



voiceprint

Newsletter

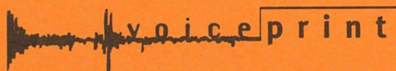
of the New South Wales Branch
of the Oral History Association
of Australia

27

October 2002



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The views expressed in articles in this *Voiceprint* are not necessarily those of the NSW Branch of the Oral History Association of Australia, nor its editors



Editorial

Voiceprint No 27 is loaded down with information from members. Please enjoy reading this issue. It is longer than usual, but what could be left out? In all the reports about the various projects undertaken by members there is so much practical information – a wealth of ideas. We hope you find the information useful and helpful in your oral history practice. Thank you all for sharing your ideas and experiences. There is a wonderful report of the recent International Conference in South Africa. Our Victorian colleague Lesley Alves shares her thoughts on many aspects of the conference and reports about many of the papers presented. It is interesting how ethical issues are being discussed around the world. Any further contributions on this issue welcome.

Voiceprint mostly seems to be words and more words! – yet members are doing interesting projects with photos and other memorabilia related to people, time and places. Examples in this issue from Barbara Bryan and Jacqueline Sherry. Something for the photographers to think about! Would love to have some pictures too.

Special thanks to Susan McClean, Roslyn Burge and Sue Georgevits for allowing the publication of their edited transcripts from the seminar on the advanced interview. This seminar was very highly regarded on the day, we are delighted that they agreed to talk to you all through the pages of Voiceprint. What interesting stories they told about the conduct a variety of projects to inspire us all to try new ventures.

If you wish to venture further in your professional career and win the commissions, then Michael Clarke's excellent paper Tendering for Oral History will prove a very valuable guide. Do keep this Voiceprint for reference! All the tenders should now be well written and hope the commissions come in! Thank you Michael for your contribution.

Please remember to report to Voiceprint. Contributions before the end of 2002 for publication early 2003. Best wishes from the Editors and we await your contributions.

Joyce Cribb

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New Members

It is so interesting to note where our new members are coming from. Interest in oral history is growing in more and more communities and in the minds of diverse members of those communities. Welcome to you all! We look forward to meeting those whom we have not yet met and in re-meeting all of you often! Thank you for your support.

The Great Synagogue, Sydney

Woollahra Library, Sydney

Dr Mina Roces	University history lecturer
Heather Smith	Church historian
Dr Philip Sharp	Surgeon
Joel Greenberg	Historian
Babette Lake	Family historian
Vicki Smith	Retired, interested in history
Carolyn Lowry	Historian
Nancy Huggett	Student
Carmel Rose	Historian
Theda Stapleton	Historian
June and Lex Weaver	Retired, interested in history
Kami Smith	Student
Barbara Linz	Communal worker
Alison Wicks	Student
Ellen Blunden	Administrator
David Turner	Social historian
Adele Mackay	Director
Tracy Novello	Student
Judy Stump	Librarian
Nicholas Petrunoff	Dietician

Nuts and Bolts

Ten Years of Service

Many members will have enjoyed the lunches and teas served at our seminars and will I am sure join in a big THANK YOU to Marjorie Day and Nancy Tuck for their 10 years of voluntary service – well done! They even found their replacements – so welcome to Lilla Towie and Marcia Whibley.

Energy Australia National Trust Heritage Award 2002

Congratulations to Pauline Curby who has won the Print Category Corporate Government Award, of the Energy Australia Awards, with her recent book on Manly. Pauline was commissioned by Manly Council and after two years of research *Seven Miles from Sydney: A History of Manly* was published. Congratulation to Pauline!



Pauline Curby (Photo: Martin Lange)

REPORTS

International Oral History Association Conference – The Power of Oral History – Memory, Healing and Development – Lesley Alves

Recently I had the pleasure of attending the 12th International Oral History Conference at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa. The conference was presented by the International Oral History Association, with the local organisation done by a South African committee. South Africa does not have its own national oral history association, however it was hoped that the formation of such an association would flow from the enthusiasm generated by the conference. Judging by the level of participation by people from South Africa and from the African continent generally, this hope has a good chance of being fulfilled.

It was clear throughout the conference that oral history is alive and well in Africa, as many communities try to recapture their culture and identity lost in the process of colonisation.

In the opening session Graham Dominy, of the Department of Arts, Culture, Science & Technology, Pretoria, commented on the importance of oral history in the new South Africa. Whereas

Apartheid was based on documents, which told the story of the powerful, oral history gives voice to the voiceless and history to the people on their own terms. Oral history is part of the transition process for a rainbow nation. South Africa has a large national oral history program, with a network of projects researching indigenous knowledge and music. Several of the program's staff attended the conference.

Of the 172 conference participants, 69 were from Africa, with strong contingents from the Americas, Europe and the UK, and 4 representatives from Australia. Unfortunately a lot of paper givers had found it necessary to drop out, causing nightmares for organizers, who had to rearrange their carefully thought out conference program. Nevertheless, the reduced program still offered an overwhelming variety of papers, with 32 parallel sessions and 7 plenary sessions over four days. I would like to highlight just a few of the papers that inspired me, especially those that addressed the conference themes, Memory, Healing, and Development in interesting ways.

Lotte Hughes of Oxford University, in her paper *Blood Brotherhood in Colonial Kenya*, discussed her doctoral thesis on the forced moves of the Maasai by the British in British East Africa in the 1900s. She aimed to interweave oral testimony and written accounts in comparing the discourses of the British and the Maasai. However, many of the 64 Maasai elders Lotte interviewed talked about something that did not appear in written records – an alleged blood brotherhood between the Maasai and the British. Stories of this blood brother oath had been passed down through the generations, and were told to Lotte in a number of different versions. Whether myth or record of actually happenings, the blood oath stories are a powerful symbol of Maasai-British relationships, in which the present day Maasai could see themselves as in control of events rather than as dispossessed victims, and as peaceful rather than warlike. An interesting outcome of Lotte's research is that the Kenyan Maasai plan to challenge the legality of the colonial agreements through which they lost their land, and may use some of her findings as a basis for their claim.

Contrasting with Lotte's academic research was a report on a community project with the San, a minority group in Botswana, who had also lost their land, and with it their language and their culture. Chumbo Sefako, who was trained as an interviewer in the project, and project officer, Willemien le Roux, spoke about the project. The San are amongst the most researched people on earth, but they had never seen the results of the research. They therefore liked the idea of running their own project. For Willemien, who has worked with the San for many years and was tired of being the "gatekeeper" between the San and outsiders investigating them, it was "time to stop trying to be the interpreter of the San's cause and struggle to the outside world and to hand the mike to them". The project focussed on the most marginalised people, using those young people who had lost much of their culture but gained little education as interviewers. Willemien described the process and some of the pitfalls encountered, including the difficulty of convincing the San that the interviews were for their own community and not for the benefit of foreign researchers. She resisted demands for the use of the material collected in a book and on the internet. By using open-ended questioning the outcome was much more than a large accumulation of knowledge regarding

intimate details of family life, traditional rituals and other matters. Sometimes interviews were seen as a direct lesson to the young interviewers in traditional education, and about "being San". Willemien said that within "what many professional researchers may regard as worthless babbling, lies the voice of the San people of today". She could only guess at the value of the healing that must have taken place in that society. Another advantage was for the young. The interviewers, sitting under a tree with their tape recorders and notebooks, had become new role models for education, which younger children now wanted to emulate, making the difficulties of schooling in foreign languages, separated from their families, worth enduring. The project also stimulated a renewed interest in the San languages and a renewed acceptance of the value of the traditional leadership and culture.

Daniel Mengara a native of Gabon, now teaching in USA, completed this trio of papers with *Codes of Culture: the Role of Myths, Tales, Proverbs and Music in African Oral Tradition*. He discussed the loss of African history. Loss of memory leads to loss of nationhood and loss of identity. He talked about the way codes

of culture are embedded in words and the way written language has come to dominate history. Daniel compared this with the African methodology – which marks important events with songs in which the codes of culture are embedded.

These three papers inspired a lively discussion on mythology and truth. We also considered the ownership of information – do oral historians take it away or give it back? So many practitioners take over the story for publication. That was just the first session, where we found out a lot about Africa, its people, and their struggles. Oral history indeed has a significant role in empowering and healing, and in addressing the old view that African history commenced with white colonists. One of the things that struck me was the fact that in some places in Africa tape recorders are not used, either because they are not available or affordable, or they are not culturally acceptable in some communities. We have come to take the tape recorder for granted as essential to oral history, but Africa reminds us that oral history is much older than the tape recorder.

Nevertheless, the reality is that most people are using tape recorders now, but of all the presentations at the conference, I heard only two sound bites. One was given by Alistair Thomson, in his

paper, "I Live on Memories": *Return Migrant Life Stories and the Possession of the Past*. (This was on a similar topic to the one he gave at the Australian conference in Canberra 2001.) Another presenter used a sound bite that really brought home the importance of hearing the voice rather than just reading a transcript. It was played during a session on technology, and it was not an interview but part of a famous speech by Desmond Tutu, talking about the end of apartheid. Clearly the words when transcribed are only words, it is the voice that carries the power and emotion of the message.

A major theme that emerged was language and its connection with identity and with land, not only in Africa, but in other places. Papers exploring these connections included – Joan Fairweather on land claims in Canada and South Africa, Rebecca Sharpless on *Stories of Southern American Sharecroppers*, Rachael Selby, on the lifelong effects on Maoris of punishment for speaking their language as children, and a very entertaining presentation by Helen Andreoni of Australia, describing her own multicultural family in which "faces don't match where we are".

Helen's paper, also Rachael's, Rebecca's and a number of other papers, including Janis Wilton's, were not only reports of oral history projects, but personal stories featuring the presenter's own family or community.

In contrast to the earlier papers about miraculous things produced by oral history, a paper that brought us down to earth was given by Sean Field, of the Centre for Popular Memory, University of Cape Town, on: *Dialogues of Trust: The Value of Oral History in Developing People*. Sean questioned the assumption that oral history automatically contributes to development work in a community. He argued that the "more significant contribution of oral history is in helping to change how people value their histories, themselves and their communities", and that oral history can be integrated with other long-term development programs. Sean outlined some of the strategies that will enable a community to do its own oral history project, stressing the need for proper community consultation and guidance by professionals.

In the methodology session a paper that impressed me very much was given by Almut Leh of Germany: "Please Tell me your Life History ..." *Ethical Problems in the Work with Historical Witnesses*. This paper, challenged us to think about what

we are doing when conducting an interview and presenting its outcome. Almut discussed the ways we induce people to tell us their life stories, and highlighted the dynamics and the interplay of power during the interview. She suggested that ideally interviewee and interviewer are partners in telling the story and that this partnership implies ethical behaviour.

Another impressive paper on methodology was by Shannon Page who is in charge of the transcribing department at Bancroft Library, University of California. (Imagine, a whole transcribing department!) In *The Invisible Participant: the Role of the Transcriber in Interpreting Meaning in Oral History Research*, Shannon described an exercise she conducted for the purposes of her presentation. A staff member was interviewed and four different people, all considered experts in transcribing, did transcripts. The differences were quite amazing. Each person gave a different interpretation to the interview, based on their own approach to the job of transcribing and their knowledge of the interviewee and his subject.

Many other papers dealt with the nature of oral history, its value and use. Not surprisingly, many of the issues discussed were the same as those discussed at conferences I have attended in Australia.

Other interesting papers dealt with the kinds of information gained through oral history. The range of topics included Malay identity through traditional *songket* textile design, safe sex in Kenya, urban development in a South African township and also in Socialist East Germany, and the re-unification of Germany. One paper I enjoyed was by Maria Jose Ferreira de Araujo Ribeiro of Brazil about tracing the history of an American doctor who discovered the cause of a disease in Brazil. This was a story of serendipity, where family oral history provided the key to the doctor's identity. However it was the presentation that was really memorable for me. The paper was read *in absentia* by a colleague, reading in Portuguese, and translated into English by the moderator, Joelle Rouchou, also from Brazil, to an audience of just three. This was one of those enjoyable moments at a conference where, despite the language barriers, we managed to communicate and have a worthwhile discussion, and to make some new friends. Isn't that what conferencing is all about?

It was also terrific to meet for the first time some of the “big names” in the world of oral history – Paul Thompson, Joanna Bornat, and to catch up with some old friends who have participated in our own OHAA conferences recently - Alistair Thomson, Rob Perks of the British Library, and Donald Ritchie of the US Senate Historical Office.

Another highlight of the conference was the Reception on the first evening, where we were treated to a fantastic program of Zulu culture. We were entertained by a Ladysmith choir, a troupe of women dancers, and a troupe of young girl singers and dancers. We were told that these girls were all orphans, a sober reminder of Africa’s terrible AIDS problem. Their polished but enthusiastic performance was an inspiration. For me, and I think for many others present, the most moving performance of the evening was by Gcina Mhophhe, a wonderful traditional

African story-teller, whose stories conveyed to us so much of African culture and the struggles of its people.

The conference was well organized, and the organizing Committee went to a lot of trouble to ensure the comfort and safety of the participants. I must pay tribute to the dedicated team of volunteers who assisted with transport between our hotels and the conference venue. The next IOHA conference will be held in Rome in 2004. Lastly, in case you haven’t yet heard, Australia’s Janis Wilton was elected President of the IOHA, and there is a strong hope that Australia or New Zealand will host the 2006 conference.

(Thank you to Lesley of Victoria for her report. Congratulations to our member President Janis Wilton! Ed)

PHIN (Public History Interest Network) – Roslyn Burge

The group last met on Saturday, 9 March, 2002 at the NSW Writers' Centre in the grounds of Rozelle Hospital when approximately 25 people went on a walking tour of the site guided by Roslyn Burge. A most enjoyable tour! As members will know the future of the site is currently being debated. Our member Roslyn Burge is working very hard to preserve the site. Roslyn has submitted a brief history for your information and sets out the case for preservation as follows. (Note the suggested web sites to visit for more information. Ed.)

Rozelle Hospital, located in the Leichhardt municipality, is the property of HealthNSW and was so named in 1976 when the two psychiatric institutions of Callan Park (1880s) and Broughton Hall (1920s) were amalgamated, though the site continues to be widely known as Callan Park. As practices in mental health care have changed in recent decades successive state governments have sought to find alternative uses for these 61 hectares of harbour foreshore public land. Yet at the same time community attitudes to mental health issues have also shifted and the grounds of the hospital have come to be valued by the local and wider community as a site of recreation and respite.

David Malouf describes that community association to a place as a body of shared possessions and "the group has an interest in a site which overrides the rights and interests of the legal possessors ... the nation as a whole has a proprietary interest". Indeed the

site has national and state significance – buildings and precincts within the grounds are listed on the register of the National Estate and the NSW State Heritage Inventory and by the National Trust. Callan Park also remains on the list of Endangered Places prepared by the Australian Council of National Trusts. Several Aboriginal middens are located on the site, including one largely undisturbed midden which is "considered to be one of the most important Aboriginal archaeological sites on the southern shores of Sydney Harbour".

The site is extraordinary, the gardens of Broughton Hall in particular are unique. Its natural landform is still visible and the bright red oriental bridge and the finely crafted brick bridges scattered through the rainforest represent the care and efforts taken earlier in the first half of the twentieth century to both delight and distract patients as part of therapeutic practices. Everyone who visits the site is impressed

by the extent of open space, by the architecture of the Kirkbride Block, now the Sydney College of the Arts and surprised by the lush and naturally formed rainforest just a few traffic lights from the largest CBD in the nation.

All this will change under the government's proposals contained in the *Draft Master Plan* released in July 2002. The hospital is to be closed and patients moved to a new hospital to be built on 2 hectares at Concord Hospital. The "site as a whole" is a phrase used repeatedly in the *Rozelle Hospital Conservation Management Plan*. The curtilage of this largely intact Victorian landscape will be destroyed by the very government which should preserve and maintain the site for the future. Three large chunks of Callan Park are to be sold off to private developers for private residential housing. New streets and subdivisions will march across the ridgeline along Balmain Road, shatter the tranquillity of the Manning Street precinct near the main entrance gates and dominate the landscape at the northern perimeter of the Broughton Hall gardens. Private residential development at the edge of these gardens will destroy their sense of respite and they will become inevitably

the domain of residents occupying 3 storey unit structures to be constructed along a new roadway. These residents will also enjoy uninterrupted harbour views once the trees presently marring the view are thinned.

The site should be retained in its entirety. Private residential dwellings anywhere within this parkland are an anathema. Visit and see this landscape for yourself. The *Draft Master Plan* may be viewed on <www.rozellehospital.net>. The government must legislate to allow rezoning for private residential development on the site and State Environmental Policy Plan 56 (covering harbour foreshore lands) will be amended (amendment 7) and this can be viewed at <www.planning.nsw.gov.au>. The ongoing issues can also be viewed at the Friends of Callan Park website <www.callanpark.com>. Please take the time to look at these sites and voice your opinions.

OHAA (NSW) Seminar 27 July – Overcoming Barriers in Oral History

Gina Lennox spoke of her experiences in collecting material for her recent book – *Fire, Snow and Honey. Voices from Kurdistan*. In collecting the stories for the book, from Kurdish people in Australia, Gina had to overcome so many barriers

relating to language, cultural differences, political situation – a very interesting story in itself! And then the stories of the people – even more interesting reading! Recommend the book! Further information and review next *Voiceprint*.

Oral & Photographic History Project – Artarmon, NSW 2001-2 – Barbara Bryan

We all have many memories and recollections of our lives in a neighbourhood, where we have lived for many years. When I was asked to find old photos of my area for the Heritage Week photo exhibition, I met many long-term residents and realised what a treasure trove of information they had as well as the old photographs they possessed! And so was born my plan to record their memories and images whilst they were still able to remember so much.

With some backing from the Artarmon Progress Association and some Willoughby City Councillors, I was able to gain a small Community Arts Grant to fund some of the work. A

training course in Oral History recording completed, I was ready to visit with my newly acquired voice recorder and existing Medium format Pentax 645 camera. Over the next twelve months, I recorded the wonderful stories of fourteen residents of our lower Northshore (Sydney) suburb of Artarmon, which was first settled more than one hundred years ago. The eldest lady in my project (Kathleen) was born in 1899 and only moved out of her home (of 75 years) in July 2001. Several of the subjects had lived for more than eighty years, in the same home. Consequently, they were able to recall the district as far back as World War I and had lost fathers

or brothers in that war. One man (Horace) never met his father (who was killed in the Somme, serving for the Allied forces). Most recalled the horse and cart delivery era as well as the Great Depression. They also had keen memories of involvement with the local schools and churches and remembered the shopping precincts in great detail (some of which has changed little).

World War II also touched all their lives in various ways. Some had served themselves or had brothers involved and some had worked as nurses. Some residents constructed air raid shelters in their backyards and I saw the remains of a shelter still in existence today. All vividly remembered when Japanese submarines entered Sydney Harbour. There was noise from the defence gunfire that night. The sixtieth anniversary of this incident was recalled in May 2002 and a local resident was one of few survivors of the sinking of the 'Kuttabal' (the ferry on which defence personnel were sleeping).

I decided to photograph each subject with traditional Black and White film and print the negatives on archival quality fibre-based paper. The film used was Kodak Tri-X 400, for its fine grain and exposure latitude, without having to use flash. Most subjects were photographed outside their home within the garden or by the verandah or by a window, so I was able to use available

light in all but one case. I used Agfa Multi-grade FB 111 printing paper (8" x 10") and made several copies of each subject. One print was donated to the Local History archives in our Municipal Library and one or two were given to the subjects and their families.

I was privileged to be able to mount a public exhibition of the work in the Willoughby Council's Foyer Space nearby in the Chatswood Business District. As there are four secure glass display cabinets in situ, I decided to include items of memorabilia as well. Each of the residents kindly lent articles of immense sentimental value for display and labels were made to describe each item to viewers. The public were very interested in the displays, creating much discussion. Some of the particularly interesting items included – part of a wedding dress from 1927 along with the silver brocade shoes and kid elbow-length gloves. Letters from fathers from the European trenches of WWI. School class report from 1926. Photos of Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip on their first visit to Australia in 1953, meeting the father of one interviewee. Photo (1940) from top of Sydney Harbour Bridge, climbed secretly at night! Many old photographs of the interviewees as children and of their neighbourhood before many houses existed.

In order to portray a brief background story for each resident, I made a

summary of the major recollections and included these within the frame underneath the photograph. This worked very well, giving viewers some insight without taking too long to read.

The exhibition was officially opened by the Mayor of Willoughby and was open for viewing over the ensuing two weeks, followed by another four weeks at a nearby community centre (framed part only). I am truly grateful to the residents who gave so generously of their time and memories and to the Council for its assistance along the way. I am also indebted to the local Artarmon Framing business who very kindly mounted and framed the work at no cost – a wonderful gesture indeed!

I have gained much experience from this project and have been delighted to get to know these charming long-term residents. It was a big challenge and such a thrill to see it come to fruition as a display. I encourage all local history enthusiasts and/or photographers to take on an image project, to pursue a theme and follow it through, rather than the usual 'one off' shots or tasks we all tend to concentrate on. This helps enormously in developing discipline, experience, a body of work, and a feeling of great satisfaction.

(Do we have other photographers? – any technical discussion? Ed)



The Weroona Life Stories Project – Jacqueline Sherry

This project was inspired by a desire to bring to light the individuality of residents living in a nursing home. With the process of ageing, the disease of Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia, personality and individuality often seem buried deep within. Reminiscing and different forms of storytelling seemed to create some light where there was darkness. This affected the persons and their carers in a positive way. Over time, sixty people including residents, relatives, carers, staff and members of the broader community worked together on the Weroona Life Stories Project. The book, *With My Heart On My Sleeve*, published in November 2001, contained sixteen stories. There are eleven edited transcripts from residents and carers, five stories written by carers and eleven visual histories.

For those working in aged care it can be difficult to appreciate the degree of experience and inherent beauty in the life of each person. Caring for someone when you are privy to the stories of their life is a more intimate and rewarding experience. For those living in aged care, one of the benefits of reminiscence is that it provides an emotional window to previous feelings of strength and confidence. Opportunities for reflection and pleasure are created as stories are

shared with others. When my grandmother shared her life story with me I very much appreciated how her words led me comfortably and gently into her world. From the tragic death of her beloved husband, to the struggle and hardship of bringing up four children alone, her experiences were emotionally vivid. Fifteen years later while working in a nursing home as the Diversional Therapist, I noticed the effect of reminiscing on people. Sleepy disinterest would change to animated discussion and laughter. I wanted to develop this further and the Weroona Life Stories Project was born.

Having had funding approved from The Uniting Care Ageing and Disability Service, I looked to like-minded others for support. Relatives and staff, who had specific skills, or those with empathy and an interest in life stories, joined me in this enormous task of creating the book. The support of these people proved to be invaluable in the process. External support from the Leichhardt Library Oral History Program Librarian and volunteers was very useful. Their involvement extended the influence of the project process to the local community.

Before beginning the practical work of creating oral and visual life stories time was spent developing a project

framework. This document outlined our goals and emphasised the following: the central positioning of individual residents in the publication and throughout the process; the strengthening of the relationships between staff, families and residents; the challenging of stereotypical ideas about nursing homes and older people in the broader community; the inclusion of people with dementia, recognising their need for meaningful communication and self-knowledge; and the importance of the process as equal to the importance of producing a book. The project framework was time-consuming but represented important groundwork for directing our process and understanding our motivation. Later, used as an evaluation tool, it affirmed the fruitful achievements of the project and the value in paying careful attention to the process. Initially many women and men felt they had little to contribute having lived "ordinary" lives. Some convincing was needed to point out the value and originality of their life experiences. Surprisingly some of the most talkative residents were not interested in having their story recorded or published for general viewing.

Through creating a project framework we realized that alternative ways of storytelling were needed to better suit our client group. Oral history would exclude a number of residents

from participating and therefore visual collages would be developed using memorabilia and personal objects. Having established various methods of storytelling our attention turned to consent and copyright issues. Residents and carers were consulted individually throughout the process, through informal discussion and consultation, and by formal consent processes. Consent forms were required for use of memorabilia, photographic portraits, oral and visual histories from resident and from carers. Creating the various consent forms was important in providing clear and precise information for all parties. Because we were involved in publishing it was vital that copyright arrangements were correct.

With participants suffering from dementia the question of subjectivity and truth become more pronounced. However, dementia sufferers tend to lose the immediate memories first and can often describe vividly events from the distant past. When concern was high, both the resident and carer gave consent. Some family members were anxious their relative would distort the truth and that this would cause embarrassment to the family. One relevant question might be, whether the client would have revealed particular parts of their life previous to their disease. This was a difficult question to answer and carers were relied on in this situation. For

example, one resident revealed an affair during her marriage. The story is romantic and comical and her take on the event is equally intriguing. She was happy to have this included in the book but thought her daughter was not aware of this past event. To prevent later problems I decided to discuss this with her daughter. Her response? "It's mum's story to tell." The importance of the participants being free to choose the content of their story, divulge as much or as little information as they wished, and to express their opinions on their experiences and on life at Weroona, governed the resulting oral histories and written stories. All transcripts had to be reviewed by authors and edited transcripts were given to the contributors to review three times before the final drafts were approved.

When asked what was gained from telling the story some comments from residents were, "it brought back to me all the things I've done in my life and I felt good at eighty-four I could remember so much." Another said "We have to live our lives not just for ourselves but for others too". The response from carers revealed a sense of resolution and understanding. One said "I feel good because I can see the positive in my relationship with my mother, and the fact that old age and dementia have bought her contentment." Another said she felt "Relieved, contented. Like I can lie him to

rest having come to terms with who he was." And finally, "Good and proud. I can now really see my Mum as a heroine of life, conquering the odds."

When the chaos of life events becomes meshed with our personal qualities, our life story is created, our imprint on the world. On the book cover is a section of a painting called "Horizon" by Karen Casey. In the foreground a human fingerprint, textured with original markings blends into the underlying image of the world. Working as a metaphor this originality and multi-layered experience is present in each life story. Being able to maintain individuality is often difficult in a nursing home and like the fingerprint our goal was to bring to the foreground the cultural and experiential uniqueness of each storyteller. Reminiscing is incredibly valuable in nursing homes because it allows for reflection and sharing with others keeping people strong and connected. Fiery, passionate and heartfelt stories were told as the doors of the nursing home were finally opened. Creating communities of support and love for nursing home residents who experience isolation and loneliness rests on the support of the nursing home staff, carers and the local community.

ARTICLES

The Advanced Interview – (Seminar 4 May, 2002)

Our members Susan McClean, Roslyn Burge and Sue Georgevits provided a wealth of information on the Advanced Interview. For the interest of members not able to attend (and a record for those who did) we provide here an edited version of the transcript of their session. Many thanks to Marjorie Day for the hours of transcribing and to the speakers for their editing. Ed.

Susan McClean

Introduction

My role in speaking to you this morning is to make some general introductory remarks. Roslyn Burge and Sue Georgevits will then speak about their specific projects, their in-depth interviewing experience. Roslyn and Sue asked me if I would tell you about more general aspects of research when approaching an advanced or in-depth interview. We'd like first to say, that we are assuming no prior knowledge. Obviously all of you will have experience, but we do not know how many people here today are just starting out in their oral history practice, how many are here to perhaps fill gaps in their knowledge, and how many are just wanting to review what they already know. So we decided to start with basic information. We thought it best to describe the in-depth interview by example rather than offering a formal definition. In-depth interviews come in a number of forms.

An in-depth interview might be just a one-off interview with a single person, or a group of people on a single theme or single topic. Alternatively you may be interviewing one or more people biographically, addressing a wide range of topics, but working over several hours or even coming back for further interviews. It is a very variable thing.

We wanted to make a very simple point first, about the nature of research, and this point is that ongoing general reading, particularly in twentieth-century Australian history, is necessary for oral historians working in Australia. We see that as basic because we think that a knowledge of the forces of change in living memory in Australia will assist you to ask more interesting questions and to make appropriate connections during the interview.

Australian History References

Australians, An Historical Library, Vol. 4., 1938, and Vol. 5 from 1939, Fairfax, Syme & Weldon 1988.

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V Burgmann and J Lee (eds) *A Peoples' History of Australia since 1788*, 4 vols., Penguin 1988.

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Stuart MacIntyre *A Concise History of Australia*, Vol. 4, CUP Melbourne 1999.

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Richard White and Penny Russell, *Memories and Dreams*, St.Leonards, NSW, Allen & Unwin, 1997

Oral History References

Robert Perks, Alistair Thomson, *The Oral History Reader*, New York, Routledge, 1998

Many of you will know these references, but we felt it was important to suggest a short list of books to start off those who need it, in their background reading. Burgmann and Lee, *A People's History of Australia* offers history written from the point of view of ordinary people in every day life. Stuart Macintyre's *Concise History of Australia*, covers the period before World War II. It uses oral history to explain, fill out, and make sense of the grander themes, the more formal and official themes of history, so it has an interaction between individual experience and broader historical themes. Richard White and Penny Russell, *Memories and Dreams*, is

thematic, and may or may not be useful to you. It is a collection of individual papers that have been published post World War II, covering themes in Australian history. These papers are important: historians have returned to again and again in interpreting the century. There is just one oral history reference and it is terrific for orienting you to oral history. It describes how oral history arose, so you can see where it came from socially, politically, historically and geographically. It also offers chapters which show you, what sort of animal oral history is, via the chapters covering a range of oral history projects from different settings and others exploring the theory of oral history. It is a really accessible book, many of the papers very short, and it does orient people well to the nature of oral history.

This list is not exhaustive, just a suggested list, and we remind you to think about ongoing reading in Australian history. Of course, if you're interviewing somebody who has come from another place, targeted reading about that place, as well, will be a necessary. As people working in Australia you will need as least some of those books.

Research

I'm particularly going to be talking about research, not so much on interviews. Having talked about background research, I will now talk about research for a particular project. The sort of research you do for a project always depends on the aims of that project. The aims determine the depth and breadth of the research. There is no simple answer, it does depend on what you are trying to achieve. For example, an oral history for a commission for a public institution which will be deposited in an archive, will be quite different from an oral history which is a private commission, say a single biography for a family history, or two or three biographies for a family history, or perhaps a small local or community project. Targeted background reading on specific relevant themes will always be needed for those more publicly-oriented oral history interviews, the ones that are more official and are going to be deposited in a public archive. For a family or local history, especially if your knowledge of Australian history and the local context is sound, you may not need further thematic investigations.

Sources

You may have already been involved in commissioned oral histories where you have been lucky enough to have been presented with a basket of sources, a set of photocopies of journal articles, chapters from books, newspaper articles etc., which actually give you background research. If you are not given material there are two methods of finding out such information. One method involves broadly traditional sources, and the other more recent electronic searching.

The sources that you might use to investigate a person in the public eye, or a theme, as I have said, are your local library catalogue, encyclopedias of Australian events, or people, such as *Who's Who*. These are good first steps in collecting information. Most libraries now have electronic catalogues. These catalogues are usually based on earlier card catalogues, so that they are fairly easy to access, because the mind-set that has entered them into the electronic searching tool in your library will be familiar to you.

The internet too, is a good place to search as a first step for basic information. If you use a good search engine like 'Google', you're likely to get fairly extensive material. An internet search will retrieve a variety of references and articles, including text from the general sources I just spoke of. Keep in mind that material off the net is

Goat Island

I undertook an oral history project interviewing people who lived on Goat Island, it was a personal project, with no commissioning body to intervene. Research could be the proverbial piece of string. I chose to look broadly at the 1940s – it was wartime, Japanese submariners wreaked havoc and the harbour was a hive of activity. Relatively little is known about the site, Goat Island has always been quarantined from the public through its early use as a quarry, an ammunition store and its twentieth century history as a working depot for the Sydney Harbour Trust, the Maritime Services Board and now it is managed by the National Parks and Wildlife Service.

My interest in the island developed from my grandfather's work there. As one of two maritime engineers working shifts on the island, he lived there with his family during the 1940s. I wanted to learn more about the lives of these people, their immense pride in their employment and the island, the social divides on the island, the practicalities of shopping, schooling and socializing, the impact of illness and travel, whether there was a sense of isolation and how living on a small island in a very small community in one of the most beautiful urban locations influenced these people's lives.

My questions were focused on these people's experiences of living there and rather than specific questions, I went with a series of topics I wanted to cover and worked through these. Sometimes the interviewees gave expansive answers, which covered a number of topics, and I'm sure you all recognize some dexterity was required.

Researching Goat Island's History

I started research at the State Library where a search of the catalogue produced some twenty six entries. Most of which were heritage studies undertaken in the last decade. Heritage Studies can provide you with a very useful starting point for your research: usually there is a brief history of the place, foot-noted and a bibliography. Remember bibliographies and their fund of hidden treasures. The heritage studies of Goat Island listed the changing government instrumentalities which managed the site and annual reports of the relevant government entities made reference to the island with endless statistics about the water capacity of firefighting vessels moored there, the tonnage of shipping stock repaired or built in the shipyard and included the harbourmaster's report. Whilst these official reports on activities associated with maritime Sydney referred to the island, the activities happened, seemingly, without people. Since my

principal interest was the residents, I could certainly have conducted an interview without any prior research, however, an understanding of the maritime landscape of Sydney's working harbour, an awareness of the infrastructure and administrative role of a government department the size of the Maritime Services Board (MSB), added to my understanding of the stories these people told. Living as they did in the midst of the harbour with family members working for the MSB, they were immeasurably proud of their role and felt a sense of supremacy about their site, whatever happened on the harbour they'd seen it all!

Most interviewees were asleep on Goat Island when the Japanese torpedo struck the Kuttabul. The memory of that event was of little concern to them and unless I'd known about that event and sought their reaction to it, it would never have occurred to them to discuss this with me.

I am sure you recognise that you can research a whole raft of issues surrounding a place and still have some obvious gaps. Someone later asked me about toilets – how was human waste on the island disposed of? A perfectly sensible question and yet with all the hours of research I'd undertaken that was an elementary issue I had missed despite my preoccupation with people's daily lives.

ShoroC on a Shoestring

The next project I would like to tell you about it is *ShoroC on a Shoestring – the Depression in the 1930s*. Two years ago the ShoroC Councils of Mosman, Manly, Pittwater and Warringah, suburbs north of Sydney Harbour commissioned an oral history project which was site specific, interviewing 72 people in an area covering 289 square kilometres, reaching across a landscape in the 1930s of developed suburbs to semi-rural areas and bushland at its perimeter with much of it edged by water.

Through the Australian Centre for Public History at UTS I worked as part of a team of three on that project with Paula Hamilton and Paul Ashton. Here the demands of the brief set the structure of the questions: we were to interview people from a range of backgrounds about their memories of the depression and the 1930s in a particular area of Sydney. Of course these people are now in their eighties and would have been teenagers then. We all bring with us some knowledge of the depression and indeed there is a wealth of material available on the subject, whether recording the impact of the global economic cycle or the international and domestic events later in the thirties.

Because of the youth of most interviewees during the period their memories of the depression were

received memories and part of family stories. Reaching back more than 60 years most interviewees were recalling youthful memories not just of a decade, but also reminiscences of a universal economic period whose title instantly resonates with certain images. This was one of the challenges of the project, interrupting the expression of events which pre-date the interviewees' memories, yet which form part of each family's repository of remembering.

Once again the parameters of the brief, the location and ages of the interviewees during the period shaped the focus. There is no comprehensive publication about life north of the harbour in this period and it is hoped one will follow from this project to fill that gap. Since many interviewees had a strong attachment to place and the landscape figured prominently in their memories we needed to be familiar with the geography of the area as well as an understanding of the wider events of the decade. It was imperative to research the history of the local area when the focus of most interviewee's lives as young people was that locality. We needed to be familiar with some of the details which preoccupied their lives – transport routes, the prominence of surf clubs and culture, places where they fished and swam – which would lead us to better follow-up questions.

Where do we begin our research on this period?

There is an immense amount of material written about the depression and the 1930s but much of the literature was unsatisfactory for this project because of specifics of location. Many of you may be familiar with the research guides published by the National Archives and this, *Working for the Dole*, is number 15. (This series of excellent guides covers other areas such as New Guinea, Parliament House, Collections in Melbourne, the Boer War, Cockatoo Island, Chinese Immigrants.) Whilst this publication takes a broad view of the depression almost none of it relates to the local area of this particular oral history project. Knowing a great deal about national policy and interest rate activity was of very little interest when interviewing someone who was then an eleven year old boy living in Balgowlah! The local libraries of Manly, Mosman, Dee Why and Mona Vale were more practical resource sites where rich local studies sections and dedicated librarians with encyclopaedic knowledge about their locality produced a variety of information for the period.

There is a wealth of heritage histories of Manly, Warringah and Mosman, studies of rock pools on the northern beaches, histories of the surf clubs as well as unpublished theses of the northern beaches. The Manly Warringah

historical society also publishes an excellent journal. Local collections – the Carroll collection at Mosman, the Wellings collection at Manly are important resources, as are newspapers, the National Archives and extensive fiction which has been written around the depression, providing a flavour of the period. The bibliographies of these texts and their footnotes can be productive.

We looked at the census, ferry histories, and of course images and photographs. Because the majority of interviewees were still at school in the period, we asked questions about which schools they attended. Across a number as great as 72 a simple question such as “where did you go to school” and follow on questions about transport to and from, subjects studied and leaving school, elicits a great deal of information about modes of transport, the long journeys for some students, parents economic circumstances, religious associations and a great mix of private and public education. At least 20 different private schools are represented in this group and whilst some walked as little as a few blocks others travelled by ferry and train as far as Burwood.

Research also meant identifying significant events in Sydney which impacted on the lives of the people living on the northern beaches. In 1932 the Harbour Bridge was opened and

made a huge difference to people travelling across the harbour, businessman, travelling salesmen, fruiterers, market gardeners taking goods to the city. Another question such as, ‘what work did your father do?’ brought forth an extraordinary variety of employment. Some worked hard seven days a week, others owned large businesses in the city, one man’s father died at sea and his mother took over his maritime job, some fathers worked as grocery or paint salesmen, others such as marine engineers and builders were unemployable, tomato growers were successful and some highly successful entrepreneurs.

Our familiarity with the area, the kinds of work available there, the different modes of heating, shopping or materials sold, amplified our understanding of interviewees’ responses. While this collection has replicated the social profile of the entire region, which was predominantly white, Anglo-Saxon and Protestant, we were interested to learn about other ethnic groups in the region. Census figures showed the area was not entirely Anglo-Saxon and most interviewees remembered Chinese market gardeners. Sadly, we were unable to track down any of the Chinese Community from that district who lived there in the 1930s despite pursuing literature and personal

contacts. Although there are articles in local journals about the Chinese market gardens of Manly Vale nothing has been written about the people themselves. However, for the Yugoslavs, the story is different, material has been written about the Yugoslav market gardeners of Warriewood, and indeed we interviewed two men who were there as young men in the 1930s.

Tamil Community of Strathfield

This project titled *The Tamils and Their Neighbours – Oral History Project* was commissioned by Strathfield Council. This is also a team approach, Jennifer Cornwall and I are working together as associates of the Australian Centre for Public History at UTS. Our brief is to interview members of the Tamil community who have settled in the Strathfield area over the last twenty five years, recording their experiences of migration and interaction with the wider community. As far as we can ascertain no oral history project has previously been conducted in the Tamil community and the very briefest glance on the library shelves brought out stories of the migrant experiences of Greeks, Hungarians, Italians, Vietnamese, Lebanese and Chinese to name just some in Australia, but nothing of the Tamil or Sri Lankan community.

So were do we begin to research this project? The internet was my starting

point and was somewhat surprised by my initial search results when the word Tamil produced a porn site! Again the State Library's catalogue was an obvious resource but little material directly relating to the Tamil community of Strathfield – some references to Tamil language literature and a search of newspaper articles produced a number of references to the Tamil Tigers. Few of us can be unaware of the terrible internal conflict in Sri Lanka which has propelled much migration but the project was to explore more generally the migration experience and, returning to the brief, our the focus was to be Strathfield municipality.

One publication detailing migrant statistics produced nothing on Sri Lanka but there were references to Indian Tamils in Melbourne. Similar stories of educational achievement and professional successes echo in the Tamil community of Strathfield. A recent publication compiling extensive research undertaken among Tamil refugees in Norway made little reference to the Australian experience but discussed some customs and cultural practices which have helped our understanding of this community.

Searching the internet has unearthed articles in medical journals on the effects of trauma amongst the Tamil community. The encyclopaedia, *The Australian People*, edited by James Jupp

(Cambridge University Press, 2001) had a small section on the Tamil community. You may already be aware of the Migration Heritage Centre <www.migrationheritage.nsw.gov.au> which showcases the work being undertaken in a number of migrant communities. Images of people who have been interviewed and their stories can be read on site.

At the beginning of the project last year a search of the Migration Heritage Centre's website produced nothing about the Tamils or the Sri Lankan community. By chance I looked at the site recently and suddenly up came a reference to an exhibition and seminar entitled *Serimdib to Sydney, Sri Lankan Settlement in New South Wales* jointly hosted by State Records Office and the Migration Heritage Centre. These events were held in February and could have been fruitful for the project – providing potential interviewees and adding to our greater understanding of Sri Lankan settlement in Sydney. You can only begin to imagine my disappointment. It was a salutary reminder that research for any project does not finish on day one, nor does it have a tidy shape.

Over time there have been some hundreds of immigrants from Sri Lanka, then known as Ceylon. Of course information about this particular group is not sitting in a file neatly labelled Tamils or Sri Lankans, rather the

information is embedded within records relating to the activities with which these people were associated - convict, jail or land records. Nor is research confined to tidy labels: frequently references were found by using broad titles such as Indian hawkers. Again remembering our brief, the location and timing, we were required to look at people settling in Strathfield and only in the last quarter century.

Recently as part of this project I interviewed a world renowned expert practitioner of Indian dance. This woman made her public debut in London at the age of nine and said of her life as she travelled and danced across Europe accompanied by her mother that she was treated like a little princess. Since 1987 she has had her own dance company at Homebush and with the assistance of a major government arts grant is about to depart for India to refresh her work. Her students living in Canberra and Melbourne continue the traditions and arts learnt at her dance school at Homebush. In preparing for this interview I was somewhat anxious about how quickly I could bring myself up to speed as an expert on Indian dance, an impossible feat. Back to the internet and a search on Google, using both the woman's name and the name of her dance company produced a raft of articles with reference to her history, reviews of concerts and even an entry on

the Health Department's website which mentioned a concert held to raise funds to purchase cardiac equipment for Concord Hospital. Even she was unaware of some of these entries and was delighted with the discoveries.

So in conclusion, I hope you can see from my experiences with these three projects, that there is no perfect list of research resources. It is an evolving process which requires lateral and creative thinking, and it is too often shaped by restrictions of time and funding. Of course in addition to the details of research, as oral historians we all want the interview to be perfect. Research is not only about the subject matter, but how the interview is conducted and how we make use of the information we find. Now Sue will tell you of her experiences.

Sue Georgevits

Introduction

I have been using oral history testimony for over twenty years, and my first oral history project was undertaken as an honours graduate at the University of New South Wales. Michael McKeron who is now at the War Memorial set me a task in preparation for my honours year, he said, "Go and do a pilot study using oral history to see if it is worth us putting a subject into our undergraduate course". So off I went! I did my pilot study on women in a country town, because that is where I come from, and an undergraduate course was actually started. But this was in the days when oral history was being road tested, it was not accepted as part of academic study. For me, the acceptance of oral testimony, has been a really exciting and important development in the second half of the twentieth century. Interviews gather information not always available in written records about events, people, decisions and processes. Oral history interviews are grounded in memory, and memory is shaped by the present, the past and particular life experiences of the person being interviewed. Exploring people's memory through interviews in no way makes oral testimony less valid. Every interview is unique and for me this

is part of the thrill, as with any rich source of history, oral testimony can make the past sing.

Methodology

I will concentrate on the methodology for an in-depth interview. There is no one way to proceed, every project is different and requires different strategies. It is very important to know the aims of the interview and what information you want to gain. Once you have determined the focus of the interview, whether biographical recollections, family history, corporate or institutional history, organise an outline of topics, which comprise biographical information and subject information you hope to gain from each interview. A pre-interview questionnaire can be very useful in assisting with this organization. Under each heading work up a detailed set of questions. These questions are not a definitive list, as the participant may introduce issues not covered and these may be incorporated in further interviews.

An example I would use is of a project that I am working on at the moment recording oral histories for a large institution who plan to produce a book. One of the first interviews I did, was with a man who had over 30 years of service there, and he started to talk about a topic that was not on my list of questions. He talked about the social life

surrounding the institution, taking trips with families and having a wonderful time. He also talked about the built environment which changed dramatically in his time there. As I am doing all the in-depth interviews, I was able to incorporate these topics in later interviews. Whether the information it is used for the book or not, for future researchers, it is really important information that we have been able to gain.

Interview Questions

When preparing your list of questions put the simplest questions first – like biographical data at the beginning. There are reasons for doing this, it provides a nice lead-in to a person, makes them feel safe and comfortable with something they know well. Even more than that, if the tape is going to be deposited in an archive, this information gives the interview context. It is impossible to know how in the future the interview may be used. Many tapes, deposited in archives, are never transcribed due to cost, so future researchers can listen to the beginning of the tape and get a sense of that person very quickly, then decide whether they want to proceed or not. Finish with the most complex question, but I also think that it is nice to end with something to round off the interview.

Ask the tough questions but return to something safer in conclusion.

Arrange questions so there is a logical progression of ideas and or chronology in the interview. I find chronology works best as a structure when conducting a life story. Ask open ended questions, rather than questions that can be answered yes or no. A simply structured single-handed question, is easier to answer than compound questions, and compound questions are also harder for your transcriber. If they are harder for the transcriber they cost more and can blow your budget if you have quoted a certain number of hours for transcription. If you have more than one point to pursue on a topic, compose follow up questions.

Remember people's memories hang on substantial hooks, so try to give participants points of reference from which to reminisce, without overloading them with information and taking over the interview. The aim is to guide the participant, offering the links to keep the interview flowing. This is where your research will give you background information to keep the interview flowing. If you are completing a recent history it's worth spending a couple of days in the area, sitting in coffee shops, seeing what is advertised in the local library, generally absorbing the culture of the area. You can find lots of information in a serendipitous way about the people that you are interviewing.

It can also be very useful, particularly if you have a limited amount of time to give your participants a copy of a set of topics you wish to cover. This has been very useful for many of the older participants in my current project because they feel nervous that they will not remember things. When they have the list for a couple of weeks before an interview, they have had an opportunity to look up information. Quite a few have refused to be interviewed, their fear is that their memories will not actually be good enough. I am at the point with those people, of visiting and having a chat, rather than doing an interview and hopefully once we have meet, they will agree to be interviewed. It is important to know as much about the person you are interviewing as possible, as this knowledge assists in establishing rapport with the interviewee. It also helps to tailor the interview questions to each individual especially if the interview is part of a larger study. If you decide not to have a pre-interview meeting, at the very least, have a chat on the phone to set up some level of communication.

Project Aims

Different approaches are appropriate for different types of interviews. The aims and the nature of the project drive the type and extent of the research required, and the extent of the research is also influenced by the length of the interview

as well as the budgetary constraints.

Where time is limited, a topic summary becomes useful to ensure all the topics are covered. Some interviews I have conducted are with people I am familiar with, even so, there is always a degree of specific research required to fill the aims of the specific project. It is so necessary to have a very, very clear set of aims. The clear set of aims will give cohesiveness to the project, particularly if more than one interviewer is involved.

Ethically it is very important the participants understand the purpose of the project they are participating in. At the very least, if you do not want to go down the road of study specifics, they should have received a covering letter outlining the project before being asked to sign consent forms.

In terms of preparation and research, I will walk through a couple of examples, without breaching confidentiality of my clients. The overall aims of these projects are different, but both involved collecting a person's life history.

Project One

One project involved a gentleman I will call Kurt, my ninety three year old Auschwitz survivor. I knew, very little about Kurt before I went to visit him, just a little of his East European background. I was brought in to see whether or not he would like to be interviewed. I had a meeting with Kurt, where he baked me a cake and made me coffee, to determine whether or not he was prepared to have me interview him. So I got interviewed! Then I went back for another cake, and I completed a preliminary interview with Kurt. There was no pre-interview questionnaire filled out in this case, he said he had a C.V. but it did not appear and he was not even certain that he wanted to be interviewed. This was because he had a bad experience on a previous project. At the end of that project nobody had written to thank him, nor supplied him with a copy of the tape or transcript as requested. But he also thinks, and he is a very smart man, filling in a form detracts from the real story, the flow of the story, and I agree with him in many cases. He also believes he has a very important story to tell, and if I was O.K., he was going to tell it to me. I made notes during that meeting and put together approximately three pages with background information as told by him. He has a really strong memory of the Austro-Hungarian Empire which I found

This family was also unknown to me except for what the son told me via email. I began by contacting the couple and asking them to complete a simple biographical data sheet, and it was a very simple one, partly, because I did not want to frighten them, also, I already had quite a bit of information from the son. It asked for obvious things, name, place of birth, where you were brought up, siblings, education, secondary school, working life, parents, because the idea was to get the background of this couple as well. One of the important things that came out of this was that the mother actually jotted down, not just the number of children that she had, but information on when a son had died, which was only three years ago, and what had happened to him. It put this event in context for me and it was useful in the interview as well. As there was no particular direction that these interviews had to take, except to find out as much as possible about the family, I asked them to sort through what ever photographs and documentation they have, with a view of them labeling it, and organising it into some sort of archive for the family. The mother said that her husband was having difficulty remembering, and photos and

memorabilia assisted in generating his memories.

We had a number of telephone conversations about their family history before commencing, so they were familiar with me and this replaced the preliminary interview. This assisted in keeping the project within budget. The interviews began with family background proceeded chronologically through their lives, focusing on the lives of their children and grandchildren. Because of the nature of their story, overlaying with the story of their migration to Australia, it is a really wonderful story which I hope will be archived to become part of one of our Australian collections of oral histories.

Tendering for Oral History – Michael Clarke

Increasingly, oral historians are being asked to tender/quote for commissions by large organisations including government authorities. However, many are not used to bidding for work and do not appreciate what is required. Nor do they understand the constraints on their clients that may influence the brief or specification for the work, and the manner in which the tenders will be processed and the contract awarded. This paper is not a prescription, which if followed will assure oral historians of success when tendering. Rather, it is designed to enhance both their understanding of the principles involved and their chances of success. Tendering in a business-like way, will also elevate their standing as professionals, and will increase the awareness of clients of the value of oral history and of what is involved in undertaking successful commissions. For convenience, throughout the paper the terminology relating to “tendering” will include the process of submitting quotations, and the term “client” will be used to designate individuals or organisations that seek tenders for oral history work.

The Challenge

Quotations/tenders are sought for all sorts of things such as painting a home, supplying goods, provision of consulting services and of course, for oral history work. In most cases it will be a competitive situation as tenders will generally be sought from more than one person or firm, and of course there can only be one winner. The challenge for a tenderer is therefore twofold: first to make sure their tender is shortlisted for consideration, and second, to convince the client both that theirs is the most advantageous offer and they are the person best able to provide the desired outcome. Even a sole tenderer cannot take it for granted their bid will be successful; they will still need to convince the client they are able to do

the required job at an acceptable price.

Considerable care and thought needs to be put into preparation of the tender. Much of this will involve getting inside the skin of the client and understanding his needs, what he is looking for and even uncovering his uncertainties, because not all people or organisations seeking tenders, are what might be called “informed clients”. In most cases it goes without saying that a person tenders because they want the work. They therefore need to do their utmost to win the job. They will rarely be successful if they produce a casual, unattractive, uninformative, perhaps non-conforming tender, or one that does not convince the client they have the necessary knowledge, skills and experience ie. a good “track record”.

Preliminary Comment

First it should be understood that in undertaking work for a fee, oral historians are entering into a contract (whether one is signed or not) and so their relationship with the client should be business-like and professional.

Second, these guidelines reflect many years' experience in obtaining quotations from oral historians and employing them, and of dealing with tenders and administering contracts for a variety of work in a large public authority.

Third, whilst the principles will apply to most oral history work, the degree to which they are applied will vary considerably according to the size and complexity of the potential commission. Whilst this will require oral historians to exercise their own judgement, it is preferable when in doubt, to provide more information than too little, when submitting a tender.

Compliance with Tendering Conditions

Most clients will have spelt out in some detail in the brief, the information required of the tenderer and the form for its presentation. Some authorities, particularly government ones, will in considering and awarding a tender, have to comply with laid down procedures relating to matters such as compliance with the brief/specification, probity, accountability, transparency, value for money, assessed ability of the tenderer,

workers compensation and public liability insurance and so on. Some will also have standard conditions that apply to all their contracts and which must be complied with. Accordingly, each and all of the tendering conditions must be addressed by the oral historian when tendering. Failure to do so will not only reflect badly on them, but could result in their tender being dismissed out of hand as non-conforming.

Response to the Brief

The brief will include a statement of what the task is and what outcome the client is looking for. So the first thing is to read the brief carefully and gain a good grasp of the task. The oral historian's understanding of what the job is about should then be written down in their own words. This will not only prepare a draft "Response to the Brief" for inclusion in the tender, but will help identify deficiencies in the brief and areas of uncertainty. Where these are revealed, they should be clarified at a meeting with the client. This will not only ensure there is an agreed understanding of the nature of the commission and the desired outcomes, but will establish a personal relationship with the client, as well as indicating interest in the work. Answers to questions should be included in the "Response ..." and if they are complex, confirmation should be sought from the

client before the tender is submitted. The final version of the Response to the Brief should address all the points made in the brief.

If not dealt with adequately in the brief, the discussion with the client should traverse as applicable, matters such as the client's management of the commission; responsibilities of the client (what he will do and provide); authorisation to contact interviewees; copyright; methods of payment; time for completion; meetings and progress reporting; format, quantum and delivery of outputs. In simple cases, much of this can be done over the phone or preferably by email, so there will be a "written" record.

Clients

Clients seeking tenders will vary from those who know precisely what they want and who spell it out clearly in a good brief, to those that have not adequately defined what they want. The range will also include those that know little or nothing about oral history and those that merely make an oral request for a quote. The last three pose a particular problem, because although they might not have clearly defined (including perhaps to themselves) exactly what the task is and what outputs they require, they will be disappointed if the product does not satisfy them. However, they will not see it as a failure on their part, but will

blame the oral historian who, as the "professional", should have made enquiries and clarified areas of uncertainty. Accordingly, the latter's reputation and prospects of future work will suffer.

A prime reason for commissions not producing acceptable outcomes, most often lies in poor briefing at the outset by the client and a poor understanding of what is required by the oral historian. This emphasises the need to prepare a response to the brief and to seek clarification where there is uncertainty. Where the brief is singularly lacking, an alternative brief should be prepared and the client's confirmation obtained of its acceptability. In this regard, oral historians should not be fobbed off with statements such as "we merely want you to do an oral history of so and so" or "you know what we want, don't you?"

Methodology and Equipment

Setting out the proposed methodology will give the client confidence the tenderer is competent and will approach the task in a way that will produce the desired outcomes economically. The client will also need to gain assurance that interviewees will be treated with respect, that their contribution will be appreciated and that any confidences or caveats will be honoured.

Many clients like to be appraised of the type of equipment proposed so they

can feel confident of the quality of the end product, particularly if it is to be a sound recording. So even if a description of the equipment to be used is not asked for, it is often worthwhile including it in the tender.

The length of the "methodology" statement will vary from quite short for simple commissions, to lengthy for complex ones.

CV, Knowledge, Skills, Experience and Referees

An important factor in awarding a contract will be possession by the tenderer of satisfactory qualifications (academic or practical), experience and successful completion of similar work. Knowing this will give the client confidence and trust in the tenderer's ability to "deliver the goods". Most will also require the names of people who can vouch for the tenderer's competence ie. referees. So every tender should include such statements. These days it is easy to maintain a CV on word processor that can be kept up-to-date and can be massaged to suit a particular purpose.

Insurance

Public liability insurance is becoming an increasing problem, as many public authorities are demanding high levels of cover. The cost of premiums particularly to a casual practitioner was prohibitive even before the recent insurance hiatus.

This, despite the fact that the risks associated with oral history might be considered minimal. Unless it can be spread over a much larger business, the cost of public liability insurance could prevent many oral historians from operating, where such cover is demanded. Irrespective, oral historians will need to make their own decisions as to whether they take out insurance. Where a current public liability insurance policy is required by the client, evidence of it will need to be provided either with the tender, or at least before a tender is formally accepted.

One means of counteracting the high cost of public liability insurance could be for a group of individual oral historians to form a non-profit making company. Members then tender for the work through the company and carry out the work if successful. In this way, the insurance premium might be shared between the members. However, legal advice should be obtained before entering into such an arrangement.

Pricing

A client may have a number or a combination of reasons in asking for the price to be quoted in a particular format. This may be because the quantum of work required might not be exactly known at the beginning, or the quantum could vary as the project progresses, or it could be to facilitate comparison of

tenders. Accordingly, the prescribed format should be used. If it is not, the client in assessing tenders will be trying to “compare apples with oranges” and is just as likely to dismiss a non-conforming tender out of hand. Any evident deficiency in a pricing schedule should have been discussed with the client early in the tendering period as part of the brief clarification process. However, if problems remain, qualifications should be appended to the formal schedule of prices and/or an additional, alternative pricing schedule supplied.

In many oral history projects the quantum of work cannot be accurately pre-determined. This applies particularly to biographical interviews, where the length of interview will be determined by the willingness of the interviewee to elaborate, their ability to concentrate, the length of explanations, the emergence of unexpected but important experiences and so on. Because of such possibilities, it would be fundamentally wrong to restrict the interview to a pre-determined length. Consequently, lump sum prices would not be appropriate and hourly rates should apply, so that the monetary amount can be adjusted according to the length of interview. Other components of the tender may also need to be adjusted such as travel costs where more than one visit is required, research time can be a variable factor and so on.

Pricing of tenders should be realistic making due allowance for overheads and incidentals such as tapes, stationery, computer use and discs, postage, travel and use of car, telephone, home office, public liability insurance, meetings, reporting etc. Some allowance should also be made for incidental discussions with the client, for answering queries, discussing and quoting for additional work etc., as with some clients and particular commissions, this can take a significant amount of time. Where changes will not be covered by payment for the actual quantum of work, some contingency amounts may need to be built into prices to cover areas of uncertainty and where the work could take longer or be greater than anticipated.

However, where rates will be applied to the actual amount of work performed, the tenderer should ensure that the addition of a contingency to each of the rates he tenders, does not result in the sum of the rates multiplied by the amount of work shown in the schedule, becoming unreasonably high. The priced tender form should indicate whether or not the prices are inclusive of GST and whether or not the tenderer is liable for the payment of GST.

Submission of Tender

Tenders must be submitted by the stipulated closing date. Accordingly, tenderers should ensure that delivery

will not be affected by postal or courier uncertainties etc., and should also be sure of the right address, whether delivery will be by post or by hand. It is not unknown for tenders to be sent to the wrong address, or for them to be taken to the wrong place for lodging.

Most tenders should include:

- a covering letter on the oral historian's letterhead containing their contact details and ABN;
- a cover sheet showing the name of the project as used by the client, the number of the tender if applicable, the closing date and the name of the tenderer;
- an introduction, stating the purpose of the tender;
- a response to the brief;
- a statement about methodology and equipment;
- the tenderer's CV including a statement of their knowledge, skills and experience, and description of similar work;
- a list of referees with contact details;
- the priced tender form; and any other material required by the client.

Check List

It is worthwhile using a checklist during preparation of a tender and before it is submitted, to ensure all points have been covered. Such a list might include:

- Are the client and I fully agreed on

the nature of the commission?

- Have I resolved with the client matters such as the client's management of the commission; his responsibilities; authorisation to contact interviewees; copyright; methods of payment; time for completion; meetings and progress reporting; format, quantum and delivery of outputs etc?
- Have I adequately described my proposed methodology and the equipment to be used?
- Have I included an up-to-date CV, demonstrating my knowledge, skills and experience, and have I provided details of similar work successfully performed?
- Have I provided the names and contact details of two or three referees, and have I alerted the referees to the possibility they may be contacted?
- Have I submitted the price in the prescribed format (with or without qualifications) and/or provided an additional, alternative pricing schedule to ensure I will be fairly recompensed for my work?
- Have I adequately addressed all the tendering conditions?
- Have I clearly explained any alternatives to the client's requirements, that I have offered?
- Have I noted the closing date and place for the lodging of tenders and

ensured my tender will be received on time?

Progress Reporting

Many commissions are so short that reporting of progress will not be an issue. However, there can be delays in completion due to a variety of circumstances, such as the temporary unavailability of an interviewee, illness etc. In such cases it is important that the client be kept informed of what is happening and not "left in the dark".

With longer commissions, clients may require regular progress reports (generally in writing) and possibly meetings. This may be for a variety of reasons, apart from the comfort of knowing that the work is progressing on schedule. It must be remembered that clients have expectations of the work being completed within a particular time frame, they may have deadlines to meet and funding constraints (money to be spent within a set period), or they may have commitments to others. Consequently, delays beyond an agreed time for completion can be an acute embarrassment and will reflect badly on the oral historian's reputation as a reliable contractor. Accordingly, whether or not the client has requested progress reports, they should always be kept informed of progress and of potential delays. Forewarned, they can take corrective action and work with the oral

historian to recover the situation, or to make acceptable adjustments to the terms of the commission.

Planning or Programming the Work

All oral historians will know that obtaining appointments with interviewees and postponements of interviews, are some of the prime sources of delay to a project. Accordingly and particularly where there are numbers of interviews to be performed, one of the first things to do is to prepare a schedule of interviews and to start making appointments. Preparation of a flexible work program will also enable successful completion of the work, rather than just hoping that everything will go OK and the project can be completed on time. It can also identify where alternative activities can be performed when others are delayed. For instance if an interview is postponed, it may be possible to undertake research, advance a future pre-interview or to log a completed interview to fill in the gap.

Keeping Records

During the course of a project, oral historians should keep records of their costs and the time spent on elements of the project. By comparing their costs to their tendered fee, they will have early warning of whether or not they are likely to make a profit. It will also provide data in support of claims made for payment for extra work. Comparing their costs

and income at the end of a project, will provide data on which to base future tenders.

Reputation

An important aspect of providing a service to others eg., being a consultant or an oral historian, is the maintenance of a good reputation. Just as oral historians talk to one another, so do clients seeking their services, which means that reputations for sloppy work or offhanded behaviour are soon broadcast. Effort needs to be put into developing and maintaining a good reputation.

Many things contribute to maintenance of a good reputation, some of which have already been mentioned. Others include responding to an invitation to tender, even if you can't because of work overload. Don't just ignore the request. Send a polite letter which should thank the client for the opportunity, declare your interest whilst explaining the circumstance that preclude you from tendering, and indicate your interest in receiving future invitations. Tendering in a professional manner will also enhance your reputation, even if you are unsuccessful. Clients appreciate intelligently and thoughtfully prepared tenders and will remember to invite the tenderer to participate, the next time there is an opportunity.

Conclusion

Oral history commissions undertaken for a fee are a contract and must be performed in a business-like and professional manner. This includes the process of tendering. The purpose of tendering is to win the job and so tenderers need to convince the client they are not only competent, but are the best person offering to do the work and will produce the required outcome at an acceptable price, on time.

The client's brief/specification must be complied with. Tenderer's should avoid making a nuisance of themselves (and thus jeopardising their chances) by providing non-conforming tenders. The tenderer's understanding of the purpose and nature of the commission, of the desired outcomes and their ability and intention to comply with the client's requirements, must be clearly spelt out in the tenderer's response to the brief.

After winning the commission, the oral historian should ensure they keep the client informed of progress and of any potential delays that could affect completion of the work by the agreed time. Effort should be made to overcome delays (perhaps by altering the sequence of work) so the impact will be minimal and may in fact be prevented from delaying completion. Programming the work, making realistic allowances for possible delays is important and will help keep the project on track

Diary of Events



Executive meeting Dates for 2002

Members are welcome to attend the Management Committee meeting to be held at the State Library cafeteria at 5.30pm on 26 November.

Next Seminar 9 November

"Oral History made Public" Presented by Margaret Park, North Sydney Council Historian.

National Oral History Conference

Guildford, Western Australia (less than 15 minutes' drive from Perth Airport)
September 4-7, 2003.
Theme: "From all Quarters".

Noticeboard



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The Australian Biography Project.
Film Australia has recently completed the eighth series of this program shown on SBS television. If you missed seeing this series of portraits of leading and interesting Australians, episodes from all 8 series can be purchased from www.filmaust.com.au
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