



voiceprint

Newsletter

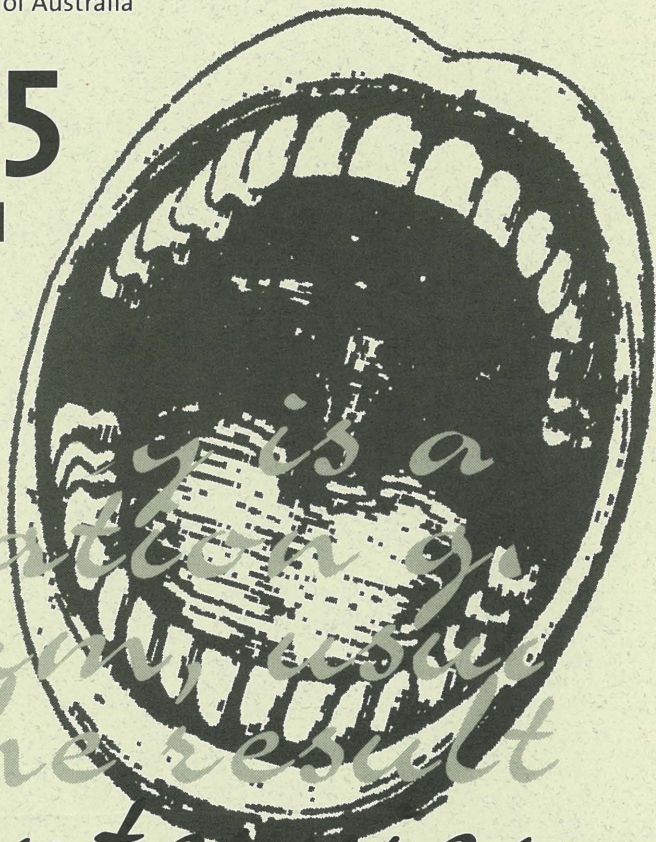
of the New South Wales Branch

of the Oral History Association

of Australia

4/5

May/August 1995



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Editorial

With pleasure we introduce Issue No. 4/5 to members.

Assuming joint editorial responsibility and delving into the wealth of contacts and organisations that support this corner of Australia's cultural heritage is both exciting and rewarding. At present the Committee is guided by the following objectives:

- to provide information on forthcoming OHAA and other events*
- to stimulate interest and discussion on oral history methodology, practice and technical issues*

The framework and presentation for the newsletter will continue to develop. We hope to foster closer links with the members, report on projects, activities and events occurring throughout New South Wales, and provide briefs on other states' activities.

In this issue, the Robina Lockett article on the Macquarie Fields Women's project provides a comprehensive insight to how this worthwhile project was developed and accomplished. "In the Field" will look at projects currently underway and "Hints" will hope to reinforce and support members' skills development.

*Letters to the Editorial Committee, news items, enquiries, articles short and sweet or up to 1,000 words on projects or on issues that assist in developing professional commitment and awareness will be appreciated. Lastly, our thanks to Rosie Block for her continued efforts and support: we can now appreciate more fully her efforts and those of past editors in the production of **Voiceprint**.*

Miriam Moloney (02) 9985 7298

Jenny Allison (02) 955 3387

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New Members

John R. Brain

Errol Floyd

Michelle Young

Suzanne Whyte

Holt, A.C.T.

Palm Beach, N.S.W.

ABC Radio, New Delhi

Gwandalan, N.S.W.

We welcome Don Boadle as Archivist at Charles Sturt University and to our membership.

The History Council of New South Wales

Last November Judy Wing went on behalf of the OHAA (NSW) to an inaugural workshop to address the situation of history in New South Wales and to explore the possibilities of raising its profile in the community.

Several meetings took place after that. Rosie Block went along to all of them and found that it was very exciting to be part of a creation process. OHAA (NSW) is a founding member of the Council.

Paul Scifleet, the recently appointed Executive Officer, reports:

The History Council is an exciting undertaking. It provides for the first time a cohesive structure to represent the diverse interests of organisations and individuals involved in the research, writ-

ing, dissemination and appreciation of history throughout New South Wales.

The Council aims to promote the practice of history in New South Wales, to raise the public profile of history and to seek increased resources and funding for history.

Membership is open to local and family history organisations, specialist history organisations, educational institutions and government agencies involved in history. Individuals are also encouraged – and most welcome – to join.

The objects of the History Council of NSW Inc. are:-

- to facilitate co-ordination between the various organisations engaged in history

- to function as an information, communication and referral centre for individuals and organisations in the history community
- to raise the profile of history at all levels of government and throughout the community
- to raise awareness and appreciation of Aboriginal Peoples' history and Aboriginal perspectives of history
- to improve liaison with government and other organisations
- to provide advocacy for history
- to seek increased resources and funding for history
- to achieve greater recognition of the value of historians' professional expertise in heritage, education, government process and policy making

Membership application forms with this edition of *Voiceprint*.

ARTICLES

A Grass-Roots Product

Between the River and The Railway

Between the River and the Railway, a women's oral history of Macquarie Fields, was very much a 'grass-roots' project. It was conceived by the community, for the community, conducted by the community and the result was enjoyed by the community.

Macquarie Fields is in the northern sector of the Campbelltown City Council area and the Council sponsored the project, with the Community Arts Officer acting as liaison between the women and the Council.

The Macquarie Fields Women's Writing Group, having successfully published an anthology, eagerly took up a Council

Welfare Officer's suggestion to write a women's oral history of Macquarie Fields. I agreed to give guidance in the skills of interviewing, making transcriptions, the legal niceties of copyright and the various methods of putting oral material into book form. I live in Campbelltown and have a certain knowledge of Macquarie Fields' past. I also agreed to edit the work.

Over 30 women showed interest in the project but most withdrew when they realised the time involved in interviewing, transcribing and administration involved. We began and finished the practical side of the project with the

same six interviewers. They included a High School teacher; a school secretary whose 1940's childhood had been in Macquarie Fields; a doctor who had practised in the district since early Housing Commission days; the District Family Welfare Officer; a local woman involved in voluntary activities and the Council Community Arts Officer. Later a local free-lance photographer became involved.

There was a dearth of recorded material in library records, council archives and local newspapers. We contacted a retired history teacher who researched the 19th Century history of the area and documented her findings. This work is the only comprehensive history of the area during last century. So as well as oral history beginning at 1910, the project also produced a history of the previous century. We contacted a member of the local Aboriginal Committee who wrote an introduction on the D'harawal Dreaming, covering the pre-history of the period.

The area was a grant by Governor King in 1806 to James Meehan, the acting Colonial Surveyor. Governor Macquarie extended the grant in 1811 and in appreciation Meehan named it Macquarie Fields. The area remained a rural district, though subdivided and with many different owners, until the late 1960's when the Housing Commission took over a large area, and since

then private residential developments have run riot.

The project began in November 1994 and culminated with publication in September 1994. We met monthly to review work and discuss forward planning. The dedication of the six interviewers and the twenty six narrators was a feature of the project.

Firstly, we listed the subjects we wanted to cover. After the first few interviews several topics were deleted and others added. The group's intention was to present a verbatim resume of the narrators' stories. The final format of the book used the subject topics as headings.

I worked through the completed transcripts, extracting relevant data to fit the subject headings of the narrators' interviews. I sent two print-outs to the interviewer: one for her assessment of any facts I had overlooked in her transcript and the other for the narrator to check out. Fortunately, there were few alterations needed.

The interviewers collected photographs covering over 70 years of life in Macquarie Fields. Some were dog-eared and faded but the photographer re-photographed and enlarged many of them, giving a wide choice for the final selection.

Publicity about the project began early. It included a visual display of these photographs with enlarged printing of extract from the text, with the narrators'

approval. We displayed these in the local shopping complex in connection with Campbelltown Writers' Week. This display was later exhibited in schools and libraries in the Campbelltown area and is now part of the local history collection.

A morning tea for narrators and those interested in being interviewed was attended by the local press and gave a great impetus to the project. The Community Arts Officer contributed a regular update in the local press. My talk to the Campbelltown/Airds Historical Society's monthly meeting encouraged new narrators. Two told of life as children living with their parents in shacks out in the Macquarie Fields' Bush during the 1930's Depression. Their recollections brought to light unknown material.

The Council's printing department gave us a costing and we devised a publication equivalent to the money available. This allowed us 100 pages in A4 size. We estimated the pages needed for imprint page, title page, foreword, preface, table of contents, list of photographs and maps, index pages, plus 3 maps and 16 photographs (of a size to fit on 1/3 of a page). Photographs on the cover are of the Georges River and the railway, the life-line of the district and present boundaries of Macquarie Fields.

Despite a dead-line, extra interviews were conducted and transcripts came in

late. This threw out the printer's timetable and necessitated waiting until other scheduled Council printing was completed. These problems do arise in the best planned projects. The Council typesetter was not available and I had to typeset the book. Fortunately I had used the computer on two previous occasions to typeset books, but it is a demanding job.

I used 12 pitch New Times Roman font, 1.5 spacing between lines and double spacing between paragraphs. To allow for more space for text I dispensed with Headers or Footers. The photographs were interspersed throughout the text. Next, my software was not fully compatible with the Council hi-tech printing machinery. However, the Council staff spent time transferring my floppy disk into their programme.

After the first printing-run, the galley-proof was proof-read by a volunteer expert. This cleared up the errors the computer spell-check failed to spot, and typing mistakes.

The cover design caused problems. The hi-tech printing press couldn't cope with the complex photographs and graphic design. The second attempt was acceptable.

Rosemary Block launched *Between the River and the Railway* at the end of October 1994. The book was well received and at \$5.00 a copy the entire edition sold out by Christmas. The second edition is due in a couple of months. For details

ring the Campbelltown City Council on (046) 201556.

The Council took the financial worry out of the project but the Macquarie Fields Women Writers had full control of the setting the agenda and formatting the manuscript. The dedication of the

group and the discussions at each monthly meeting resulted in a co-operative effort which produced a comprehensive history of Macquarie Fields.

Robina Lockett

Copyright Robina Lockett 1995

I N T H E F I E L D

Between the Bridges

Brooklyn Oral History Project

B*etween the Bridges* is an oral history project I commenced in 1993 and which seeks to construct a picture of life in this community in those years between the first railway bridge (1887 connecting the northern NSW rail-line with the Hornsby/Hawkesbury River rail extension) and the first road bridge (built in 1945 and still used, nestled alongside the expressway road bridge built in the 70's).

Hence *Between the Bridges* locates the project geographically as much as it also spans the years between the 1890's and the 1940's.

The township of Brooklyn, 50kms north of Sydney's business district, is inextricably linked with the history of the river and the history of rail. Family names continue to appear in the Brooklyn Public School's roll call which have their ancestors in settlers who forged a wild

and new beginning in Australia in the 1800's, long before the "Brooklyn" Estate was developed for sub-division in 1884.

Governor Philip's "discovery" of the Hawkesbury River (it was known by the local Aboriginal tribes as Deerubbin) led in the early years of Sydney's settlement to farming in the upper reaches of the Hawesbury which sustained Sydney's food supply. Until a road offered transport between Parramatta and Windsor, the route was by river - small and large trading vessels plying their way down river through to Broken Bay, Pittwater, out to sea and south through the Heads to Port Jackson.

Brooklyn, which it has recently been discovered by the Gosford District Local History Study Group was named after the Fagans' (owners of the Estate prior to its sale) memories of Breucklen in the Netherlands, hosted many a railway

worker and provided a significant base to food transport (by boat and rail) into the 1900's and to the development of oyster farming and fishing which remain key industries in Brooklyn and for which Brooklyn, together with tourism, nowadays is better known.

This project has both an interview and a research component that seeks to provide an understanding of the fabric of everyday life, from the 1890's through the 1940's of the working class, light industry and small business residents in this semi-rural setting. The 1890's I know appears ambitious but interviewees may reminisce on stories or events passed down from their parents.

With particular reference to the article which we have been permitted to reprint, courtesy of the S.A. Oral History Association newsletter - on Broadcast Quality Recordings - I thought I would share my worst experience "in the field"; one which nevertheless provided an unexpected bonus and some further reflection.

The Nature of Sound - Voices and Soundscapes.

One of the guiding principles in interviewing is the need to control background sounds, ensuring others are out of the room or at least aware not to interject or clink the cups. Certainly this can detract from the final sound quality of the interview, cause confusion and

perhaps interference for both later translation or listening. Most importantly, as expressed in the article courtesy of S.A. in this issue, background sounds potentially cause technical problems when editing for later broadcast.

My biggest gaff in this area occurred when interviewing a resident of Dangar Island, near Brooklyn. The gentleman I interviewed had spent his early years living in Brooklyn and on the river and indeed, his entire working life oyster-farming.

It was a gorgeous day, blue sky, slight breeze rippling the waters as I caught the early afternoon ferry over to Dangar with a mission.

It was Spring and very soon we were seated on the verandah (the interviewee, his wife clicking on the needles - very aware of all said - and I), all overlooking the River. After a hesitant introduction, soon we were immersed in what would become a memorable two hours exploring the interviewee's vivid recollections of life both on the River and growing up in Brooklyn during the Depression.

Little by little, bit by bit, the breeze was strengthening. The chimes hitherto unnoticed but for a pleasant intermittent tinkling in the background, became, gradually, more pronounced. Papers on the table rustled with envy. I was caught out! The conviviality of the afternoon and interest in the interviewee's story had taken over.

The chimes which had appeared to be in the background rose, in glorious frenzy, with the wind to confront me.

We stopped recording, reached for, fought with and subdued the chimes, rearranged the deck-chairs and resumed. The wind appeared to lessen over the next while. Peace reigned again and the hum of distant motor craft mingled with birdsong. Later in the afternoon now and the birds (probably lots of chicks among them) decided on their late afternoon chorus. Chimes, boats, birds - I had it all.

What did I do - and what did I gain?

The tapes are translatable, the interviewee's voice clear but with significant background sound "interference".

In terms of "broadcast quality" the tapes will present difficulty. In terms of capturing some of the sounds or soundscape that surrounded the interviewee and provides a glimpse of a lifestyle beyond the spoken word, the experience has provided some reflection. How would I handle it next time.

Probably because I see broadcast as the ideal method for conveying recollection and anecdote (voices are unique) I will be far more conscious of aspects such as background sound. It may not mean sitting inside a home within a controlled situation but it does mean for me, if choosing a garden setting or indeed if such a setting is preferred by the interviewee, being aware of weather, birds (their time of day especially, papers

on the table etc.) as a basic risk management exercise.

As background sound on the existing tape I now find it difficult to separate the lifestyle/ambience that those background sounds convey, the personality of the interviewee, his moments of reflection during recording and sounds that may be familiar and indeed peculiar to that landscape. In some respects it has inadvertently enhanced the tape and provides another context for the listener.

One way in which I have considered how the views above might be reconciled is by demarcating "sound as interference" from "sound as enhancement". Voices very rarely occur in vacuums and prior to an interview (or in the middle when there's a pause for a break or at the cessation of interviewing), attempting to capture some of the sounds which are part of the setting in which the interview will occur could enhance any final production and provide such a context, without compromising the quality of the tape recording. This requires a bit more planning and contrivance but may lead to unexpected riches.

Miriam Moloney

Brooklyn Oral History Project
Brooklyn, NSW

Note: If members know of a neighbour or relative who grew up or lived in Brook-

lyn or on the river between 1900-1940's and who may have particular anecdotes reflecting on that time I would welcome

the opportunity to discuss this project further (a.h. phone 02 9985 7298).

Local Government Projects

A number of local government Councils have initiated oral history programs. We will endeavour over the next few issues to document their involvement. We will be interested to hear from members who know of projects currently undertaken by their local Council.

The Burwood Oral History Program

The project in Burwood aims to reflect the social and cultural history and make up of the district. Information, by way of interviewing, is recorded on cassette (available in the local library) and transcribed into a booklet.

The project is working on its second edition. "Memories" the first production was a huge success culminating in a historical bus tour for contributors, a book, a cassette launch and the sale of all 100 books during Seniors Week 1994. Each production takes approximately 2 years.

The project this year has received a small grant from the Australia Remembers Program enabling Burwood to record the wartime memories of local residents - those who served/volunteered at home and abroad. The War Memories mini project will be launched in November/ December 1995 and the second edition of Memories should be complete in time for seniors Week 1996.

Tracey Sweetman

Growing Up in South Sydney

The interview stage of the South Sydney Social History Project is now drawing to a close. With the theme 'Life as a Child - Growing up in South Sydney' the interviews have focused on family and community life across the century. The decision to experiment with videoing the interviews has greatly enhanced the project.

Initial concerns that the technology might result in a loss of intimacy were quickly allayed. The use of a single technician rather than a 'crew' mitigated any sense of intimidation and the expressions, gesticulations of the interviewee reinforced the sense of what they were saying. With an entire dimension added to the project, the audience no longer has to totally rely on intonation patterns to judge the veracity of what the interviewee is saying.

Of the 70 interviewees 62 agreed to be videoed and all were sent a copy of the interview. The positive PR generated by this encouraged others to volunteer for what is a very personal project. Although only base level professional equipment was used the quality of the

footage and sound is excellent and the cost has been low compared with industry norms. The videos have opened up a range of possibilities in terms of outcomes for the project which are currently being explored for development in the long term. Meanwhile, the next stage of the project entailing analysis of material and development of a book in which the residents of South Sydney will tell their own story is about to commence.

Although there has been a certain amount of 'coming to terms' with the technology i.e., lighting, the use of appropriate 'gels', the mysterious 'white balance', exploding halogen lamps, and temperamental cameras and tape you do get to become familiar with what can go wrong and I'm now a firm believer in the accessibility, flexibility, affordability and appropriateness of the medium. This has been a 'road to Damascus experience'; I'm convinced that it's the way of the future for oral history.

Sue Rosen



National Conference – Words at Work

8–10 September, Launceston, Tasmania

For those who may have mislaid or forgotten the information about the National Conference which was sent out with the last issue of *Voiceprint* here is a reprint of part of the Conference Convenor Jill Cassidy's last news sheet.

The keynote speaker is of particular interest. Donald Hyslop is Community History Officer for Southampton City Council and has been in the forefront of oral history developments in the United Kingdom. The keynote speaker at the British Oral History conference in 1993, his ability to self-fund his oral history programme through publications is highly regarded. He has written several books based on oral history, the most recent being *Titanic Voices: The Story of the White Star Line, Titanic and Southampton*.

At the moment he is preparing (in collaboration) a book on Oral History in Museums in the U.K. and he is well placed to give a very good account of general trends in oral history practice in the U.K.

Since the conference brochure was printed, the British Council has advised that they will support the visit to the

conference of John Roles, Senior Keeper at the Brighton Museum and Art Gallery. This is wonderful news. John Roles has been the initiator of an innovative programme at the Brighton Museum using over one hundred volunteers to put together a multi-media display (CD-ROM) which incorporates oral history. His use of oral history is quite unusual and should be of great interest to delegates at the conference. Roles has also published several books. His topic will be: "My Brighton - A Case Study in Combining Multi-media and Community History for the Medium-sized Museum". We are hoping he will be able to bring a CD with him so delegates can view his programme in operation.

With these two speakers plus the great range of Australian speakers at the conference you can look forward to a very stimulating three days in Launceston. The conference venue, the Albert Hall, is a 100-year-old stately building very close to the city centre and its Tamar Valley Centre overlooks City Park.

Registration costs are still remarkably low, and you will find the cost of eating out is quite reasonable.

National Conference Update

There is some more exciting news about the national conference of the Oral History Association of Australia to be held in Launceston in September.

It has just been confirmed that Donald Ritchie from the Historical Office of the United States Senate will also attend the conference. A past President of the (U.S.) Oral History Association, he will present: "Oral History's Third Wave: New Directions of Public Presentation in the United States". Ritchie conducts an oral history programme with senators and Senate staff, and serves as series editor of the Twayne oral history series. He has written many articles and this year has published the book, *Doing Oral History*. He will be accompanied by his

wife who is Oral Historian of the National Gallery of Art in Washington and President-elect of the Oral History Association.

Along with keynote speaker Donald Hyslop and the British-Council sponsored visit of John Roles from the Brighton Museum and Art Gallery, we now have three very good overseas speakers. With the addition of the great range of Australian speakers you can expect a very stimulating three days in Launceston, and registration costs are still remarkably low. We look forward to seeing you in September.

Jill Cassidy

Conference Convenor

Tel. 003 371391 Fax 003 371117

Editing and Publishing from Oral History Recordings: A Practical Seminar

Saturday 12 August 1995 in the Metcalfe Auditorium, State Library of New South Wales, Macquarie Street, Sydney NSW 2000. Enquiries to Rosemary Block, State Library of New South Wales (02) 230 1697.

Members of the Oral History Association are invited to a special guest lecture by

Donald Hyslop on September 6, 1995 at the University of New South Wales. Enquiries to Maureen Henninger, School of Information, Library and Archives Studies, University of New South Wales Tel. (02) 385 3589 Fax (02) 385 3430.

Donald Hyslop's Sydney Program to Date

From 1–12 September, Donald Hyslop can be contacted through Rosemary Block, Curator of Oral History, State Library of New South Wales, (02) 230 1697. From 18 September to 24 September he can be contacted at (02) 337 6978.

Seminar. On oral history and museums in the UK. For MA Applied History Students, hosted by Paul Ashton September 19. University of Technology, Sydney. Enquiries Paul Ashton.

Maritime Museum, Darling Harbour. Enquiries Penny Cuthbert.

Meeting. Outreach and oral history. For museum staff, hosted by Penny Cuthbert September 20. Australian National.

Meeting. Outreach and oral history. For Outreach staff, hosted by Penny Packham, Program Officer, Museums Australia September 21. Australian National Maritime Museum, Darling Harbour. Enquiries Penny Packham.

Other Events

Included in this diary, courtesy of Joy Hughes and the PHA, are history-related events which may be of interest to members.

heritage sites at south end of the city, August 19, Enquiries Royal Australian Historical Society 247 8001.

Exhibition. The Work of Art: Australian 1966 Women Writers and Artists. August 14 to February. State Library of New South Wales.

Walk. Glebe with Robert Irving. August 26. Enquiries Royal Australian Historical Society 247 8001.

Talking and Viewing with exhibition curator Rebecca Thomas, 10.30 to 12.30 August 21.

Talk. Australia Remembers 1945 to 1995. Krait: The Fishing Boat that went to War by Lynette Silver. September 4. Enquiries 230 1500 Library Society.

Talking and Viewing with exhibition curator Rebecca Thomas, 6 to 8 August 24. Enquiries 230 1500.

Byron Cranstone on Westpac Archives. 1 p.m. September 6. History House. Bookings 247 8001.

Walk. Sydney's Engineering Heritage II: The Whitton Walk, engineering



Producing Quality Recordings:

The Importance of Technical Excellence in Oral History and How to Achieve It

Excerpt from the Notes from Deborah Welch's presentation of the Technical Skills Seminar 15 May 1993 (Courtesy *Word of Mouth* June 1993, Newsletter of the South Australian Branch of the Oral History Association of Australia)

Deborah Welch has extensive experience in public radio, including Radio 5UV in Adelaide, and in teaching radio production and criticism at Swinbourne University in Victoria

Deborah's presentation at the Technical Skills Seminar focused on the quality of recordings required for radio use but her comments are equally valid for many other kinds of broadcast uses.

The following notes are meant to apply to the "broadcast" of oral history recordings in the widest sense of the term

One of Deborah's strongest arguments in encouraging interviewers to produce quality recordings is that quality recording is a matter of habit not time. Deborah reminds us that oral history is time consuming but that it takes no more time to learn good recording habits than bad ones. Its a very

practical approach to producing quality recordings.

Typical problems in oral history recordings

Deborah has listened to numerous interviews in the J.D. Somerville Oral History Collection in the Mortlock Library and the City of Adelaide Archives seeking excerpts to use for her "Ear to the Ground" series. She found that many of the recordings had one or more characteristics that meant that they could not be used on radio or other broadcast uses.

One too common problem is "the interrupting interviewer". This may not seem like a technical issue, but becomes one when a recording can't be used for broadcast because a producer can't locate any sections, or grabs, of the interviewee's speech that are not interrupted or talked over by the interviewer.

Another persistent problem is the ineffectual interviewing style that doesn't allow the interviewee to actually provide anything but Yes or No answers. Deborah gave the example of seeing in an interview summary that an interviewee grew up in Burra and spent a happy childhood there. When she listened to

the tape she heard something like the following:

Q: *So did you live in Burra all through your childhood?*

A: *Yes.*

Q: *Was it a happy childhood?*

A: *Oh yes.*

Q: *And did you used to play down the creek?*

A: *Yes.*

The Interviewer, rather than the interviewee, is providing all of the information.

More obvious technical problems in many oral history interviews are that the interviewee sounds "off mike" and that there is an audible level of "tape hiss". As explained in the section of these notes about "What constitutes a quality recording", an off mike recording occurs when the microphone is too far away from the interviewee or the record levels on the tape recorder are set too low. As a result the voice sounds distant or in the background. An on mike sound, in which the voice sounds close and present, is achieved by a close microphone - as well as appropriate record levels - so that the voice is projected directly into the microphone.

Deborah demonstrated that what you hear in an off mike recording is the voice echoing around the room on the way to the microphone, rather than the voice

going straight into the mike. The further the interviewee or interviewer are away from the microphone, the more their voices interact with the environment of the recording - and that is the sound that goes into the microphone, rather than the original voices.

Sounds are waves - they bounce off hard surfaces. A room with more absorbent furnishing and finishes - like a studio or living room - has a deader sound, less echo, and produces a starker recording if the microphone is correctly placed.

The tie clip, or lapel microphone, is becoming increasingly popular amongst interviewers because of its portability and ease of use. It moves with the interviewee, so the interviewer doesn't have to worry about the interviewee changing position away from the microphone. However, tie clip microphones are generally omni-directional - they pick up sound from any direction indiscriminately. This means that a well-placed tie clip microphone will pick up more background noise than an equally well-placed uni-directional or cardioid stand-held microphone that pick up sound in a relatively narrow range. Deborah also pointed out that the tie clip microphone is directed at the ceiling, which is where the air conditioning noises that can plague tape recordings usually emanate from.

It is important for interviewers to be aware of these issues - and to listen for

them in the sound check before the interview begins - so that we can make better choices or better use of equipment in non-studio settings.

Tape hiss is caused by too low levels recorded on tape and by the use of poor quality tapes. It too has important implications for production work. As mentioned above, the most common use of oral history in broadcast involves putting several grabs of voices side by side. The volume of these recordings needs to be even so that the listener isn't surprised or distracted by changing levels of sound. If the excerpts were recorded at quite different levels originally, then the level of hiss will noticeably rise and fall as the level is raised or lowered in production to bring them all in line. If all the excerpts were quality recordings with optimum levels to begin with this is not an issue.

Poor quality tape has more hiss to start with and doesn't cope with repeated playing. Deborah also pointed out that the recording heard on radio or in other broadcast productions is likely to be at least a fourth generation copy of the original (a copy goes to the producer, who copies the grabs wanted onto another tape and then assembles the program onto a further tape). The better quality the original, the better it will stand up to these processes.

Lastly, another all too common problem Deborah encountered in oral history

recordings was a lot of background noises on tape recordings - traffic sounds, ticking and chiming clocks, talking and clatter in adjoining rooms, dogs barking and so on. Of course, background noises are inevitable with recordings outside studios.

However the interviewer can do many things to minimise their impact - such as correct placement of microphones, closing doors and windows, removing noisy appliances, seeking the co-operation of other household members and so on.

Interviewers often argue that background noises provide atmosphere or context for the interview, but remember that in broadcasts usually only grabs of an interview will be used and placed next to excerpts from other interviews. If one excerpt includes the noise of a cuckoo clock chiming in the background, the listener will wonder at its significance. Did the producer put it in? Why? Odd noises are disturbing to listeners and to the flow of a program.

Background noises also make it very difficult to edit a section of tape - such as removing a question, a cough, or a false start to a story. It is usually very clear to the listener that the tape has been edited because the background noise has obviously been interrupted. In fact, it is more likely that an interview including background noise simply won't be considered for broadcast use.

Nevertheless, Deborah did demonstrate the benefits of on site - out-door or workplace - interviews that can involve quite a lot of background noise. There is something about the way that people talk when they are looking at something, or doing something, that is quite different to them speaking about it in the abstract. But Deborah stressed that it takes a lot of skill to do this sort of interview well. You shouldn't attempt it until you feel really confident with getting a good clean recording with no background sound in the first place.

Summary: Essential technical features of quality recordings

1. You can hear the voices very clearly
2. The voices are on mike and at good levels
3. There is little or no background noise including tape hiss
4. The interviewee speaks without unnecessary interruption from the interviewer
5. The tapes used for recording are of good quality

Summary: Good habits to develop for quality recordings

1. Use quality equipment - a tape recorder with a third head for monitoring the progress of the recording through headphones, and two microphones.

2. Know your equipment well so that its proper use is automatic
3. Wear headphones to listen to the recording when doing the sound check before the interview and for the first few minutes of each new side
4. Place the microphones carefully and confidently as close as possible to the interviewee's and your mouths
5. Put a sock in it - keep your own mouth shut as much as possible during the interview!

Finally, Deborah urges interviewers to keep radio and other broadcast uses in mind as one end for our recordings and suggests talking to radio producers when setting up new projects to get ideas about how to make the recordings useful to radio as well as more conventional research purposes. Quality recordings are worth making available to as wide an audience as possible.

Deborah Welch and Beth M. Robertson

Editors' note: We are sure this article is very useful in pinpointing some difficulties readers may have experienced. Remember OHAA offer seminars and advice on technical matters. Contact Rosie Block on 230 1697.



The Forgotten Ones: Women and Children Under Nippon by Shirley Fenton Huie, Angus and Robertson, 1992

Book review by Heather Campbell, courtesy of Play Back Vol. 15 No. 2 May 1995, Newsletter of the West Australian Branch of the Oral History Association of Australia.

This book, as the name suggests, describes the experiences of Dutch/Australian women of Java and Sumatra interned under Japanese rule in World War II. The 200 odd page book is divided into four chapter headings, within which individual prison camps are given subheadings. The book contains excellent photographs and some maps and diagrams.

Russell Braddon indicates in the Foreword, "few women seemed so ill-equipped to survive the ordeal of Japanese captivity as the Dutchwomen of Java and Sumatra. Not only had they never toiled or spun, they had never cooked, kept house, changed nappies, bathed children or suffered any of the hardships of war". Shirley Fenton Huie collected the women's stories 'over the lunch table, over the telephone and over great distances by letter', and has allowed them to speak for themselves. Among the predictable tales of hardship and cruelty - and there are many - are

humorous episodes; 'A plain looking woman' was desperately ill with dysentery and there was little hope of recovery. 'She begged for lipstick and powder which we managed to find and then miraculously she began to improve and eventually recovered completely. She said she arrived at the Pearly Gates and, taking one look at her, they decided she was too ugly to go in so she was rejected. Her good humour cheered us all up'.

The moist poignant chapters are those on the camp children who had seen only women and children for three and a half years. Schooling was primitive, and paper supplies sparse, but a school-teacher 'gave us arithmetic and spelling. We did our writing on white floor tiles. You rubbed out by spitting on them and rubbing it out'. Daddies were remembered only by photos, but their significance not forgotten. 'One little boy took an Australian by the hand and led him into the hospital where his mother was lying sick, saying, 'Look Mummy. I've got a Daddy for you, to make you better'. The end of the war was heralded with the children running in crying, 'The Daddies are coming! The Daddies are coming!'

Shirley Fenton Huie has thoughtfully provided a glossary of non-English words, a bibliography and an index. The index is particularly helpful as in the

'kaleidoscope of terrible experiences of camp prison life' names and sources of extracts were confusing on occasions; in addition it was nice to be able to locate quickly a photograph of the informant you were currently reading about.

Not strictly based on oral history, but an attractive and readable book, where one has the feeling that there is a potential book in every chapter.