



voiceprint

Newsletter

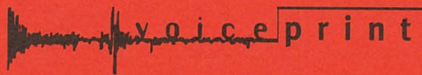
of the New South Wales Branch
of the Oral History Association
of Australia

15

March 1998



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Editorial

We do apologise for allowing the gremlins into the system and allowing some errors to creep into your November Voiceprint. However, we will continue to use modern technology to transfer as much of our information by electronic means as possible. Perhaps as a group we are not using 'the net' as much as is possible. We note that there are some computer addresses in this newsletter. We have on hand some listings of web pages which we will edit for our next publication. Do members know of any web pages that might be of interest to oral historians (and here we must emphasise oral history, rather than history). If members tell us of addresses which they have found interesting then we can add them to our listing for Voiceprint (thank you to those members who have already provided addresses). Are there any mailing lists that members find interesting – tell us about them – or do we need one of our own? What do you think? Many of our members must spend considerable time at the computer – are we communicating – 'talking' to each by electronic means? We look forward to your communication. You can make contact for Voiceprint to – Joyce Cribb <ivancri@mpx.com.au> and Rosie Block at the office <rblock@ilanet.slnsw.gov.au>.

Ethical questions are always with oral historians and especially in regard to the stories of indigenous people. "Whose story is it?" Those attending the 10th Biennial Conference will recall the discussion in relation to this subject. We are delighted to print for your interest the full text of the paper presented at the conference by Dr Anna Shnukal from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Unit, The University of Queensland. We have included the full list of reference so our readers may expand their own research in this area. Do other members have experiences to share with members?

Also in this edition there are reports on a very successful project involving older people and reminiscence conducted in the U.K. and a project being undertaken in Australia by The Film Makers Oral History Group. I'm sure all oral historians are delighted to know that there appears to be so much interest in the stories of the lives of people and particular industries. We are delighted to have received book reviews from members – thank you. Do you have a story to tell? Remember we would love to hear from you!

Please note the coming events – it is pleasing to see our noticeboard is growing. We hope you find this information useful.

Best wishes,

Angela Wawn, Katja Grynberg, Ruth Wilson & Joyce Cribb

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New Members from May 1997

Welcome to you all of you new members! As usual a wonderful range of interests and occupations. I do hope that it will be useful to you and that you will enjoy your membership of the OHAA (NSW) Inc. (We include here the names of members who were unfortunately not included in the last Voiceprint.

Mrs J. Halliwell	Retired Judge's Associate
Stuart Braga	Senior Master, Trinity Grammar School
Lois R. Strong	Interested in life stories
Brenda Gadsby	Interested in local history
Kim Eberhard	Student archivist
Rosemary Montgomery	English and History teacher at TAFE
Parramatta City Library	
Therese Clarke	Nurse – interested in hospital history
Jane Newbould	Student archivist, former journalist
Tatjana Keczcuski	Library Manager, Redland Shire Council, QLD
Sue Georgevits	Student
Lisa Williams	Curator, ACT
Maureen Simons	Diversional Therapist
Susie Phillips	Oral Historian, Sydney Maritime Museum
Katherine Albury	Researcher/Producer/Writer
Claire Manning	Student/Adult Training
John Miller	Tour Guide
Frank Heimans	Film Producer/Broadcaster/Consultant
Peter Deklerk	Investment Manager
Concord Heritage Society;	our member, Lois Michel, has 'joined them up'
Stephanie Claire	Teacher interested in writing
James Dalton	Mechanical engineer interested family history and railways
Dr Isabel Perez-Molin	Lecturer, Institute for International Studies, UTS, interested in migrant's memories
Bridget Brandon	Teacher of story, Storyworks (see advert.)

Beverly Johnson	Professional historian
Liz Segal	Transcriptionist (see advert.), music teacher interested in music and literature
Mrs N.R. Blackaby	Public servant interested in local and family history
Ann Beaumont	History student, UNE, interested in local and English history
Ann Close	Student, interested in Scotland, immigration
Lola Sharp	Secretary, completing MA in history
Deborah Jordan	PhD student, interested in migration from independent India
Patricia A Turnbull	Educator, family oral history, group work

Mailbag

This is a "plug" for the Oral History course presented by Rosie Block and Ann Pederson at the University of New South Wales. I was one of a number of practising professionals to undertake the course from August to October last year. I found the class enthusiastic, the course itself a good balance of theory and practice, the sessions interesting and stimulating, and the interaction with younger, full-time students refreshing. Altogether, well worthwhile. Thoroughly recommended to those who wish to hone their skills and learn more about the wider context of oral history.

Yours sincerely
Jan Henderson

REPORTS

Crossing Borders - Revisited

We have some more from the 10th Biennial Conference to share with you.

Motion passed at “Crossing Borders” Report from Di Ritch

The following motion was moved by Richard Raxworthy:

“That this meeting strongly supports the validation of Native Title, particularly where the Indigenous People have been forcibly removed from their land, and, that this support be conveyed to the Prime Minister, the Premiers of the States and the Chief Ministers of the Territories”

The Maori contingent re-enforced the solidarity of the Indigenous People. Their opening address started with a traditional Haka, which was both moving and powerful.

The past was reviewed but it was the positive view of the future that gained the attention of delegates. ‘Crossing Borders’ was an apt title for our conference – borders were crossed, extended or broken down altogether and replaced by solidarity, re-enforced by the unanimous petition on behalf of Aboriginal People

Dianna Ritch

It was passed unanimously and with applause. This emphasised the wonderful spirit that pervaded the conference – that of solidarity with, and support for the Aboriginal People. This spirit was felt from the start of the conference when visitors were welcomed by the Arrernte people, traditional owners at Alice Springs. Throughout the conference speakers thanked the Arrernte for their welcome and acknowledged both their ownership and the respect that was felt toward them.

'It's all about Respect'

the etiquette of recording Indigenous oral history. Anna Shnukal – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Unit, The University of Queensland *

In recent years numbers of oral historians have begun tentatively to cross one of Australia's least permeable internal borders, that which divides Indigenous from non-Indigenous communities. Researching history 'from the other side' has aroused interest in the etiquette of initiating and carrying out field research among Indigenous peoples from 'Fourth World' communities.¹ Educational institutions are formalising principles for their non-Indigenous students; professional organisations are establishing basic protocols of behaviour to guide their members; and funding bodies now scrutinise proposed research frameworks much more closely than before. Intending researchers must demonstrate that they have considered not only the scholarly, methodological, technical and financial aspects of their work, but also the ethical and philosophical aspects.

This paper revisits and reflects on the oral history research which I have carried out among Torres Strait Islanders over the past sixteen years, and compares it with fieldwork done in August 1994 among the descendants of Maori pearl divers from New Zealand's Bay of Islands, who worked in Torres Strait during the last decades of the nineteenth century. It

is a personal response to questions I was asked at the 1996 meeting of the Queensland branch of the Oral History Association of Australia in Rockhampton. An early paper on the etiquette of working in Indigenous Australian communities (von Sturmer 1981) begins by explaining that, given the extreme variability of such communities, no-one can provide a simple set of instructions. More recently, Cowlishaw (1997:111) makes the point that 'fieldwork relations are also race relations'. The following remarks provide a general framework only and much of the paper is generalizable to any oral history interview; indeed, many of the issues were canvassed at the 1997 annual conference with its theme of 'crossing borders'.

Beginnings

I began researching the creole lingua franca of Torres Strait in island communities in 1981 and became increasingly interested in Islanders' stories of the early post-contact period. Most academic accounts were reconstructed by anthropologists with the classical British anthropological bias towards the 'pure native of the past'. Almost all the Islanders I knew, however, were descendants of Pacific Islander and

Asian seamen, who had flooded into the Strait from the 1860s, married local women and founded the dynasties which have provided this century's political and economic leadership. The story of their eventual domination of much Islander life, their strategies for acquiring land and kin, which are the bases of traditional life, and their transformation of traditional custom into contemporary 'island custom', became my primary research interest in 1994.

A key to understanding the dynamics of cultural transformation in the remote island communities is to study the marriages contracted by the immigrants and the children they fathered. Some of these births, marriages and deaths are recorded in the nineteenth-century Somerset registers which I was privileged to view in early 1994. At the time, I believed that the worlds of the European and non-European intersected in only the most superficial and obvious ways and I therefore ignored the numerous births to the New Zealand pearlsheller, William Parkes, who had lived on Muralag (Prince of Wales Island) for about fifteen years before the turn of the century. Like a number of his contemporaries, Scandinavian and

British shellers who also lived on Muralag, he had evidently prospered, beginning as a diver and becoming a sheller and boat owner. I assumed that he was British from his name, his occupations as pearler and boat owner and the fact that his children's births and deaths were recorded at a time when 'coloured' men's progeny were generally unregistered. However, his wife, whose name was variously written as 'Rea Reffa', 'Leah Repha' and 'Leah Reffer', may have been Maori. Entries in the death registers also indicated a family connection between William Parkes' wife and Toota Rifa, the father of William Parkes Toota, who died in 1893 on Muralag at the age of eight: possibly they were sister and brother. The dead boy had been born in Russell, Bay of Islands, where William and Ria Parkes had married. The undertaker at the boy's funeral was his uncle, Himi Tenana, also from Muralag.

I became intrigued by this extended family. I had heard several stories about Maori in Torres Strait, handed down within Torres Strait Islander families for over a century. The tales dwelt on their physical presence, exploits and knowledge of sorcery. The earliest recorded name of a foreign non-

European in Torres Strait history was Jack Maori, whose beheading sparked a revenge massacre by fellow crewmen in the early 1860s (Haddon 1908:190-191). The ancestor of the Murray family from Purma (Coconut Island) was a Maori, from whom his descendants derived their family name, originally 'Mari'. The London Missionary Society (LMS) missionary, William Wiapo, was the only Maori to have served, albeit briefly, with the Society in the Strait (LMS Papuan letters and reports 1890-1892). A friend's mother and aunt had been saved as children by 'Billy Maori' from Muralag, who had rowed out in his boat to bring them in when they ran into difficulties in the surrounding channel. The grandfather of that family, a celebrated healer, had bested another Maori in sorcery, turning the Maori's evil thrust back on the originator and killing him.

Though Maori never represented more than a tiny proportion of the marine workers of Torres Strait, they were remarked on for their physical appearance, exceptional talents as divers, direct experience of the European cash economy, and knowledge of European ways, English and the world outside the Strait. Their social position in the racially-based caste system of Torres Strait was ambiguous: sometimes recorded as Norfolk Islanders, they were of British nationality and, as I was to discover, many were of mixed descent, yet as

'coloured men' they became a reference group for the people of the Strait. No Maori figures in academic histories of the region.

I copied the death registrar details about William Parkes, his wife and children, as well as possible affines living on Muralag during the final fifteen years of the nineteenth century. The names disappeared from the records c.1900, perhaps indicating that they had left the Strait around that time. The Reports of the Government Resident of Thursday Island provided additional names of New Zealand divers, who I reasoned may have been among the Maori referred to approvingly – but only in one instance by name – in contemporary official reports on the Torres Strait pearling fisheries.

The amount was meagre but suggestive. With a few names, birth-places and dates of birth, marriage and death, I went to New Zealand to attempt on a small scale a methodology which I hoped could be transferred to my larger project, one aim of which is to 'rescue the individual and identify personal signatures on life' (Denning 1980:93).

One must always be introduced into Indigenous communities. An American friend, whose husband was then the only Maori I knew, gave me an introduction to her mother-in-law, Jean Ngawati. Immediately after arriving in Auckland, I drove north to Keri Keri to see her. Although Jean herself was not from the

Bay of Islands, she knew some of the family names and individuals by repute and where they were living. She and a friend suggested various people to talk to and found phone numbers for me. The Te Nana family, they informed me, was the same as the Clendon family. Jean also suggested I visit the local museum at Russell, the main Bay of Islands township. In ten days I was to deliver a paper on the Maori pearl divers at a conference in Auckland and leave New Zealand.

I drove to Paihia, across the water from Russell, intending to make it my base for a week, and set out to catch the local ferry. What struck me at once was the physical resemblance between that part of the Bay of Islands and the Prince of Wales group of islands. As I walked along the shore towards the wharf, I passed a church, entered its grounds without quite meaning to and, within seconds, was looking down at the grave of one of the men I had come to find. Behind the church were a number of other graves of those same families.

At the Russell Museum, the staff were courteous, helpful but wary. They sat me down with some local history books and manuscripts which mentioned in passing that a number of men from Rawhiti, a small Maori settlement east of Russell, had worked as divers in Torres Strait. There was little additional detail in the general histories but Robin Shepherd, who taught there in

the 1960s, had included in his booklet on Rawhiti the names of schoolchildren from the Parkes, Te Nana and Rewha families enrolled in the school in 1901 (Shepherd 1966).

New Zealand and Australian museums, libraries and archives, do not accord researchers any automatic right of access to family historical information. That information is highly restricted and can be released only with the approval of heads of families. After the usual testing period, however – I discussed my project with each staff member and one board member during the next few days – I was permitted to look at nineteenth-century local censuses and listen to recordings made as part of a local oral history project. And I was lucky. One of the staff was about to revisit a Maori woman to record local history and, with the permission of everyone concerned, I was invited to come along. The following day her cousin, Komene Te Nana, the grandson of Himi Te Nana, phoned me and invited me to his home not far from Rawhiti. Komene and his wife, Shirley, showed me photographs, took me to the *marae* in Rawhiti and to visit the senior member of the family there, translated the Maori headstones in the Rawhiti cemetery, told family stories of the pearling days, recounted genealogies and put me in touch with other family members in Paihia and Auckland. They in turn passed on additional family and

cultural information, took me to the Auckland museum and other sites of interest, contacted other family members and, shortly before my departure, organised a *hui* for me to meet three generations of the family.

The pearl divers of Rawhiti, Bay of Islands

It was through conversations with family members that the disparate fragments began to shape themselves into coherent narrative. Supporting documents surfaced: indeed, a feature of this kind of research is the reinforcing dialogue which develops between oral and written sources.

In the mid 1880s, three Rawhiti men, Wiremu Paaka, Himi Te Nana and Matutaera Rewha, formed a business partnership and travelled to Torres Strait, where rich beds of pearlshell had been discovered in 1868. These were difficult times in New Zealand and the men, related by blood and marriage, continued the long Maori entrepreneurial tradition of trading throughout the Pacific wherever opportunities offered.

Wiremu Paaka, or William Parkes as he was known in Australia, was the leader, the eldest, well-respected and well-liked. He was the son of Hiria and Thomas Parkes, an American whaler; he was also half-brother to Himi Te Nana (or James Clendon), Hiria's son by James Stephenson Clendon, Russell's first

Stipendiary Magistrate and grandson of Russell's first Resident Magistrate and New Zealand's first American consul, the Englishman, James Reddy Clendon. The two boys were adopted and raised by Here Te Nana, the chief of Rawhiti, after his marriage to Hiria. Wiremu and Matutaera Rewha were brothers-in-law, Wiremu having married Ria Matutaera's sister.

The men's families accompanied them and they settled for about fifteen years on Muralag, adjacent to the administrative centre, Thursday Island. They made their homes on a stretch of beach known by an earlier generation of Torres Strait Islanders as 'Bilimaui' [Billy Maori], after the 'head man of the Maori who lived there' (probably Wiremu Paaka). The families made many trans-Tasman crossings during those years; the wives were homesick and complained about 'primitive' conditions in the Strait. Kiritapu, the wife of Himi Te Nana, delivered her first child in Torres Strait in 1892 but insisted on travelling back to Rawhiti two years later when pregnant with her second child, in order to give birth among her own people. She refused to return and all her subsequent children were born in Rawhiti.

Nonetheless eleven children were born to Wiremu and Ria Paaka on Muralag and the partnership prospered. According to his descendants, Wiremu employed a mixed crew of Japanese and

Pacific Islander divers, as well as cooks, servants and nannies for the children. As their business grew, they built their own jetty, packing shed and storehouse to outfit the divers. Stories are told of packing the shell in crates to send to England through Burns Philp & Co., the main shell buyer for London at that time. By 1895 Paaka was registered as the owner of a boat, purchased according to family tradition with a loan from Burns Philp, and had entered a partnership with a Pakeha. No contemporary records of the boat purchase or partnership survive but certainly Burns Philp lent to 'coloured' men, provided there was a good profit to be made. Paaka returned to the Strait for the last time in about 1900 to sell up and pay off the crews.

The Rawhiti men were among a number of Maori from the Russell area, who worked as divers in Torres Strait from around 1881 to the turn of the century. They were the elite of the industry, highly skilled 'dress' divers who might earn as much as four to five hundred pounds per year, as well as windfall profits from the pearls they found. Witnesses at the 1908 Queensland Pearl-shell and Beche-de-mer Royal Commission singled out the Maori divers from the Bay of Islands for special praise. Although the families mention personal reasons for the return – the wives' homesickness and dislike of conditions on Muralag, Ria's failure to

bear a son and her conviction that she could do this only in her own country – no doubt difficult business conditions also played a role.

The 1890s saw the first depression in the industry, which became increasingly unprofitable. Its character changed with further regulation and the influx of Japanese divers who soon dominated the industry, replacing the Rotuma and Maori divers, who had themselves replaced Europeans. Wiremu's business partner embezzled the profits, say his descendants, and brought the enterprise to a close. Perhaps the deaths of Ria's two youngest children also affected the decision to return. Despite the setbacks, however, the families brought back enough money to build fine houses in Rawhiti. Wiremu Paaka's grandchildren remember his house, which later fell into disrepair, as having big rooms and a huge kitchen.

It would take too long to recapitulate each stage in the search for information about the Maori divers and their relationships with one another, but the retrieval of fragments of story and the serendipitous discovery of supporting written records seemed almost miraculous in retrospect. As an overseas visitor, I was welcomed into the families in characteristically Polynesian fashion – undoubtedly my non-New Zealander status was an asset, given the deep suspicions of Pakeha among many Maori.

However, there was a deeper reason for my reception by the Rawhiti families, which goes to the heart of contemporary Maori (and Torres Strait) culture, both of which are centred on family and land, and committed to the past to give meaning and direction to the present and the future.

Komene Te Nana had long been keen to learn more about the families' sojourn in Torres Strait. About three months before my arrival in New Zealand, he had urged a family visit to Torres Strait, in order to reconstruct the period of roughly fifteen years when their grandfathers were pearling there. Apart from some memories, passed down by the women to their children, some family names which commemorated that time, and some physical mementos, knowledge of that part of their family history had largely been lost. There was no family record of which children had been born in Torres Strait, nor of those who had died there. One of the grandchildren, the Anglican Maori Bishop of Auckland, Ben Te Haara, had begun to plan a visit to the Strait to recover lost records and had contacted an Aboriginal priest in north Queensland for assistance. My appearance was read as a sign of the ancestors' response in guiding me to them.

At the *hui* I was welcomed into the family and my project blessed by everyone present. Since then I have kept

in touch by letter and phone with three family members, passing on any information I find and exchanging family news. The published results include a small monograph, with photographs provided by the family and dedicated to Komene Te Nana, which I sent to all concerned, a short account of the Rawhiti men for the Russell Museum journal and this article. I have not returned to New Zealand but, after Komene's tragic accidental death, his widow Shirley came to stay with relatives on the Gold Coast and I drove down from Brisbane to meet her. Last year I sent back more information that had since come to light in the Thursday Island registers. Two weeks ago, another family member was visiting her brother in Brisbane and we spent a day together. Dialogue and exchange of this kind is essential to the maintenance of relationship between the oral history researcher and community or family members, as was mentioned several times in conference papers.²

Implications for the etiquette of working in Indigenous communities

My research in New Zealand was more successful than I could possibly have hoped for, given the short time available. Clearly, this would have been impossible without the help of the families concerned. Given all the possible pitfalls for the non-Indigenous oral history

researcher, it could easily have led to nothing. But pitfalls are matched by rewards, both intellectual and emotional, about which many conference participants have spoken during the past few days. Intellectual rewards include amplifying and enriching the historical record, reconceptualising familiar events and landscapes and subverting assumptions and stereotypes, perhaps best summed up in the multiply ambiguous slogan: 'white Australia has a black history'. Penny Taylor (1996:8-9) writes that the European settlement of our region has resulted in 'two different but overlapping histories... Only when this is recognised and Indigenous history is reclaimed at the local level is there any possibility of the overlapping histories becoming a shared history'. Our history will be thin indeed without the stories of Indigenous people, who are prepared to share them. Many have not previously been told to outsiders and they are not necessarily pleasant to hear. Historically marginalised Indigenous experience and memory – Deborah Bird Rose's 'hidden histories' – may destabilise or even contradict accepted interpretations but, in my experience, supporting documentary evidence is generally forthcoming. Thus, while most of the Maori divers conform to the stereotype of the Pacific Islander marine worker in Torres Strait – young, single, often

accompanied by close relatives, forming liaisons with Torres Strait women, but rarely remaining for more than a few years in the Strait – the Rawhiti diving syndicate, which for fifteen years operated a profitable pearling business superficially similar to their Scandinavian and British neighbours on Muralag, challenges both this stereotype and the once conventional New Zealand view of Maori as lacking in entrepreneurial initiative.

For many oral historians, the intellectual and professional rewards of this kind of research are outweighed by the emotional – indeed, it is difficult to separate them: the creating of relationships; the satisfaction of becoming, if only temporarily, part of an extended family; the adventure into an unfamiliar culture; the serendipity of uncovering precisely those pieces of information which support intellectually-arrived-at conclusions.

However, such intellectual and emotional rewards are not without cost. Indigenous oral history, like ethnography, 'is intimately embroiled in race relations' and oral historians, too, must deal with the 'painful racial dynamics' of contemporary Australia (Cowlshaw 1997:95).³ The ethical research protocols for Indigenous communities are not those of most academic scholarship. Given the fact that this kind of research can be carried out only within the

context of relationships, the criterion of non-involvement has to be jettisoned, but not objectivity nor impartiality, and there may be tension between them. Relationships are established slowly and constantly tested against the bitter baggage of past injustice and present inequality. They are maintained through sharing material goods, knowledge and self. Requests for goods or money may be made for social reasons, rather than economic need, in order to test the commitment of the researcher to the relationship. I like to subvert the stereotype of the ungenerous white researcher by bringing some small gift to each meeting. Interviewees should also be paid for their time – the current AIATSIS suggested rate is \$15.00 per hour.

As in academic life, initial vetting by gatekeepers occurs in Indigenous communities. However, the relative importance of professional versus personal is inverted and the vetting is resolved, not on the basis of professional competence, the researcher's subject knowledge and technical expertise, but more often personal qualities and the perceived utility of the research to the communities. People also need to be informed in advance about the researchers' aims and methods, what they intend to do with any information they are given, their funding organisation, the form in which the material will eventually be returned to

the community and the benefits that might be expected to accrue to both researchers and community. In my experience, this tends to be accomplished at a public meeting (in Torres Strait) or, if the research topic is restricted, at a family meeting (the *hui* in Auckland). People should also have opportunities to alter decisions already made about these matters, though this tends to be achieved later in private conversation.

Knowledge in Indigenous societies is not a free good and different people are permitted to know different things. Knowledge is intensely political: like land and ceremony, it is owned, and transmitted to trusted individuals who have satisfied the owner as to their suitability as recipients, i.e., who have obtained 'a series of cultural qualifications' (Janke 1997:11). Moreover, while the information may be passed on by someone with the authority to do so, rights to the information are retained by that person. The differences between the two intellectual traditions produce a number of disjunctions between Indigenous processes of knowledge transmission and the legal complexities of Australian copyright and contract law. Under current law, the maker of a recording is considered the author for copyright purposes and copyright is also generated in the final results of the research (Terri Janke, personal comm.

26/7/1997). When I began recording oral history in Torres Strait in 1981, access to information depended on first establishing and then not betraying trust within family relationships. Today the process is increasingly regulated and many projects devise some kind of written contract.⁴ One way of surmounting difficulties is to tape-record at the beginning of each session the eventual use to which the story will be put and the person's permission for its transcription and eventual reproduction. Any confidential material should be stated as such at the time of recording and guidance sought as to restrictions on its reproduction. While this has no legal force, unless some monetary or other exchange is specified (whereby it becomes a legally binding contract), it has a moral force and avoids the contentious issue of establishing who, if anyone, is the legal author of the story and therefore the holder of copyright. Alternatively, the researcher can write a letter to each person interviewed, explicitly recognising Indigenous copyright in the text.

I view each recording session as a transaction, negotiated within a dialogic relationship that is continually evolving. The underlying social, cultural and political assumptions of such transactions are rarely made explicit in the researcher's own community but in Indigenous communities the fieldworker

is forced to do so. Research etiquette also demands that researchers publicly acknowledge the contribution made by community members and that they not use the final product to claim the status of expert; they will remain in Indigenous eyes merely secondary contributors to its creation. We become partners but the researcher is very much the junior partner. The senior partners are the community members who have shared their knowledge. The results belong to them and must be returned in a form previously negotiated and agreed upon in an open forum and through which they can claim ownership.

If I had to articulate the major guiding principle for carrying out oral history research in Indigenous communities, it would be, as many Indigenous people put it, 'all about respect'.

Neate and Wilkinson (1997:15) express this as always giving priority to cultural protocols 'doing things properly and politely from another culture's perspective'. While this is self-evident commonsense, researchers are not always willing to learn and practise culturally appropriate respectful behaviour, and lapses are noted and commented upon. I was certainly not prepared for the continual scrutiny and testing of my commitment to the people I interviewed, the centrality of the notion of exchange, the constant negotiation of cultural borderlands, nor

for the way all of us were changed by the experience. On the other hand, my teachers were much more patient with my mistakes than I would probably have been if the situation had been reversed. They taught me that respectful behaviour may manifest itself in many ways, which may be summed up as: (1) respecting Indigenous social mores, the proper behaviour of a guest in Indigenous communities; and (2) respecting Indigenous modes of transmitting intellectual property.⁵

Thus, the cultural context imposes respectful behaviour such as:

- accepting family and community obligations and responsibilities, which include learning and using appropriate address and avoidance terms, and giving time, information and assistance, as well as material goods, as required
- taking food when it is offered and accepting invitations to social events
- dressing appropriately and not exposing parts of the body which evoke shame in the community
- touching and being touched where appropriate to show solidarity, empathy and pleasure at renewing acquaintance
- ideally learning the common verbal and body language or at least modulating one's English to approach community norms, without, however, 'talking down' to people

Transmission of information requires:

- being guided by Indigenous people with respect to content and preferred locale, not imposing too much pressure and negotiating rather than imposing conditions
- 'listening with the heart' (Neate and Wilkinson 1997:10), remembering what has been said and not challenging its veracity
- gracefully accepting refusals to impart information
- expressing interest and appreciation
- accepting that Indigenous history has invariably a spiritual dimension, is holistic rather than dissected into discrete fields, and that its truth is not necessarily literal and lies deeper than historical accuracy.⁶

The theme of the 1997 OHAA conference was 'crossing borders' and the papers illustrated many adventures in border crossing. The Rawhiti pearl divers of Torres Strait also crossed and recrossed many borders – of nation, race, culture, knowledge, language and expectation. In researching their story, I was privileged to follow them.

Notes

¹ The term 'Fourth World' was first adopted at the 1972 United Nations Environmental Conference in Sweden and refers to Indigenous peoples unwillingly colonised and encompassed

by first world nation states. Definitions of such peoples stress their political, economic and cultural marginality within the encompassing, usually 'First World', nation states.

2 However, the return of information from archives and other sources is not unproblematic and the ethical issues involved should be discussed by the Association when it establishes guidelines for working in Indigenous communities. While I take the view that information, no matter how patronisingly written or potentially hurtful, should be returned to the families concerned – after all, I have no right to censor material which belongs to others in practice I have not passed on damaging and possibly incorrect information, e.g. about incest and spousal cruelty, or confidential information about adoption and biological parenthood.

3 Cowlshaw's paper is a compelling reflection on the contradictions inherent in living and working 'at the racial frontier of Australian society'. I am grateful to Ian Lilley for making the paper available to me.

4 For a brief exposition of the complex issues involved in establishing legal protocols to protect Indigenous cultural and intellectual property in the

Australian context, see the 1997 paper prepared by Terri Janke of Michael Frankel & Associates for the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies at <http://www.icip.lawnet.com.au/>.

5 See, however, Cowlshaw's paper, especially the section on fieldwork as parody (1997:105-106), for a far more complex unlayering of the problematic nature of the simplified guidelines which follow.

6 See Taylor 1996:17-22 for discussion.

My deepest thanks to the many Torres Strait Islanders who have shared knowledge with me over the years and to the descendants of the Maori pearl divers of Torres Strait: Rangī Hakaraia Higgison, James, Brian and Margaret Joyce, Darlene Joyce Reweti, Karani Rewha, Iri and Jim Riley, Gwen and Bishop Ben Te Haara, Shirley and Kornene Te Nana, Pane Frances Ututaonga and Te Miringa Wynyard; to Huhana Jean Ngawati, Arapeta Hamilton and Robin Shepherd; to Heather Lindauer and Patricia Colmore-Williams of the Russell Museum; to Ian Lilley, Christine Stratigos and Sean Ulm of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Unit, The University of Queensland; to Michael Stubbins of the Thursday Island Magistrate's Court; to Justin Malbon of

Griffith University and Terri Janke of Michael Frankel & Associates; and to the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies and the Australian Research Council for funding.

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The uses of oral history: when memory serves

One of the many ways in which oral history serves basic human needs was acknowledged recently in the U.K. by the judges of the 1997 Guardian Jerwood Award, presented for individual excellence in smaller social welfare charities. A 'highly commended' went to Pam Schweitzer who, in the 1970s, developed the habit of sitting down with a tape recorder and listening to elderly Londoners' memories of the past tales of trams and trolley buses, summers hop-picking in Kent and of loved ones lost during the war.

Pam was teaching at the time, and she used the recorded material to write plays for her pupils to perform. This led, eventually, to staging her plays with professional actors, and in 1983 Age Exchange Theatre began a tour of homes for the elderly, schools and hospitals. Rave reviews resulted.

Pam continued to develop the possibilities that emerged from the idea of recording and sharing recollections of the past. She managed to raise the money to buy and renovate a dilapidated building in south London. Here she created an interactive museum and reminiscence centre.

Pam Schweitzer says that Age Exchange plays are great boosters of confidence for the elderly who think: 'My life was like that – maybe I'm interesting too'. She believes that reminiscences help make people feel part of a community of experience.

One of the museum displays is a "my life in a box" exhibition – a 3-D display by German and English pensioners set out in old grenade boxes donated by the German and English armies. Each elderly person was encouraged to display photos and memorabilia in the box, which will be kept as a time capsule for future generations.

There is an emphasis on intergenerational aspects of the project. An attempt is made to bridge the gap between old and young by using the older people's stories. Schools are encouraged to use this method as a way of teaching history.

One of Pam's current projects involves working with 11 European countries to explore the idea of passing on reminiscence skills to informal carers. The idea is to improve the quality of life of the older people they look after.

Another international project involves working with older people from ethnic minorities. Rehearsals are under way for a play called Routes, tracing the

experiences of older Asian people who came to Britain after the second world war. There are also more productions to come from a group of elderly people who work on performances of their own life stories.

The concept of bringing older peoples reminiscences to dramatic life is one which affirms the value of oral history as an enriching activity which can generate a variety of benefits. **Ruth Wilson**

Behind the movie

The film makers Oral History Group was formed in 1991 by a group of film makers and oral historians with an interest in recording interviews on Australia's film history.

This group has undertaken a very interesting project 'Behind the Movie' designed to bring an understanding of both classic and recent Australian films to a wider audience.

Each film selected will be profiled in a 30 minute program which will consist of interviews with key personnel involved in the films production together with excerpts from the film in question. The aim is also to produce the programs in pairs – one recent and one classic with, where possible, a common theme that binds them together.

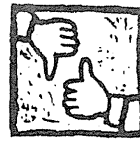
The format of 'Behind the Movie' will consist of in-depth interviews with those involved in the various stages of production of each film. It will not be a piece of promotional puffery, in the style of the ubiquitous "Making of ..." programs, nor will it gushingly pander to

the egos of the actors and others. If controversy is raised, if facts need putting straight, or if reputations become a bit tattered, so be it. Those interviewed will be encouraged to speak honestly and candidly about their and their colleagues work.

The Film Makers Oral History Group sees Behind the Movie as being an on-going series. We are currently organising the funding for the first two productions, which will be *Sons of Matthew* (1949), produced by Charles and Elsa Chauvel and directed by Charles Chauvel and *Strictly Ballroom* (1992) produced by Tristram Miall and directed by Baz Luhrmann.

Excerpt from *Film Makers Oral History Group; Newsletter: Issue 1.*

All interested inquiries to David Perry,
4 Marshall Ave, St Leonards NSW 2064
Phone: (02) 9436 1970 Fax: (02) 9436 4980



X-ray Vision – A Review Paper Peter J.F. Newton*

Hilary Irvin, *In the Footsteps of Röntgen: A Selection of Biographical Experiences*, ISBN 646 25288 7, 1995, 216 pp. Hilary Irvin Productions. PO Box 338, Edgecliff, NSW 2027, Australia.

As a preface, let me first throw a feral cat among pouting academic pigeons and talk about the contrasting roles of oral and interview histories in the context of contemporary science writing. The history of science, any science, in Australia is still in its post- embryonic phase in terms of readily accessible publications. Yes! We do have some fine science writers, but we have yet to produce the equals of Needham, Bernal, Haldane, Jeans or Hoyle, each of whom wrote with elegance and clarity and readily captured the public mind. To be sure there are in Australia a number of well written biographies and autobiographies of the front-runners in the international race to scientific discovery – works on Florey, MacFarlane Burnett, Fred Hollows and the now regrettably besmirched McBride come immediately to mind.

There is also excellent pioneering work by for example historians Anne Moyal (institutional science), Bryan Gandevia (medical science), the physicist Paul Davies and quite a few other

worthwhile specialists. The best of such writers make good but selective use of recorded interviews. Even so, a great deal of such writing does not, I feel, capture the hearts and minds of the reading public, not only because of the sheer complexity of the science involved but also because of the equally numbing ordinariness of some of the subjects once they are let out of the laboratory. There is, I suspect, a large number of biographies in Australian science, both broadly topical and in the narrow spectrum of specialisation, that reside almost forgotten in the case bindings of honours and postgraduate theses, read only by the examiners and culled from time to time by authors (or supervisors) to build up impressive publication lists for promotional rather than public interest – usually in the most obscure or least accessible of learned journals.

It is this inaccessibility that goes far towards mythologising science and scientists and contributes to the poor image that the public have of science in general. Some popularisers of matters scientific have caught the public eye, once they have cut through the sometimes thick wax of the public ear. Here I refer to such excellent interviewers and condensers of science

history as Robin Williams, Earl Hackett, Norman Swann, the late Peter Mason and a host of other radio voices, whose easily digested interviews and aural histories soon appear in print, and sometimes on the remainder shelves in bookshops almost as soon thereafter.

There are two types of science history writing that incorporate either the raw elements of oral history, or the refinements of the interview. Public documentation, say a report on the findings of a Royal Commission, Environmental Impact Study, a Senate Inquiry or some other politically sensitive document, often records autobiographical or biographical details elicited from witnesses which in themselves could be considered to make up an oral history. Having worked on one Royal Commission as scientific editor, I have found that the tradition of objectivity when questioning the use of oral histories as evidence sometimes become skewed owing to the preconceived beliefs of either the inquisitors or their researchers. I say tradition because the other tendency we now have with us, courtesy of the French *philosophes* of the new school of history and of literary review and criticism (loosely termed “post-modernism”), is a process of deconstruction and reconstruction to redress the hurtfulness of both the real and the imagined earlier ideas of history. At its worst, it’s an

‘anything goes’ sort of history writing, where truth is based less on deduction and evidence and more on manipulation and unprovable assumption. It used to be called myth-making. And oral histories can just as easily be manipulated to fit preconception. The problem here is that rather than improving our general knowledge of the whole history of anything – music, working lives of groups and individuals, politics and the physical, social and medical sciences – the new breed is often caught up in that “tangled web of words” that is woven on reams of paper outside the user-friendly home page.

What, you may ask, does this panegyric bring to the review at hand?

First and foremost, the author of *In the Footsteps of Röntgen* is no post-modernist. She guides her subjects through a set of clearly structured interview histories! Her collection of interviews is not obviously manipulated nor is it based on some set of preconceptions, so far as I can tell. Mrs Irvin trained in science – at the University of Sydney and has worked as a researcher in scientific laboratories such as the CSIRO’s Wool Biology Laboratories, and in journalism. Useful credentials for the given task. The catalyst for this set of 23 interviews (out of 41 originally selected) was the centenary of the discovery of the X-ray, in 1895, by Professor N.K. von Röntgen, and the subsequent

development of X-ray and other diagnostic imaging and therapeutic modes, with particular reference to Australia. Röntgen's name was also commemorated for many years as the unit of measurement of radiation dose in air (R) but, with the advent (and adoption in Australia) of SI related units, its use has gradually fallen into a slow obsolescence (although some countries still do not use SI).

There unfortunately are some flaws in this book which, with closer attention to detail and editing, could have improved its usefulness as an archival document. Of the 23 persons interviewed, most work in medical disciplines, a substantial number of them being radiologists, and herein lies one of the limitations of this collection – the scope is much too narrowly focused for the topic to be fully representative, and some of the interviewees, as discussed below, are really extraneous to the topic. How the interviewees were selected is not discussed although Mrs Irvin states that the “parameters for selection have been strict.” (p.9). This may seem a small point but investigative procedures are surely of particular interest to both old and newcomers to oral history/interview history; and I'm sure that other readers expect to be informed of the selection criteria.

Reading through each of the interviews, it is easy to be impressed by the relatively casual flow that is achieved. How much of this is due to post-interview editing is not indicated nor is there any indication of the possibility that interviewees were allowed to access (and perhaps amend) the final drafts. Again, this may seem to be just picking over the nits but it is a question of interest to this particular student of the art. The author (or rather compiler) has sensibly kept her questions simple and forthright (much in the manner of the skilled oral historian), and shows quite good skills at promoting continuity with appropriate follow-up questions. There is, however, a sameness and blandness in some questions that might have deterred deeper individual thinking about the topic, sometimes leading to the anecdotal, and bordering at times on the soporific.

In general, I must seriously question the implied dominance of the X-ray in medicine that emerges in this book, when medical radioisotopes emitting beta, gamma and positron radiations and, latterly, fast neutron radiation all have very significant diagnostic and therapeutic roles in medical science. These not so new modalities were in essence stimulated not only by the outcome of the discovery of X-rays by Röntgen, but also by the later discoveries of Becquerel, the Curies and a host of

other researchers in near contemporary times. However, the inclusion of interviews with some researchers not directly involved with X-ray based imaging techniques seems rather inappropriate.

Regrettably, too little (or only token) attention has been paid however to the associated non-medical disciplines (including industrial radiography, health physics and radiation standards), or to the roles of important radiation support groups (technologists, educators, nurses, computer specialists, radiochemists) who are essential to working with imaging modalities. What is singularly lacking too, is a general but concise summary of the reasons for the collection, and a glossary of the technical topics couched in layperson's terms – as a self-confessed scientist and journalist, Mrs Irvin should be well equipped to have provided these. Despite these limitations, the compiler has put together a fairly interesting set of interviews that with a more catholic approach to her subject matter could warrant a second volume, this time addressing the equally important Henri Becquerel (who discovered radioactivity in 1896) as the catalyst. Having broken the ice with this, her first book I think, Hilary Irvin should not stop there!

Layout and setting of the book make it easy to read and photographs are generally clear and well selected. Qualitatively speaking, this book also

reflects the benefits of the fast-print, short-run philosophy being adopted by many unfunded authors as an antidote to the present closed shop mentality of publishers' agents and mainstream publishers in Australia. There are quite a number of unacceptable literals and typos; despite advances in print technology, these errors are fast becoming the rule rather the exception (RULE: Do not trust in-built spelling checkers. The eagle eye still rules!) There are also a number of technical and scientific statements by the interviewees that seem to me to be in error – a case for getting several thorough technical reviews of the edited texts before going to print, and even for providing a set of end notes for clarification, particularly if the texts were not edited.

All quibbles aside, Irvin has produced an entertaining document, but not one that will be much used as a primary source for histories of the modalities described, although it may well provide starting gates for individual biographies or autobiographies. A small semantic point is that the responses in the book are autobiographical not biographical as given in the subtitle.

* Although known to some readers for his deep involvement in jazz, Peter Newton worked for many years at the Australian Atomic Energy Commission (later the Australian Nuclear Science and

Technology Organisation), first in health physics and later as a scientific editor. In 1988 he co-authored *The ANSTO Cyclotron Handbook* with Rex Boyd (one of the interviewees) and is currently

Editor of *ANZ Nuclear Medicine* (the Journal of the ANZ Society of Nuclear Medicine). He threatens to appear in these pages from time to time wearing other hats.

When the Ferries Got Away

When the Ferries Got Away: the true story of four car ferries swept down the Hawkesbury River in the floods of 1978, by Bill Bottomley, Wirrimbirra Workshop, RMB 2551, Kulnorra 2250. (Available from the author, \$10 + \$2p&p).

This is a fine oral history, an account of a great, wild and hazardous two-day adventure, with four runaway car ferries from the Upper Hawkesbury, locked together by a series of freak accidents, sweeping down river with three ferry workers on board, no food, and lives at stake. Their struggle to bring the unwieldy agglomeration of ferries and river debris under control before it could reach, damage or bring down the road bridge at Brooklyn on the Pacific Highway, is heroic, laconic, terrifying and funny. The bridge was saved – but at the very last possible moment.

At the time, this truly epic struggle attracted only a very few lines in the press and has never before been properly documented. The protagonists were laid back about it all: 'The ferries had to be saved ... they were our responsibility.' 'A

disaster costing millions of dollars and who knows how much suffering and inconvenience was averted at the eleventh hour... and everyone was grateful to those involved' – but as one remembered, 'The Council – the people we actually worked for the Council never even said thanks. That irked us a fair bit.' Not only is it a good story, but an affirmation of the courage, strength, intelligence and importance of workers. Bill Bottomley interviewed and recorded the protagonists, edited the stories, supplied connecting material. He also produced the book, designed it, did the art work, set the type. The 84 page, A5 book has square spine with a legible title too. The book is attractive, the type easy to read and illustrations lavish. The author-publisher skilfully utilises the possibilities of black and white illustration, and achieved an attractive cover, utilising a simple but dramatic black illustration on an inexpensive coloured matt stock. An immaculate and important production. Highly recommended.

Wendy Lowenstein



Executive Meeting Dates for 1998

A cordial invitation to members to attend any of the Management Committee Meetings to be held this year. Meetings take place at the State Library of NSW at 5.30pm on the following dates; 06/04/98; 15/06/98; 03/08/98; 19/10/98 & 30/11 OR 07/12 (to be decided)

Dates for seminars to be held in 1998 04/04/98 (Presentation by the Institute of Engineers); 25/07/98 & 17/10/98. (Members please note these dates in your diary).

Two: Up in the Tropics

The 1998 annual meetings of Museums Australia Inc (Qld) and the Oral History Association of Australia (Qld) will be associated with a combined conference to be held in Townsville, 21-25 September 1998. Potential contributors are asked to express their interest by 30/4/98 to Conference Secretariat, 17 Kepler Street, Wulguru, NQ 4811.

OHAA Conference 1999 – Advance Notice

In 1999 it will be Victoria's turn to host the Association's Biennial National Conference. Planning has already begun for the conference to be held in Melbourne in September 1999. The theme will be 'TALES OF THE CENTURY', with a focus on narrative and story telling. Watch this space for further developments.

Call for Papers

Oral History Association of Australia 1998 Journal

Papers are now being received for the 1998 Journal, *Crossing Borders II*, a theme which builds upon that of the Biennial Conference held in Alice Springs in September 1997. If you would like to submit a paper or a project report concerning the philosophy and practice of oral history which would fit this theme contact editors Peter or June Donovan on (08) 8270 1770 for style details.

Please note your paper must be received by Friday, 12th June 1998.

Noticeboard

Australia's Oral History Collections: A National Directory

The Directory is a publication of the National Library of Australia in conjunction with the Oral History Association of Australia. The publication lists 455 collections across Australia, from state library services, museums and archives, to government, professional, educational, local community and private research collections. Entries include details of holdings of oral history materials, plus up-to-date contact information. It is intended to update the Directory both as a printed publication and on the internet via the National Library website. Inquiries regarding inclusion in the Directory database should be forwarded to the Oral History Section, National Library of Australia, Canberra, 2600 or email: mwoods@nla.gov.au. Order the publication from the Oral History Section, National Library of Australia, Parkes Place, Canberra, ACT, 2600. Cost \$12 plus \$2 postage.

JUST PUBLISHED!

The Oral History Reader, Edited by Roberts Perks, British Library National Sound Archive, UK, and Alistair Thomson, University of Sussex, UK. This significant work is available in Australia, \$42.95 paperback, from Library Shop, State Library of NSW, Macquarie Street, Sydney, 2000. Phone (02) 9273 1611; Fax (02) 9273 1249; email: libshop@ilanet.slnsw.gov.au

Your Storylines: The Heart of History

Storyworks is founded by Bridget Brandon in collaboration with Lotte Waters. Storyworks is offering training in various aspects of storytelling. Inquiries to (02)9389 9475.

Memories – Take a jaunt down memory lane with Joanne O'Driscoll Adventurous Ageing & Special Needs Consultant Program conducted in Canberra each month Inquiries (06) 296 1438

Golden Threads

The Chinese in regional NSW This project is assisting local Museums in caring for and displaying aspects of their collections. If your Museum would like to participate contact Janis Wilton on (02) 6773 2107

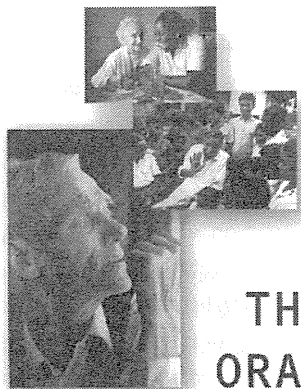
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THE ORAL HISTORY READER

Edited by Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson

Margaret Reid, Honorary Life Member

There were two Honorary Life Memberships bestowed with acclamation at the Biennial General Meeting of the OHAA in September 1997. This is the citation which accompanied the New South Wales Branch's request for this honour on Margaret Reid's behalf. She is the first member of the Branch to have received this recognition.

From the time when, as a schoolgirl she read Joseph Conrad's *Youth*, Margaret Reid felt drawn to the sea. In 1978 after the inspiration of a trip along Victoria's Great Ocean Road and a visit to Warnambool's Maritime Museum, she became a member of the Sydney Maritime Museum. When the Museum decided to form an oral history group in 1982, she volunteered her services and in late 1983, with another member, the Sydney Maritime Museum Oral History Project was formed.

She taught herself the structure and management of an oral history project from reading a variety of oral history handbooks and attending seminars regularly to be sure her skills in interviewing were up to date. She became particularly interested in the builders of wooden boats. However, her interests soon rapidly expanded into investigating the lives of many other marine folk who lived and worked on Sydney Harbour. Marine technology was

changing rapidly and this required documentation before it was replaced and thus forgotten.

Interviews were conducted with former seamen from the Museums' sailing barque *James Craig*, the 1902 steam tug *Waratah* and the 1902 steam yacht *Lady Hopetoun*, for the understanding the vessels' operation and construction.

More than 80 interviews were presented by the Sydney Maritime Museum to the State Library of New South Wales in April 1993. Among them are interviews with a Sydney Harbour pilot, sailmakers, shipwrights, boat builders, fishermen, yachtsmen, ships' Masters, cabin boys, sailing instructors, a Torres Strait pilot, marine engineers and the first woman graduate from the Australian Maritime College in Launceston to gain her Master's Ticket (Seagoing).

Increasingly precarious health has forced Margaret to give up her interviewing the 'old salts' personally, but she is an inspiration to the new team who have recently begun coordinating the Sydney Maritime Museum Oral History Project

The next issue of Voiceprint will give the citation submitted by the West Australian Branch to support Honorary Life Membership for Heather Campbell.
