irrigation channels and blocks were overwhelming.

Come and hear from a panel of Renmark residents about their memories of RIT's role in the reconstruction and how families rebuilt their lives. Trust documents, photographs, and newspaper articles have been used to develop a slide show which will support the event.

Free, bookings required. A light afternoon tea will be provided.

More detail on the Renmark Irrigation Trust website: <https://rit.org.au/>

To book contact Renmark Paringa Library on 08 8586 5544 or text 0499 681 556



*Renmark from the air, Winter 1956
Photo supplied*

My Oral History Interviewee Experience

Wayne Groom

I am turning 74 this year and for the past 42 years I have been a filmmaker, despite graduating with a Civil Engineering degree from Adelaide University in 1972.

In 2021, I was approached by an Oral Historian from the University of South Australia to record my life story.

My initial reaction was one of reserve, perhaps anxiety about revealing myself. Would I expose things that are private, will they offend my family and friends, will I make mistakes because of a faulty memory?

Despite these misgivings, I was excited about recording my life for posterity. Was that just my ego? Or was it a desire to be honest about existence, to share my insights with other humans, regardless of my faults and stupidities?

After some prevarication, I agreed to meet for the first session in January of 2022, to see how it felt. My initial anxiety was soon laid to rest as my interviewer was brilliant. He listened to me, holding back his own responses, allowing me to babble on. Was I making sense, did I say too much? He assured me all was well and asked questions at appropriate times, without being overbearing. Soon, I was enjoying myself, oblivious to doubts. I just wanted to record my journey through life, not to be forgotten, not to let death obliterate my successes and failures, my experience.

The first interview lasted just over an hour, I think, maybe more, and I readily agreed to another session the following week. I was aware at the second session that I was bonding with my interviewer; he had become not just a historian but a confidant. Telling your life story to someone involves a lot of trust, 'these are my secrets', it's a special interaction that can easily be betrayed if, for example, the interviewer challenges your ideologies or emotional responses. The oral historian must resist making evaluations, but still delve into your life and events. Luckily, my historian was a listener. His quiet demeanour allowed me space to relax and trust. He quickly became a friend. More than that I think, because I looked forward to our next meeting with great enthusiasm.

The third session was different in some way. My emotions were becoming raw, memories of both good and tragic events in my life were coming to the surface, still as powerful as when they happened. This purging was both enlightening and saddening; I was no longer guarded, I wanted to feel these things again, to free them from my unconscious.

But something else was happening. I was revealing myself to myself! It was not always kind. The decisions I made that caused pain to others, my emotional and professional failures, were painting a self-portrait of me that I did not initially want to recognise.

This of course was offset by reliving my successes, moments when I acted with courage and fairness under pressure. At the end of the third session I was exhausted, though not in a bad way. I was more reflective perhaps, learning to come to terms with who I really was.



How my oral historian could indulge my downloading of the minutiae of my existence from birth to senior status, for hours on end, I don't know. He was patient and generous, it was a wonderful gift.

Our final session (the fourth) was hard for me. I knew I had to let go of my interviewer, but it had been such a satisfying experience. His departure would leave a gap, which it did.

But amazingly, I discovered that I might fill this gap by continuing alone. I am now researching my life further with a view to write my memoir for publication. My historian awoke me to the joy of life. We are each unique, we all have something to say, our life story is so 'personal', no one else could possibly ever imagine the breadth of events that each person experiences in a lifetime.

Oral history is important. It celebrates our existence, this precious gift from the universe—I am here, I can see, I can feel, this is my story.



Wayne Groom filming at Maslin Beach, 1997
Photo supplied



NOHANZ Conference Report: 'Memory, Oral History and Material Culture'

Carolyn Collins

Footwear, tools, and toys were just some of the 'ordinary' objects that inspired lively discussions and papers at the New Zealand Oral History Conference held in Wellington in November, 2022.

The theme of the conference, hosted by Victoria University, was 'Memory, Oral History and Material Culture' and attracted about 90 people and more than 35 papers or presentations.

Trans-Tasman visitor Professor Paula Hamilton set the scene with her keynote address on Saturday morning, using shoes as an example of how objects may hold different meanings for different people in different contexts, across time and cultures. Underlining her point, she juxtaposed an arresting image of a red stiletto—an object of desire and symbol of affluence—with a museum display of thousands of shoes, left behind by those who lost their lives in Nazi concentration camps.

There was a diverse range of papers and subjects over the two days, showcasing the innovative ways stories are being told using oral history and material culture. Three concurrent sessions unfortunately meant it was impossible to get to everything.

There were several presentations on aspects of Maori oral history as well as presentations by staff from local museums and libraries. One of the most moving presentations was Sharon Moreham's description of how photos helped her unravel the mystery of her mother's identity.

Other papers centred on war souvenirs, shearing tools, houses, and family heirlooms. My own paper focused on a gold watch given to former Holden workers for 25-years-service, tracing its changing meaning and significance over the company's history.

A session dubbed 'Lightning Bolts' was an opportunity for anyone to stand up and speak for a few minutes about their current or future projects, ask advice, or even advertise the odd job vacancy! There appears to be a few ongoing projects in New Zealand focusing on the COVID-19 pandemic and it will be interesting to see—and hear—the result of these oral histories at future conferences.

A special treat was a hands-on presentation showing how puppets are being used to assist in the transmission of contemporary Maori cultural knowledge. Jeffrey Addison and Whaitaima Te Whare, the creative force behind Toro Pikopiko Puppets, have created and toured 16 cultural puppet shows as well as producing shows for television and radio. More recently, they have been involved in a fascinating project to preserve and bring to life stories contained in rock art found throughout New Zealand. Conference participants were invited to handle and play with the puppets during the session, bringing out the child in us all.

The conference was jointly hosted by the Stout Research Centre for New Zealand Studies and the National Oral History Association of New Zealand (NOHANZ), and the organising committee did a wonderful job. Overall, it was a fabulous experience and I'd encourage everyone to make the effort to cross the ditch for the next one in 2024.

Meet the New Editors

Dante DeBono

My formal involvement in oral history happened by chance. I was a third year Journalism and Creative Writing student at the University of South Australia, completing an elective class in public relations. Teaching that class was Dr David Sweet, OHA's current National Secretary. At the time, David and Dr Sue Anderson were in the process of founding a UniSA-based oral history archive and I was recruited to be part of the advisory team in an ongoing role.

This project, later dubbed the Oral History Hub (ohh...), inadvertently redirected my academic career. I went on to complete an Honours thesis in 2019 utilising oral history methodologies to explore the impact non-monosexual orientations can have on an individual's life, research I presented at the 2022 OHA Biennial Conference. Since then, my oral history work has been focused on advocating for a holistic approach to research that values the everyday experiences of queer people, as well as the diversification of queer research more broadly.

Currently, I am a doctoral candidate at UniSA working on a project that involves writing a screenplay to examine the queer potential of revisionist adaptations in fiction. As my academic career takes a detour from oral history, my OHA membership and this new position as an editor for Word of Mouth have offered a wonderful opportunity for me to maintain my ties to the field and fellow oral historians.



Dante (left) and Carly (right), photo supplied

Carly Heinrich

I am a white settler living and working in the region known by Kaurna as Ngangkippingga, the women's (nganki) place along the river (paringga). I acknowledge and uphold Kaurna protocols for learning and sharing knowledges. My work as a PhD candidate interrogates western cultural biases in research practice, while forging respectful and reciprocal relationships with First Nations collaborators in the process.

Like Dante's, my oral history learnings began as an undergraduate student at UniSA, under the supervision of Dr Sue Anderson. My first project sought to examine the histories of Aboriginal peoples living on Point Pearce but, as I have since learned is often the case, things did not go to plan! With no Aboriginal people eager to participate, the project was almost abandoned until a chance encounter with the non-Aboriginal principal of the school (1973-1976) led to the capture of a unique outsider perspective that I came to appreciate as a valuable contribution to the record of life at that time.

Understanding the significance that relationality holds for First Nations peoples has shaped my oral history practice. I have since worked to document the homelessness experiences of three Aboriginal peoples, Jeannene, Peter, and Geraldine, on a collaborative and co-authored project that I spoke more about at the OHA conference in Launceston in 2022 and I am currently in the design stage of another project as part of my doctoral program.

I see this role as co-editor as an opportunity to build relations in the oral history community and look forward to working with you all.

2022 AGM Guest Speaker: Helen Meyer

Karen McDonough

The Inaugural History Council of SA, Excellence in Oral History award winner Helen Meyer generously shared her wealth of experience with us at our September Annual General Meeting. This was our first live event since COVID, and I was excited to hear about the interview process for Helen's award-winning radio program, 'Service Voices'. I always learn from hearing how other people go about their interviews, and hearing from Helen was particularly interesting to me as I have been working with my grandfather's WWI interviews.



Helen (right) at the AGM, photo supplied

It felt like Helen was speaking directly to me when she said, 'don't start with "good morning" or "good afternoon" as this may be the "wrong" time of day for the listener.' I had thought this was the best way to engage the interviewee at the beginning of the interview, but it seems a worthwhile and minor adjustment to say simply 'hello, [name]' as Helen suggests. While an oral history interview is not a radio program, I thought this was a tiny change that could make a difference in 'welcoming' the listener.

Being in an interview with many things to juggle is a long way from second nature to me, so it was great to hear this seasoned interviewer's modus operandi. Helen's encouraging and practical advice: have a 10-15 minute 'warm up'—for both parties—before the interview proper. I can see this as a little extra time following the soundcheck. I loved the reminder to take two pens, to use a consistent file naming system, to cross-off topics covered, and follow where the interviewee goes. To be direct about what I want to know: 'What was your mother like?', not the vaguer, 'Can you tell us about your mother?'. Also nominating a hand signal to stop the interview, and (as always) remembering it's about seeing oneself as 'a listener'.

From my experience of interviewing older people (80 to 92 years old) and working with interviews created in 1990 when my grandfather was 96, I was struck by Helen's advice regarding editing when talking with older veterans, '90 to 95-year-olds'. I am familiar with the issues Helen spoke about that act as barriers to the listener, such as outmoded and now offensive language, and endlessly repeated crutch words like 'ums' and 'so'. It was interesting to hear the approach to editing the interviews for 'Service Voices'. The interviewee understands the interview will be edited and this



is recorded in the consent at the beginning of the interview. In Beth Robertson's 'The Oral History Handbook', an example of the logic of editing is that of piecing an excerpt together from an interview for a local history display.

In addition to audience accessibility, Helen spoke about the edited interview as something the older veteran is proud of and that which the veteran's grandchild can engage. This personal dimension resonated with my experience of barriers to communication between the generations. When I was a young person in the 1970s and 80s and had the chance to know my grandfather, I essentially rejected him as a silent old man and, worse, a willing participant of war. Thirty years later, my oral history experience working with Grandad's interviews has opened the door to my discovering something of who he was and exploding my ignorance.

As oral historians, we grapple with values of respecting our interviewees above all, preserving history, ethically editing, and engaging audiences. We approach every situation uniquely, considering how we can best serve these sometimes competing aspects. While the circumstances are very different with interviewees in 'Service Voices' being broadcast live, I think it's interesting to consider the contrasting decisions I made with my grandfather's material. In the notes to the transcript, I explain the choice to retain outmoded language and repetition of crutch words. Grandad's good character, possibly judged by ill-informed and contemporary standards, made me uncomfortable. However, his expression in the interviews is of a person at 96 years of age, in 1990, who lived the life he lived in the times and circumstances he did. Ernie Dagg (1893-1991) was a product of the time's culture—our history. Not produced for a radio program, but rather in the context of the ohh... archive, it is hoped that those interested in engaging with the Ernie Dagg WWI material will outweigh those who would be offended and 'switch off'. I appreciate the editing Helen does in her context to create a valuable radio program for both the engagement of a public audience and for interviewees' benefit.

Finally, and fascinating for producing a radio program, Helen also showed us her equipment selection: a Zoom H4, Zoom H5 and, the newest, a RØDE Wireless GO (compact wireless microphone system).

I thoroughly enjoyed Helen's presentation and thank her for being our guest speaker.

Karen McDonough is an OHASA/NT committee member and UniSA honours graduate in oral history. Her grandfather Ernest Dagg's WWI interviews with Brian Tate can be found at the UniSA Oral History Hub: <https://www.unisa.edu.au/research/oral-history-hub/oral-history-collections/war-narratives/>



New SA State Delegate on OHA National Committee

Christeen Schoepf

During October 2022, I was accepted by the national body of Oral History Australia to represent South Australia. This followed the stepping aside by OHA SA/NT President, David Sweet, who remains on the committee as the National Secretary and now has a little less workload!

I attended my first meeting during the Launceston Conference and my position was ratified by those who attended the OHA AGM the following day. It was fabulous to finally put faces to names and to hear what is happening in the other states. Unfortunately, the downward trend in memberships was mentioned by all groups and how we deal with this situation nationally will be the focus of our next meeting.

Our next conference is already in planning and will be held in Victoria during the latter part of 2024. There was some discussion that it might be held in a regional location, however, Melbourne is still the frontrunner. It is only three years now until it is the South Australian turn to organise the conference so we will need some great ideas, suggestions, and loads of manpower to pull it off. Get your thinking caps on!

If there is ever anything of importance happening that cannot wait until the next WOM, I will make sure that you are kept informed through the OHA SA/NT newsletter or Facebook page.



*Christeen presenting at the 2022 Biennial OHA Conference in Launceston
Photo supplied*



Membership Report 2022

Christeen Schoepf

Firstly, I would like to note the passing earlier this year of one of our long-time members, historian Rob Linn. His love of history and his employment of oral history as a methodology to support his research was obvious, abundant, and exemplary. The following is a brief excerpt from our online newsletter to provide some context for this statement:

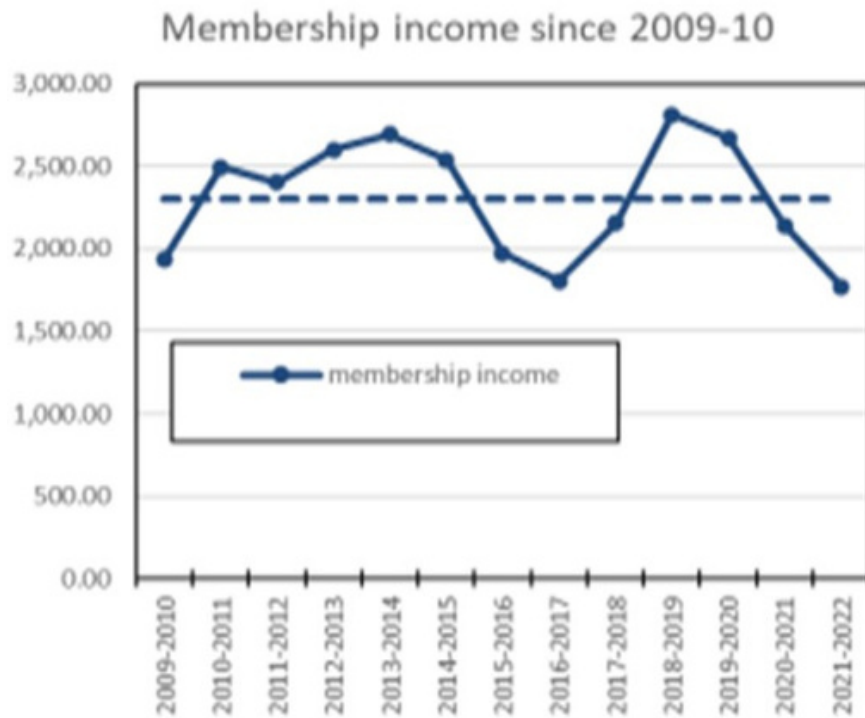
Rob was an interviewer for the National Library of Australia's oral history program and a consultant to ABC Radio National's Social History Unit, the J.D. Somerville Oral History Collection at the State Library of South Australia, the Keith Murdoch Sound Archive, and the Australian War Memorial. Rob undertook the largest oral history project of its type in the world for the Australian wine industry – 213 hours. Assisted by the National Wine Foundation and the Winemakers Federation of Australia, the oral history interviews captured all aspects of Australian wine in living memory—from cellar, through winemaking and marketing to the restaurant.

And in amongst all of this he recorded a plethora of interviews for his many local, community and organizational history books and interpretation projects that will remain the spine upon which much of our future research and output will be both referenced and supported.

I further wish to convey our friendship, gratitude, and most sincere best wishes to two of our other long-term members, June and Peter Donovan of Donovan & Associates who have closed their history consultancy and are now retired. Peter notified us by email of their regret that they have decided not to renew their membership and thanked us for our support and valuable work as an association. As he wished us success for the future, we reciprocate those sentiments for a long and happy retirement for Peter, June, and their family.

So, to the report proper which continues to see a downward trend in our numbers (see graph on next page). While this is of concern, the focus and operations of our group are evolving, and I believe that the next few years our membership base will increase and expand with the inclusion of new workshop models and our growing presence into regional South Australia.





Once again, I would like to request that members complete the sections on the annual Membership Form and then return them to me regardless that you believe your research interests have not changed. You can see for yourself on the next page how the research interests of our membership have changed only in the past few years, and those topics that were once popular are now waning, with new projects taking over. The information also assists our group to remain current and to plan workshops that are of interest to members and the wider community.

Thank you to you all for your continued support and welcome back to those members re-joining us after several years away from Oral History SA/NT. Finally, it is a privilege to welcome the inaugural winner of the Excellence in Oral History Award 2022, Helen Meyer to our membership.

Best Wishes for a fabulous research year in 2023.

Christeen Schoepf
Membership Secretary
OHA SA/NT



Oral History Australia SA/NT Members Interests

at 28 August 2022

	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
Industrial	-	-	-	-	4
Migration/Refugee	4	4	5	2	4
Community	3	4	6	5	7
Genealogy	4	3	6	4	6
Local history	7	6	10	6	6
Storytelling	3	3	4	2	5
Placemaking	1	1	2	1	4
Objects/Mat Cult	2	2	4	2	3
Education	2	2	2	-	-
Corporate	3	2	2	-	3
Medical	2	1	2	6	2
Rural	-	2	2	1	-
Dementia/Ageing	16	9	2	2	3
Ethics	1	2	1	-	-
OH Method/Theory	1	2	6	-	1
Did not state	12	3	10	6	-
Transcription	2	2	1	-	2
Women	2	3	-	2	4
Writing	4	2	2	2	2
Indigenous	1	1	3	2	4
Museums/Heritage	2	2	-	1	2
Architectural	1	1	-	-	-
Photography	-	-	-	1	2
Podcast/Documentary	-	-	-	1	2
Multiculturalism	-	-	-	4	2
LGBTQ+	-	-	-	1	2
Environment	-	-	-	1	2
Politics	-	-	-	1	2
War/Military	-	-	-	3	5
Intergenerational history	-	-	-	3	4
Organisational history	-	-	-	3	5
Folklore/Traditions	-	-	-	4	2
STEM	-	-	-	2	2
Memory	-	-	-	-	4



Liz Harfull Workshop: 'Writing Engaging Non-Fiction'

Lyn O'Grady

Organised by OHA SA/NT in September last year, an enthusiastic group of want-to-be writers took their seats around a boardroom table in a cosy room at Beaumont House. We began with an introduction around the table with each person describing the type of writing project they would like to attempt. Examples included family histories, a biography, history of an area, a building, among others.

Liz Harfull has some eight books published and with a background in journalism, we were sure to be tutored well on the subject. She shared the story of her journey from country girl in the South East to researching, writing, and being commissioned to write books.

We considered some of Harfull's work as examples of how to write history in an engaging way; 'Blue Ribbon Cookbook' is a social history of country shows disguised as a cookbook, so even people who are not interested in history will enjoy reading it.

Harfull's tips for bringing non-fiction to life is to make the most of your resources, which includes oral histories, diaries, or memoirs. This is an aspect that interests me. Some of the recommendations for using oral histories for a book include taking photos, making side notes about body language, noting the voice and tone, and their mood. Fleshing out the characters and perhaps telling the story from one person's viewpoint helps to give the history 'a voice'. Liz suggests doing a less formal interview and taking the participant to the location to prompt further memories. She also encouraged us to take more photos!



*Liz's workshop, September 2022
Photo supplied by Sally Stephenson*

We learned that there are a few things to consider before starting a project, including who it will be written for, who the audience or market will be, how it will be funded, what it will look like and why it is important. We looked at creating an outline as the next step, and discussed the key elements of a story. We thought about what makes a compelling story and explored the techniques used by authors of fiction for finding an engaging starting point.

Liz outlined the need to check certain comments for accuracy before committing to paper, a little research may be needed to verify the facts. We learned the importance of choosing direct quotes carefully and don't include large slabs of it. Some of the story can be told in the third person.

By the end of the workshop, I felt I had gained some confidence in being more engaging in my writing. I may not write a book but there are many ways to utilise Liz's tips, as an editor of a newsletter, in applying for grants, writing local history articles, giving history talks, and sharing stories on Facebook.



*Liz Harfull addressing the workshop group, September 2022
Photo supplied by Sally Stephenson*

*Carrick Hill, 1984
Photo supplied by the
State Library of South Australia*

OHA SA/NT Christmas Brunch at Carrick Hill Karen McDonough



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On the 11th of December, OHA SA/NT members gathered under the big white marquee in the grand grounds of Springfield's Carrick Hill mansion, located in the Adelaide foothills. Carrick Hill was the home of Sir Edward and Lady Ursula Hayward and covers approximately 40 hectares of land. The Hayward family bequeathed Carrick Hill to the South Australian Government in 1983.

Interestingly, our president David Sweet noted that his last visit was as a young 'paper-boy', in the pre-National Trust era of the house's past life. David recalled the house staff paying him well, as they would require each of the various publications he had available.

Although the sun didn't shine much on the terrace overlooking the rose garden outside the marquee, it was comfortable inside, and there was a high level of enthusiastic chat! The gathering comprised fourteen people, with several past and present committee members and one member's 'other half' present too, a good turnout considering the current COVID wave and flooding in the Riverland. I had a great time catching up with the people I was seated with, and it was nice to put a face to a name further down the table—even a brief chat with someone you don't ordinarily see is delightful compared to email.

Friendly staff looked after us well, and people enjoyed meals from the all-day breakfast menu or just a simple drink or cake. We kicked off at 10am, which generated the suggestion that 10:30am might be a better meeting time in future. Members also noted helpful information for planning subsequent gatherings, including an extended booking time to 12:30pm, and the venue's access entry points.

My only regrets were not getting a photo of the occasion, and the restrictive nature of the long table for socialising. With the infrequency of get-togethers, perhaps there are other options to better facilitate conversation. On the way out, through the magnificent gardens, we noticed picnickers and wondered if a picnic-style event would be more conducive to mingling and catching-up.

For planning events that members enjoy, feedback from those who attended or those interested in events/get-togethers would be appreciated. Please, drop the committee a line at contact@oralhistoryaustraliasant.org.au.



Book Review

Upheaval: Disrupted lives in journalism

Edited by Andrew Dodd and Matthew Ricketson

UNSW Press, 368pp, RRP \$39.99, PB

Carolyn Collins

There was a time, and it doesn't seem that long ago, when Saturday mornings used to start with the heavy thud of a small tree landing in my driveway. Back then newspapers were hefty in all the ways that counted. Built on seemingly bottomless gold reserves of classified advertising, deliverers needed biceps of steel to propel the weekend editions over suburban fences.

These days, newspapers can be delivered directly to mobile phones and iPads, no need to even get out of bed. Those of us who still prefer the tactile experience have sadly noted the declining bulk of their weekend reading material over the years; no danger of injuring a pet these days as it flutters rather than hurtles over the fence.

It's not just the product itself that has slimmed down. The editors of a new book on the effect of the digital era on the Australian media landscape describe how the staff of The Age newspaper once occupied an entire building; now it fits on one floor. Sadly, it's a story that's been repeated in newsrooms across the nation. It's estimated that as many as 5000 journalism jobs were lost in the past decade as news organisations scrambled to cut costs to survive.

But while the commercial reasons for the decline in the power and wealth of companies like Fairfax and News Corporation have been well documented, those who have experienced this disruption firsthand have mostly remained quiet. This is perhaps not so unusual; journalists generally prefer to tell other people's stories, not their own.

In 'Upheaval: Disrupted lives in journalism', editors Andrew Dodd and Matthew Ricketson, both former journalists now working in academia, turn the spotlight on the storytellers (and a sprinkling of subeditors, illustrators, and photographers) who bore witness to this change. It is an important book which recognises that redundancies are not just numbers but people with lives, families, hopes, dreams, and financial obligations.

Dodd and Ricketson know their subject. They were part of a team of researchers which spent five years tracking the post-redundancy lives of 225 journalists through annual surveys, the results of which were published in 2018 as 'New Beats: Mass redundancies and career change in Australian journalism'. 'Upheaval' builds on this research, drawing on 57 oral history interviews with those who experienced redundancy between 2012 and 2016.

Some of the interviewees are well known, like David Marr, George Megalogenis, and Amanda Meade, others less so. While there is the expected concentration on Sydney and Melbourne, the book also includes journalists who worked in newspapers in other states and regional areas. Their workplace experiences are remarkably similar as is their grief, sadness, and anger over careers cut short and the decline of institutions they gave their hearts and souls too, often at the expense of personal lives.



The first part of the book is a somewhat nostalgic look back at the newsrooms of the past and the various paths that led to them, from cadetships to stints at country newspapers. As one interviewee notes, just because you liked writing or were good at English at school, didn't mean you were 'right for journalism'. Winning a cadetship was akin to being 'handed passports to another world', with interviewees sharing the thrill of their first bylines, memorable stories, and the fierce competition, including inside their own newsrooms, to come up with a 'scoop'.

There are plenty of yarns, the type you can imagine old hands sharing at the bar after work, and laughs as interviewees recount the chaos, noise, and colour of their former workplaces, and the many eccentric characters that worked in them. Interviewees spoke of the difficulty of covering traumatic events, dealing with criticism, and making mistakes. They also didn't shy from talking about the dark side of the blokey newsroom culture: bullying, sexual harassment, heavy drinking, and the impact of long hours on personal relationships.

While this book is focused on the digital upheaval, we are also reminded that newsrooms were always evolving. Cadets, once drawn from school leavers, in later years had to have university degrees. Computers replaced typewriters, and some never recovered from the shock. At his farewell party, one journalist took the ultimate revenge, destroying his desktop computer to the horror of his editor who didn't realise the stunt had been staged.

Some agonised over whether to accept redundancy packages; others were blindsided, describing the humiliation of being marched out of their workplaces by security as co-workers avoided making eye contact. The book also explores what came next: coping with change, loss of identity, while reflecting on the future of the institutions they had left. Some found different jobs in the industry or forged new paths, others simply retired.

While the easier option would have been to tell the story through fewer narrators, the authors of this volume have given a masterclass in how to use oral history in a longform narrative. The result may read as though it were effortless, but such an approach is not. Three longer profiles (Marr, Meade, and Flip Prior) provide a deeper insight into the effect of the digital upheaval on individuals, and I suspect other interviews would have been equally as rich.

The book is aimed at a general audience and as such there is little theory or analysis of what these stories mean or how they fit into the broader picture of how work has changed in Australia, and indeed globally. Nor is there room for any explanation of how the interviewees were selected, or how collective memory and nostalgia might influence their narratives. These considerations are the bread and butter of oral historians, but would no doubt have slowed the pace of the book.

Journalism was/is one hell of a job, one which can probably only be fully appreciated by those who did it. But there is much in the stories about the end of these perceived 'jobs for life' that will strike a chord among those who have experienced redundancies in other industries during the same period, for example, automotive manufacturing. For at its heart, 'Upheaval' is a very human story. As Dodd notes, 'What's possibly surprising is that, despite their supposed toughness, journalists are just like everyone else.'

An earlier version of this review was first published by 'Australian Policy and History'.



Do you have an oral history project to share with us?

Members of OHA SA/NT are always welcome to tell us about the work they're doing, or projects from the past that deserve to be shared. If you have a project that you think would be suitable for inclusion in an edition of Word of Mouth, please get in touch at editor@oralhistoryaustraliasant.com.au or via our new postal address:

Oral History Australia, SA/NT
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Oral History Handbook by Beth Robertson

Beth Robertson's Oral History Handbook is the bible for oral historians. First published by the SA Branch of the Oral History Association in 1983, it has been in print ever since, and is well established as the national standard. The latest edition has information about digital recorders. The author draws on more than 30 years' experience of practising and teaching oral history techniques and preserving sound recordings. In 2022, there was a steady demand for the handbook. In response, we have obtained more copies which are now available to order.

Product details

Author: Beth M Robertson
Format: A4 size, stiff paperback, 112 pages, illustrations
Publication date: Fifth Edition, fifth impression, 2013
Publisher: Oral History Australia SA/NT, ISBN: 0646454447

How to order

Details about ordering a copy can be found on our website:
<https://oralhistoryaustraliasant.org.au/the-oral-history-handbook-old-version/>

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The book includes chapters on:

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- Recording Equipment
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Oral History Australia - South Australia/Northern Territory

Oral History Australia is a non-profit body whose members practice and promote oral history. OHA South Australia/Northern Territory (OHA SA/NT) came to life just seven months after the national body was founded in Perth in July 1978. There are now associations in each state.

The aims of Oral History Australia SA/NT are:

- to promote the practice and methods of oral history
- to educate in the use of oral history methods
- to encourage discussions on all aspects of oral history
- to foster the preservation of oral history records in Australia
- to pursue common objectives and maintain links with other Australian oral history associations through membership of Oral History Australia Inc.
- to do all such things as may be incidental to the achievement of such aims

OHA membership benefits include:

- Word of Mouth newsletter, published twice a year
- access to the annual Studies in Oral History journal which contains papers given at the biennial conference or other papers considered of particular topical interest
- opportunity to publish peer-reviewed papers in Oral History Australia Journal
- access to members' resources on the Oral History Australia SA/NT website
- invitations to participate in events such as behind-the-scenes tours of exhibitions, talks and seminars
- discounts on publications, including the Oral History Handbook by Beth Robertson
- discounted registration for oral history workshops
- opportunity to apply for an oral history grant
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