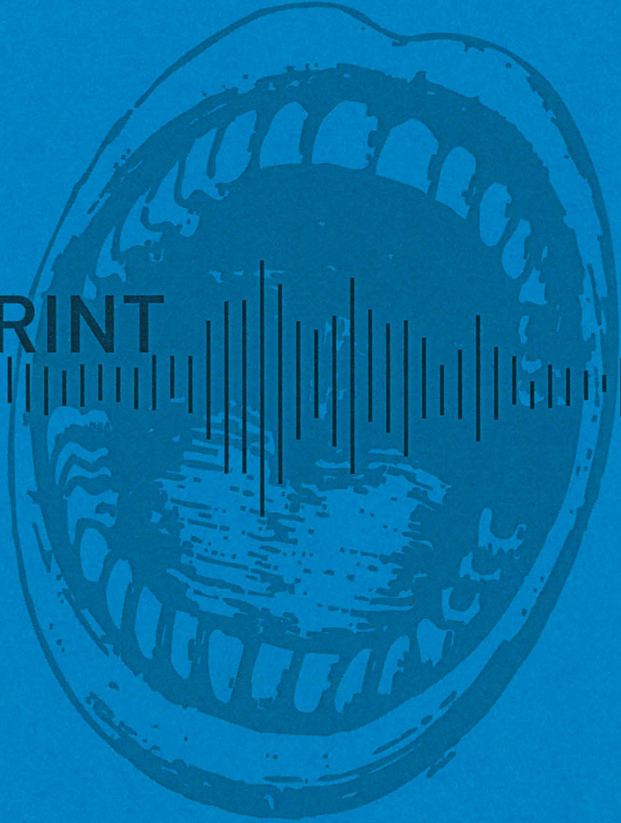


Newsletter of the New South Wales Branch
of the Oral History Association of Australia

VOICEPRINT



36

April 2007

VOICEPRINT

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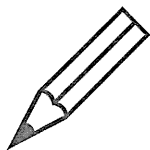
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Editorial



Thank you all for your contributions. I was, as usual when the time came to start on this edition, a little worried about where the words were coming from, but then, as always, in they came. I have been slowly getting my email under control – I bought a book! Hope I have replied to all, my apologies if not, but your contributions are most welcome. It has all come together and I hope members all find something of interest. I was pleased to have Gail Foran's contribution about her first venture into oral history. It is good to hear of the experiences of members who are venturing into oral history for the first time. Sue Rosen, Rosemary Kerr and Emma Dortins have reported on their most interesting and innovative publishing venture. Do read about it and look at their website.

In fact we have a big first in this edition – our venture to include a CD with our newsletter. Do read about it and then listen to the voices. I am delighted that we have been able to move with the times, (so often these days a 'mail out' in our letterbox will have a CD attached), our very sincere thanks to Peter Rubinstein for this innovation.

In this edition we are able to again welcome an International President to Australia – currently, Alistair Thomson. Members will remember that our member Janis Wilton recently held this post. Oral history is certainly maturing in Australia, as we have International Presidents residing in Australia. Another sign of our mature years is that we farewell another pioneer oral historian – Wendy Lowenstein will be remembered by many.

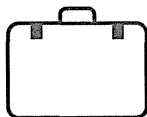
We do try to keep you up to date with what is happening in the world of oral history and have included details of the OHAA Brisbane Conference and the next IOHA Conference. For other events we have included web addresses for you to explore. There are many conferences around the world, like the one Frances Rush attended in Portugal, so please share with us if you have opportunity to attend any oral history conference/meetings etc..

*Do note that nominations are again called for the **Hazel de Berg Award**. New member may like to know that the first award was made at the Sydney IOHA Conference last July. This award was made to Beth Robinson, for her many years of service but Beth is particularly acclaimed as author of the Oral History Handbook. If you are new to oral history I hope you have a copy of Beth's book (5th Edition) to guide you!*

Contributions are always very welcome. Note July as the month to send in your contribution.

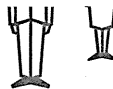
*Thank you,
Joyce Cribb*

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Membership



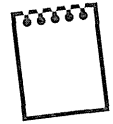
New Members

A hearty welcome to you all. We look forward to meeting you at our next seminar on Saturday 5 May when we will look at some new digital equipment on offer. If not then perhaps you may like to join us at the Biennial National Conference in Brisbane 27 – 30 September 2007. For details read on!

I am so glad you have joined now when there is so much going on in oral history – and even more with your contribution! I look forward to hearing from you.

Donna Byer-Smith	Court office
John Shoebridge	Student
Jayne Persian	Student
Jennifer McMonnies	Heritage consultant
Colleen Keenan	TAFE teacher
Valentina McInern	Academic
Meg Bishop	Educator
Sandra Whitfield	Local government officer
Christine Dudley	Lecturer
Emily el Tobgy	Producer/editor
Janeece Richards	Clerk
Liverpool City Library	
Moore Theological College	
True Story Studios	
Tweed River Regional Museum	

Rosie Block, President



Stephanie's Baby

Members will remember Stephanie Coleman as a member of our NSW committee and she served as our secretary for a time. She now has a delightful baby girl, Imogen Amber, born on 6th July. Our congratulations and best wishes to them.



Vale Wendy Lowenstein

Wendy Lowenstein was one of the grand pioneers of oral history and was made an Honorary Life Member of the OHAA in 1999 in Melbourne at the Biennial National OHAA conference. She was a remarkable woman, most energetic and challenging in her refusal to accept the status quo – ever! She sat at my table at the dinner and vilified – in not so quiet a whisper – the length and boring nature of one of the speakers – she was right! Her life was anything but boring!

Rosie Block, President

The following obituary was written by Wendy's son Richard and appeared in Sydney Morning Herald, October 26, 2006.

Wendy Lowenstein, 1927 – 2006

A force to behold Wendy Lowenstein chronicled the struggles of Australia's working class.

WENDY LOWENSTEIN was indomitable, single-minded, opinionated and forthright. Over the years she was called many things by many people, including a force of nature, a wonderful original, inspiring, infuriating, combative, impossible, a force to behold. She was even described as like a kid on an adventure.

Lowenstein, who has died aged 79, was an oral historian and author who was driven by her belief in the power and importance of the stories of individuals and their direct

experiences. Always an activist, she kept constant watch over the shifting fortunes of the working class. She was passionate about politics, workers' rights and working-class history, and was a fierce campaigner against the capitalist classes, bureaucracies and governments of all persuasions.

"I know I'm not impartial," Lowenstein would retort. "Impartiality is crap. It's like saying I'm not political."

My mother took me to my first demonstration – an all-night vigil outside Melbourne's Pentridge Jail – at the age of seven, carrying a sandwich board around my neck and holding a candle, protesting against the execution of Ronald Ryan, the last man to be hanged in Australia, in 1967.

A blur of marches, meetings and picket lines followed: May Day, Hiroshima Day, Vietnam moratoriums, Save Our Sons, People For Nuclear Disarmament, International Year of Peace, Arts Action For Peace, Palm Sunday peace marches, Save Our Schools, Hands Off Our Libraries, wharf strikes, miners' strikes, teachers' strikes and dental mechanics' strikes. The union movement's slogan "Solidarity Forever" ran deep in her veins.

Lowenstein was born Katherin Wendy Robertson, the fourth child of Douglas and Rita Robertson. "Dad forgot to put the 'e' on my first name when he registered my birth," she said. Her mother's family were Quakers, overseas missionaries and Fabian socialists; her father's were Presbyterian ministers, bush missionaries and choir masters.

Her father was a romantic Australian nationalist whose family went from prosperity to dire poverty after drought, business folly and the depression of the 1890s but were readers and musicians. Her mother was artistic and musical but in revolt against her wealthy Bendigo family.

Lowenstein went to her first political meeting in 1939, about the Spanish Civil War at the League of Young Democrats. She won a scholarship in the same year to Box Hill Grammar School, run by a principal with Trotskyite leanings who belonged to a Methodist socialist group.

At 15 she joined her sister Shirley and brother John in Melbourne's New Theatre and the Eureka Youth League where she discovered radical writing, theatre, art and class politics.

Lowenstein's first job was as a journalist with the Radio Times. Although she found life in the Communist Party satisfying, the party ordered her to work in a battery factory.

She met Werner Lowenstein, a child refugee from Germany who came to Australia on the Dunera, through the New Theatre and they married in 1947. The revelation of the Stalinist atrocities and the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956 saw them leave the party, but she became more politically active than ever.

Lowenstein was a teacher until a Literature Board grant allowed her to become a full-time writer. *Weevils in the Flour*, a record of the Depression of the 1930s in Australia,

Nuts and Bolts (cont...)

was published in 1978. Meanwhile, my secondary school headmaster had called my father in. Presenting him with an exercise book filled with pornographic children's rhymes, he asked if my father knew of the "filth" I was filling my head with. "Of course," Dad replied. "My wife is a writer. She has the whole family out collecting these things."

When teaching in the '70s, Lowenstein caught a group of schoolgirls fighting over the selling of their favours to passing businessmen – one was charging 50 cents to do what others were getting \$2 for. She lectured them on the values of unionism, agreeing on a base rate and never undercutting their fellow worker.

While raising a family, she was involved with the New Theatre, the Eureka Youth League, the Victorian Folk Music Society, the Australian Folklore Expedition, the Boree Log Folk Club, the Colonial Bush Dance Society, Melbourne's Pram Factory Flea Market, alternative and community schools and centres, Friends of the Earth, Arts Action For Peace, the Palm Sunday Committee, the Victorian Secondary Teachers Association and the Oral History Association of Australia.

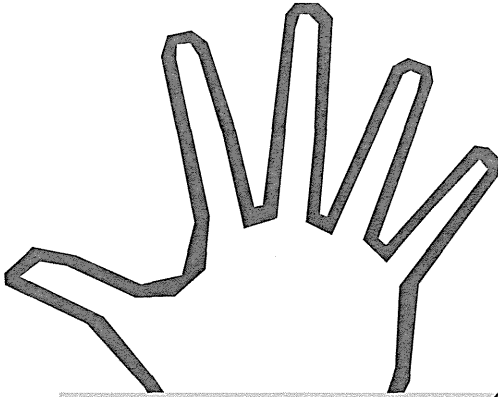
She was a writer-in-residence at Victorian and interstate universities, conducted workshops and spoke at numerous conferences and events until 2002. Her motto was to become, "*Nix Illigitamus Carborundum*" or "Never let the bastards grind you down". She was tireless in her

fight against social injustice and gave a voice to the ordinary people who lived history.

Lowenstein's other books include *The Immigrants* (with Morag Loh), *Cinderella Dressed in Yella* (with June Factor and Professor Ian Turner), *Shocking, Shocking, Shocking, Under the Hook* (with Tom Hills) and *Weevils at Work*. Her screenplays include *Weevils in the Flour* and *Strikebound*. Her vast collection of oral history is in the National Library in Canberra.

Lowenstein died from the complications of Alzheimer's disease and is survived by Werner, three children, and five grandchildren.

Richard Lowenstein



STOP PRESS

International President to return to Australia

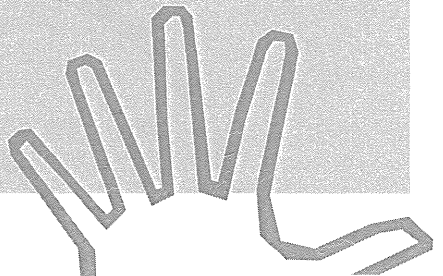
I heard on the "grape vine" that Alistair Thomson was returning to Australia so I sent him an email inviting his comments about his plans – his reply I share with you all. I know we will all welcome our International President and wish Al and family good traveling and happy times in Australia. Note; President Al has sent the Call for Papers for next IOHA Conference 2008. See Notices. Ed.

“

Hi Joyce, thanks for thinking of this. Myself and family come back to Australia on 18 August 2007 (after 24 years in England in my case – the rest of the family will be proper emigrants!). I'll be taking up a position as Professor of History in the School of Historical Studies at Monash University in Melbourne, where among other things I'm looking forward to teaching oral history and public history courses, and re-engaging in Australian history and society.

As you can imagine the whole migration experience is pretty challenging. Some of the migrants I've interviewed for oral history projects in recent years have been wondering about how I'll manage putting theory into practice in my own migrant family! I've certainly learnt some useful lessons from my interviewees (for example – you can never return 'home', you have to imagine you are starting again).

Best Wishes, Al. ”



Nuts and Bolts (cont...)

First sound with *Voiceprint!*

Peter Rubinstein of Radiowise Media Networks is a most valued and generous member of our NSW Committee and a **real ideas man**. He is an experienced interviewer and producer of radio programs, and is always willing to share the knowledge gained in his professional capacity with members and to encourage them in their oral history activities. Thus, Peter has come up with the idea that *Voiceprint* should have voice as well as print – after all it is oral rather than written history that is our *raison d'être*. So for the first time (we think in Australia) we are including a CD with mini documentaries compiled by Radiowise for three recent specific events.

We are indebted to Peter and his company for the idea, for sharing his productions, and the donation of the CDs included with this edition of *Voiceprint*. We are very proud of this historic first! Thank you Peter.

Rosie Block, President

All three of these mini-documentaries were produced for specific events. They rely on Oral Histories and are not narrated.

Tim Flannery

This 5-minute piece was produced to coincide with the naming of Tim Flannery as the 2007 Australian of the Year.

I recorded the interview in 2 stages: the first (approx 10 minutes) was conducted on the night that Tim was named the NSW Australian of the Year in November 2006; and the second (also approx. 15 minutes) was done just one day before the Prime Minister announced the Awards on January 25th of this year.

The documentary as a whole was produced for commercial radio stations around Australia, so it could not be more than about 5 minutes in length. It needed to talk about Tim, his childhood, how he became interested in things like the environment and conservation, through to the honour of being named Australian of the Year.

The only external actuality, apart from the interview with Tim, is of the Prime minister announcing the Award.

The interview was recorded on a digital Edirol R-09 using a hand-held microphone.

Bali – The 4th Anniversary

This documentary was produced using some of the 88 interviews that I conducted in the year following the Bali Bombing on 12 October 2002.

I wanted to put together something that would give a sense of the horror of the moment that the bomb went off – as well as the time leading into it, and what happened immediately afterwards.

It relied on many voices – some slightly repetitive in terms of what others had said – but all showing that they had been through a “shared” experience, regardless of whether they were in Paddy’s Bar or the Sari Club at the time of the bombing.

The 88 interviews were recorded right around Australia, and not only included those who were injured or who lost loved ones, but also the volunteers, the RAAF, DFAT, heads of burns units at Australian hospitals, etc. The interviews were all recorded on a TASCAM DAT recorder – DAP-1 with external microphone.

Steve Irwin: A Tribute

In late 2003, I was fortunate enough to spend a day with Steve Irwin and his family at Australia Zoo, west of the Sunshine Coast, in Queensland.

During that time, I conducted a two and a half hour interview with Steve. (I also interviewed his wife Terri and his manager/business partner John Stainton).

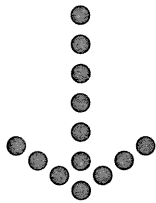
When news broke of Steve’s sudden death late last year, I was extremely lucky to have already had the interview fully transcribed. So, we leapt into action. The hardest part was that Steve was such a great interview that it would have been easy to produce a 30-minute or 60-minute piece. We chose some appropriate excerpts that we felt showed a number of different “sides” of the man.

We also had access to some actuality from his various TV shows and appearances, which we felt really added something to the overall production.

Whilst all those production elements were important in the overall sound of the finished product, in the end it was Steve’s voice that worked and made this Tribute a much sought-after documentary for commercial radio stations across Australia.

This interview was recorded on a TASCAM DAT recorder – DAP-1, with external microphone.

**Peter Rubenstein,
Radiowise Media Networks**



Call for Nominations

Hazel de Berg Award for Excellence in Oral History

The Award

The Oral History Association of Australia (OHAA) has established an award to recognise members who have made an outstanding contribution to the cause of oral history in Australia over a considerable period of time.

To commemorate her pioneering work in oral history, the award has been named the Hazel de Berg Award for Excellence in Oral History.

Criteria

The recipient shall be the nominee deemed by the National Committee of the OHAA to have, over a considerable period of time, made an outstanding contribution to oral history in Australia through one or more of the following:

- the raising of awareness of oral history within the profession;
- the promotion of oral history within the history community;
- the recording and documentation of oral history;
- the preservation and archiving of oral history collections;
- such other contribution to oral history as the OHAA considers worthy of recognition.

The award is open only to members of the OHAA.

Nominations for the Award

Nominations shall be type-written on the prescribed form.

Nominations should be brief, but present a persuasive case setting out the achievements and history of the nominee that will enable a comparative assessment to be made; they must be signed and dated by the nominator.

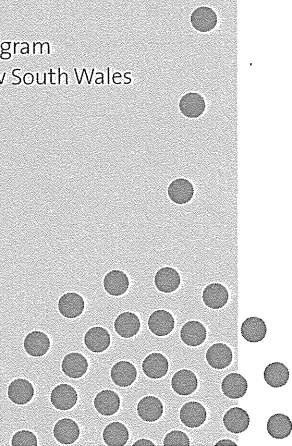
Nominations may be made by any Branch or member of the OHAA; there is no impediment to members nominating themselves.

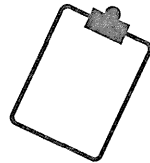
Lodging of nominations

Nomination forms are available from OHAA branches or can be downloaded from the OHAA website at www.ohaa.net.au. The website also includes OHAA branch addresses.

Nominations marked 'Confidential' must be received by 5 pm on 19 May 2007; they should be sent to:

Secretary OHAA
c/- Oral History Program
State Library of New South Wales
Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000





Seminar: Saturday 4 November 2006 *The Coast Road and the Island*

Frank Heimans, a well known oral historian and filmmaker and also secretary of our NSW Committee spoke of two recent projects; the history and the people of both Lawrence Hargrave Drive (the Coast Road) Illawarra, and of Lord Howe Island, New South Wales.

The oral history project of the Lawrence Hargrave Drive was commissioned by the Roads and Traffic Authority (RTA). The road travels between Helensburg and to nearly Wollongong with eight villages along the way. This spectacular roadway, built between the sea and the cliffs, was named after Lawrence Hargrave the pioneer aviator who flew box kites from the cliffs that rise up above the road. Frank has completed two oral histories on this project for the RTA, one about the history of the old road and the people who lived along it and the second on the building of the new road. Frank found the people and their stories very fascinating so it was this first oral history, about which he spoke. For this oral history Frank interviewed 19 people. As he was commissioned by the RTA he had their assistance in finding the interviewees. The RTA sought community input and provided a detailed short list of people who were willing to be interviewed, and Frank chose his interviewees from that list.

Frank reminded his audience of their responsibilities in recording the precious memories of individuals so that they may be kept for the future. He spoke of recording them accurately and not misrepresenting the views of the individuals through the editing process or imposing our own biases when selecting material to include in a final product. In Frank's projects the final project is often a compilation of various voices from many hours of recording which tell the story. His narrative or stories are thematically arranged and he writes a linking narration to connect the various voices. In this way he finds that the views of several interviewees can support and add detail to a description of an event or at times there may be differing viewpoints presented. He spoke of the need for the interviewer to stay impartial and ask questions in an open way. Frank said he liked to again read through the OHAA code of ethics to remind him of where his focus should be and the kind of questions he needed to ask at the beginning of each project.

Frank spoke to people who had lived in the villages along the old Illawarra Coast Road. He recorded 'word pictures' describing the

Reports (cont...)

primitive cottages and the lifestyle of the miners and their families who lived there during the 1930's depression and of life in the villages after WWII. Frank explained to his audience how at times he had to ask for more details, even though it might seem a little rude, because for example when one of his interviewees spoke of bare floors, he was in fact describing earth floors and not the absence of floor coverings! Frank played some well chosen excerpts from the recordings he made with the people who lived along the road, fifty, seventy or more years ago. The recordings gave the audience a vivid picture of the lifestyle. For the most part life was fun, especially for the boys, the beach and fishing in the sea, or camping in the bush, playing cricket on the road for hours and not having to move the box that was the wicket. They had good memories, and did not seem to be concerned by the rock falls that came tumbling down the mountain. One excerpt provided an example of the value of the recorded word. A mother was speaking with amusement of making clothes for the children from flour bags, but when Frank asked her if they had shoes, the emotion came through, a sadness still felt that her children had no shoes.

The audience were also informed again through well chosen excerpts of the hard work and conditions down the coal mines for both the men and the horses who hauled the coal trucks. Stories of hard work and the ill health and hardship of the mine workers were very moving to listen to.

The old road was in recent years judged as too hazardous as there had been numerous rock falls as well as the road washing away and subsiding. In 2003 it was closed to traffic, however the local community did not want the road closed and campaigned against this action. After much discussion and negotiations the design for the new bridges was approved. This piece of spectacular roadway was commenced in May 2004 and the roadway was opened on 11 December 2005.

Frank then went on to talk about his project in Lord Howe Island. Frank was commissioned by the Lord Howe Island Board to produce an oral history. The island which is part of NSW was discovered by Europeans in 1788. Sailors from the ship Supply, one of the first fleet ships discovered this tiny island. It is a very beautiful island with two mountains on one end and a lagoon in the centre where the most southerly coral reef in the world is found. Frank and his wife, Josette, spent two and a half weeks on the island and interviewed 33 people. Josette always assists Frank with his projects, but Frank usually conducts the interviews. On this project they both conducted interviews and in the limited time available completed forty hours of recordings.

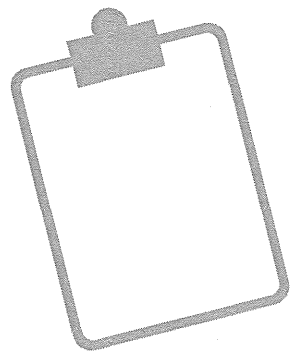
They had identified several major themes; identity – the people identified as Lord Howe Islanders; lifestyle – what is the lifestyle in an isolated place such as Lord Howe; land tenure – a very controversial aspect of their lives; environmental issues – it is a world heritage area; future concern – what is the future for the island, tourism is threatening to spoil a rather relaxed lifestyle. Frank suggested that the lifestyle for the 350 people who live on the island was rather like going back in a time warp, everyone was smiling at you, relaxed and happy. When you walk on the road total strangers pull up and say “would you like a lift?” Doors are not locked, there has been no crime on the island for 35 years and the one policeman has little to do. The island has been very isolated, the telephone only came in 1975, TV in 1987 and the first policeman was appointed in 1986.

During the early years of settlement the island was very isolated as ships called only every two or three months. However when the flying boats commenced service in 1947 this brought the islanders closer to the mainland. The flying boat service lasted until 1974, when an airstrip was built on the island.

For those interested in technical details the interviews were recorded on a laptop and the software that Frank and Josette used was Protools. Frank found having the interviews loaded in the computer right from the start very helpful.

Frank suggested that the interviews would provide the Board with an insight into how the residents of Lord Howe Island view their lifestyle and the future of their idyllic island. For his audience at the seminar he gave us a glimpse into away of life in a more innocent time. A most enjoyable look back, but a very informed seminar with a lot to think about for the future.

Joyce Cribb



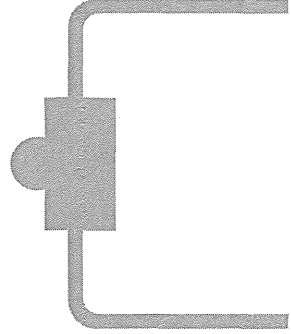
First International Oral History Congress; *Oral History, Living History*, 26 – 28 October 2006, University of Porto, Portugal.

The First International Oral History Congress, organized by the Department of History of the University of Porto (Portugal), took place from the 26th to the 28th October 2006, in Porto, Portugal, with the theme: *Oral History, Living History*. Being the first in Portugal on this field of study, this Congress aimed to bring oral history to the Portuguese public's attention by inviting the leading international and Portuguese oral historians. The goal was to reflect on oral history in a scientific manner, reviewing its past trajectory, drawing upon recent developments, and evaluating its future. Over one hundred people attended and I was lucky to be one of them.

Many of you who attended our Sydney Conference, *Dancing with Memory*, in July last year would have met Angela Campos, an Oral Historian from Portugal who was promoting this Conference. Angela not only co-ordinated the International speakers but convened most sessions and on many occasions translated from Portuguese to English.

Angela and other members of the team ensured all who attended had a great time and learnt not only of Portugal's Oral History achievements but also a lot about the magical city of Porto. I would refer you to the most recent edition of International Oral History Association's Newsletter (January 2007) as it provides a detailed overview of those who presented and a discussion of the sessions. I have done this as many of the sessions were in Portuguese and were not for budget reasons translated into English. For anyone interested I have left a copy of the papers with Rosie Block in NSW State Library.

Needless to say I only attended the sessions in English but did gain lots from the conversations with fellow attendees and just by being amongst so many passionate oral historians. Stand-outs themes for me were the reminders or rather the challenge to embrace technology and that digital technology is the way of the future. Alistair Thomson did this in his session on the four revolutions in the theory and practice of oral history. Robert Perks talked about the resistance in some quarters to digital but referred to the fact that the British Library are now archiving websites because of the technology that allows so



many to access and communicate via this medium especially when compared with the numbers who read books. Not that anyone concluded the death of the book was coming.

I learned in conversation with Sian Edwards (University of Brighton, UK) about creative alliances between research, oral history, technology and education. Sian lead a team who recorded and transcribed in depth interviews with 30 people with hemophilia who were infected with HIV in the early 1980s as a result of treatment contamination. The project transcripts can be accessed in full via the British Library, extracts via a website. The project became the subject of a radio program and has now become a teaching tool in the Institute for Nursing. Hearing Federico Lorenz from Argentina speak jolted me out of my western privileged comfort cardigan approach to oral history. He questioned the safety of archiving story in government run libraries or institutions let alone via websites. How safe for the person is the storage of story when not living in an

established democracy? Alessandro Portelli who spoke essentially about the discomfort of truth when unpacking memory and meaning in communities. The richness of the memory layers and the investments that people have in story and what we retell was very though provoking.

Having attended the Sydney Conferences and then Portugal has meant that I have a longer book reading wish list than ever. I came away filled with wanting to give up my day job to live breathe and practice oral history!

Frances Rush

(Members Note: IOHA website www.ioha.fgv.br for further international news etc. Thank you to Frances, NSW committee member, for sharing with us. ED)



Oral History Project: A Novice's Observations – *by Gail Foran*

Our Arts Group was excited to be accepted for an Exhibition in August 2006 at the Hazelhurst Regional Gallery & Arts Centre, a local Gallery in the Sutherland Shire of Sydney. The Anything Goes Contemporary Arts Group is based in Como West (south of Sydney) and is a small group of 8, consisting of painters, a sculptor, a photographer, a jeweler and myself (non artist).

After having studied Oral History externally with Janice Wilton through the University of New England in 2004, it was decided that I would interview long time residents of Como and correlate their stories with the art of the other members of the Group. Having only completed an interview for an assignment in Oral History, this was my first oral history project.

There were two types of interview conducted. I had specific topics that the members were working on, therefore some of the stories were collected from various venues with a roving microphone and people were asked to tell me their stories on those topics. Other interviewees very graciously invited me into their homes to record their stories in the more formal manner for usually one hour interviews but in some cases it was two hours as some had a lot to say (luckily I had extra tapes with me). For any subsequent visits, these lovely people welcomed me like an old

friend. Everyone had a story to tell. People, whom I did not know, opened up to me and enthralled me with their reminiscences.

Over a twelve month period, twenty people were interviewed and five were from three generations of the one family. Two generations had lived in the area for nearly 50 years or over and so I thought it appropriate to garner the thoughts of the third generation aged 8 and 11 (even though I discovered that children can be hard to interview). But I did get a delightful response from one of them as to what they thought of where they live – 'Como is the best town in Australia!'

One 87 year old gentleman was an ex oyster farmer, whose father first came to the Sutherland Shire in 1895, and told me the history of oyster farming since the 1840s. It was also a delight to find he had ties with Como. He had taken the time to write down notes to help him relate his story. He told me at the end of the interview that he had enjoyed reminiscing. On the other hand, one woman who was a bit hesitant about being interviewed, told me after the interview that, if I had asked her more questions, she would have told me more. It is all a learning curve.



I was amazed at people's reactions to their own stories. One man, upon reading his story of his house burning down in a bushfire, looked at me in bewilderment and said "I've just read my story – it was pretty dramatic wasn't it!" I got a shock, I said "but it was your story, you told it to me". I asked him why he had got such a shock, and he told me he hadn't realised how dramatic it was when he was telling me – it was only when he read it he realized the drama. Another man read his story and said "I wish I could write like that!" I told him they were his words – the story he had told me practically word for word!

Amongst some of the devastating stories I heard of homes being destroyed in the bushfire that ravaged Como West in 1994, I discovered an elderly couple who said they had had a lovely time the night they were evacuated and then chuckled. Their son had taken a bottle of dry sherry, a bottle of brandy, two glasses and two seats for them to the oval where the evacuees were settled. They knew most of the people there and spent a pleasant evening even though they did not know if their house would still be standing when they returned.

There were also some interesting sidelines to the interviews. The interviewees were chosen at random but I discovered that two people, who lived a few streets apart

but did not know each other before the interviews, were related to the same First Fleet convict. It was revealed to me that two of the interviewed families were interrelated as the daughter of one family had married the son of another. Also I found that two ladies, whom I interviewed individually, were life long friends. Two of my interviewees were boxers and have since been introduced to each other.

The Exhibition went very well with the oral history used as storyboards hung beside the members' works of art plus a book of bushfire stories on a stand. Numerous favourable comments were received about the stories and the manner in which they appeared. Most people took the time to read the 22 storyboards and to flip through the book of 8 stories.

This was my first foray into an oral history project and it was a fascinating experience. I did not realise I would get so involved in it. I thought I would just gather a few good stories to complement the artwork. I also did not realise that Oral History is an artwork in itself.

I have since passed the taped interviews to an historian who is writing the history of Como and I hope she will discover a lot from the stories. Our group is also hoping to combine the stories and art into a book. For my part I learnt more about Oral History, the locale in which I live and the people who make up the community.

Long live Oral History!



Oral History Project: A Novice's Observations – *by Gail Foran*

Our Arts Group was excited to be accepted for an Exhibition in August 2006 at the Hazelhurst Regional Gallery & Arts Centre, a local Gallery in the Sutherland Shire of Sydney. The Anything Goes Contemporary Arts Group is based in Como West (south of Sydney) and is a small group of 8, consisting of painters, a sculptor, a photographer, a jeweler and myself (non artist).

After having studied Oral History externally with Janice Wilton through the University of New England in 2004, it was decided that I would interview long time residents of Como and correlate their stories with the art of the other members of the Group. Having only completed an interview for an assignment in Oral History, this was my first oral history project.

There were two types of interview conducted. I had specific topics that the members were working on, therefore some of the stories were collected from various venues with a roving microphone and people were asked to tell me their stories on those topics. Other interviewees very graciously invited me into their homes to record their stories in the more formal manner for usually one hour interviews but in some cases it was two hours as some had a lot to say (luckily I had extra tapes with me). For any subsequent visits, these lovely people welcomed me like an old

friend. Everyone had a story to tell. People, whom I did not know, opened up to me and enthralled me with their reminiscences.

Over a twelve month period, twenty people were interviewed and five were from three generations of the one family. Two generations had lived in the area for nearly 50 years or over and so I thought it appropriate to garner the thoughts of the third generation aged 8 and 11 (even though I discovered that children can be hard to interview). But I did get a delightful response from one of them as to what they thought of where they live – 'Como is the best town in Australia!'

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Long live Oral History!

Getting stories out there: Our Place – by Sue Rosen, Rosemary Kerr and Emma Dortins

In the early 1990s Dr Sue Rosen interviewed 70 people about their lives as residents of the inner city, as part of the South Sydney Social History Project. Parts of some of these stories were published in Sue's 2000 book, *We Never Had a Hotbed of Crime*, which is very popular with the participants themselves, as well as with residents and former residents of the area. But because *Hotbed* is a thematic book attempting to cover the major events and themes of the twentieth century, only short extracts from each interview could be included. We've always wanted to get the rest of the stories published, in their entirety, as stories about the people themselves and the places that formed such an important part of their life and local identity.

After months of trekking from pillar to post trying to find funding to cover the immense costs to us of publishing a book we turned around one day and asked 'why a book?' Who is the potential audience? And how can it be got to them?

These questions set us to rethink the entire project. We realised that a local readership was most important to us and to the interviewees with whom we have been able to maintain contact. We want our

interview with Bill Schwebel of John Street Erskineville to be read first and foremost in Erskineville: and, for this to happen we would need less conventional ways of distributing our publication and a less conventional format.

This is what we've come up with: inspired by the cheap and accessible comic books of our not so distant youth, we plan to publish these great stories as a serial, with one coming out each month. Ideally, they will be in colour and illustrated and designed by upcoming local artists. They'll be available at local pubs, cafes and newsagencies for under \$5 each. What better way to reach a local readership!

The seventy stories cover:

Erskineville – Alexandria;
Redfern, Waterloo and Chippendale;
Newtown – Darlington;
Darlinghurst – Surry Hills;
Woolloomooloo; and
Kings Cross – Potts Point.

We plan to start with the *Stories of Erskineville and Alexandria* series, as a pilot project.

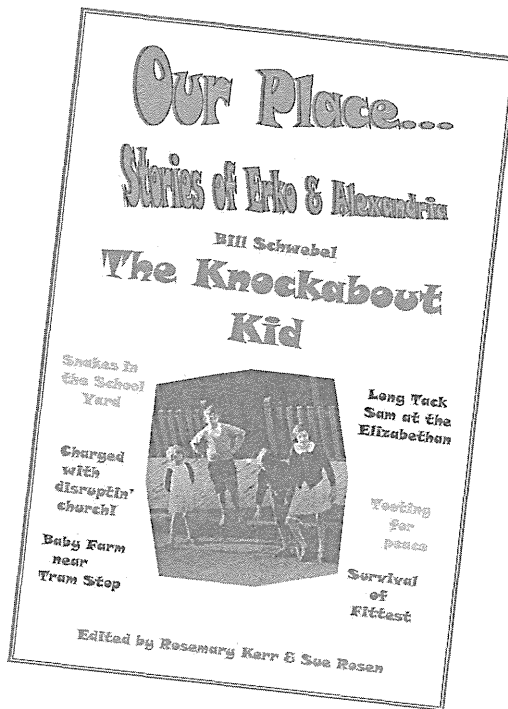
We're currently carrying out market research focussed on the Erskineville area, and we've had a very encouraging response from local business and the community.

On 11th February Sue, Rosemary and Emma attended the seventh Back to Erskineville reunion, and our idea was greeted with great enthusiasm. We're also forming liaisons with local schools. We're also in the process of getting quotes for design and printing. The venture will be non-profit, but we need to cover costs – we need help to make it viable.

We're seeking support from local businesses willing to sponsor the series and to sell copies of each issue; local artists to contribute illustrations; and readers to subscribe. Please contact us if you can help.

Come to our website: www.haah.com.au to see an extract and concept design from the Our Place *Stories of Erko and Alexandria* series: 'Bill Schwebel: The Knockabout Kid', and let us know what you think by filling in our survey form.

The HAAH Team:
Sue Rosen, Rosemary Kerr
and Emma Dortins



1,001 Life Story Questions; “Memory Man’s 1,001 Life Story Questions” by Bob Mitchell, 2006 **Reviewed by Diana Ritch**

There is a series of publications called “1,001 Things to Do Before You Die”. Perhaps Bob Mitchell’s book “1,001 Life Story Questions” should be called “1,001 Life Story Questions to Ask Before They Die”. That’s the thing about oral history; unlike other histories it has to be done when the person is alive, able to answer the questions and tell the tales. How often have I heard the lament “I wish I’d interviewed him but he died before I could work out what to ask him.”

Well worry no more, you now have 1,001 questions to choose from, covering the full range of life from “What do you know of your maternal ancestors?” to “How would you like to be remembered?” Bob Mitchell, *The Memory Man*, has written a book that suggests questions you never thought of asking, explores areas you may not remember and elicits responses that could open a can of worms.

Bob’s decision to take up oral history came about when his father was diagnosed with a terminal illness. As he says, “It suddenly dawned on me how little I knew about Dad’s life...So armed with what I thought ...were the only 50 questions I would need... I found out more about my father than I

had known during the previous 48 years. However my 50 questions proved to be totally inadequate!”

Now hundreds of hours of interviewing later Bob has put together the definitive book of questions. It is set out chronologically under the following headings:

- Family History
- Childhood
- Adolescence / Young Adulthood
- Depression Days
- WW II Years
- Marriage and family
- Retirement
- Life Observations
- Personal Reflections on Life

The questions are open-ended and encourage discussion and as Bob says “are more likely to evoke responses where emotions, reason and descriptions are forthcoming rather than just facts and figures”. While there are the usual questions concerning family, schooling and jobs there are many other unusual ones that take the interview off into different fields asking about family heirlooms, heating the bath water, the weather on their wedding day or their favourite flavoured milk.



This book is not intended to be a manual on how to conduct an oral history interview. It is not about interviewing techniques, equipment or research (*see note*). Bob, with years of experience, now conducts seminars on oral history, and would be the first to agree that it takes more than a list of questions to become an oral historian. His book doesn't claim to make you an instant expert – interest, empathy, research, listening, and practice are all essential. It is a list of in depth questions to elicit responses, encourage discussions and tease out stories. And in-depth it is, with wonderful, though sometimes cheeky, questions. Take Q297 “What qualities did you seek in a partner?” which is followed by: “How close to getting the perfect partner did you come?” Later the delicate topic of family planning is handled by asking “How difficult was it to plan your family?” That leaves the interviewee able to close the topic with, “We had no trouble” or to lead into a long, perhaps emotional discussion of problems with conception and miscarriages. Truly a wonderful question.

While concentrating on open-ended questions it is also necessary to ask a few closed questions to establish the identity of the interviewee and to clarify other facts such as dates, locations and names. In this regard I believe that the first questions should be “What is your full name?”, “When were you born?” and “Where were you born?” These should be 3 separate questions as in the beginning the interviewee is often nervous and will only answer the last one. In this book

these questions are rolled into one and are not asked until Q24. The first question is “What do you know about your maternal ancestors?” This is relevant once you have the other essential information. I understand that Family History comes before Childhood but it is more important to identify the person who is the subject of the interview before launching into the interview.

Another example of questions that are out of sequence is Q 358 “How did you get your first job?” a good question but in the wrong place. It is asked after 2 pages of questions about work and work place relations, when it should have been the first. This small detail should not detract from the other questions which cover the whole gamut of work experiences: workers' health, pay, sporting and social activities, promotions, arguments, rivalry, unions, tea breaks, overtime, celebrations, dress code etc. It really is a thought provoking list. However as most of these questions are aimed at the employee, changes would be needed if you were interviewing an employer.

Throughout the book there are questions that cover similar ground, for example Q142 “What are your memories of spiders, snakes and wild animals?” and Q166 “What encounters did you have with wildlife such as foxes, rabbits, mice, rats and lizards?” These 2 could have been incorporated into

Book Review (cont...)

a single question. The same applies to the 6 questions about games that were played during childhood that are only differentiated by the names of the games. But the opposite could be said about religion where the one question number 56 "What part did religion play at home?" is followed by 9 more that are scattered throughout the book. An important subject like religion should be dealt with in depth, like the 15 questions on dances and dancing – perhaps a few too many, even though they could evoke some very interesting replies. Maybe it says something about Bob; he probably had some really memorable times on the dance floor and not too many in church.

There are many questions I hadn't thought to ask. Q316, about getting a driver's license, brought back some amusing memories for me, and I'm sure that Q572 "What do you recall of your first kiss?", would have some very interesting answers.

Missing from the list are prompt questions such as "What did you think about that?", "How did you feel about that?", "Could you give me some more details?", "What happened next?". These are often the best way to tease out an answer without intruding.

Bob Mitchell's questions show a great understanding of the human condition. He asks about courtship, marriage, relationships – "What adjustments to your

life did you need to make now that you were living together as a married couple?" – having children – "How did parenthood change your appreciation of your own parents?" and neighbours – "What disputes or conflicts with neighbours can you recall?". He has questions about children leaving home – "How pleased were you with the manner in which your children commenced separate lives of their own?", and later when they married and had children themselves – "Describe your reaction at hearing that your first grandchild had been born." Retirement and all its ramifications, both positive and negative, is subject to the same intense questioning as his other topics.

The section on Life Observations starts with the question "Over your lifetime you have seen a great deal of change in all areas of everyday life. What aspect of everyday life has changed the most and why?" This is followed by 6 pages of questions about areas where changes have happened eg. Race Relations and Racial Tolerance, Transport Motoring and Travel, Climate and Weather Patterns, the Family Unit, etc. Before starting an interview pick a few that would be significant to your interviewee making sure that you ask specific questions. I wish I'd read this section when I started interviewing 25 years ago. I foolishly asked a 107 year old woman about the many changes she had seen in her life "from horse and cart to the Space Shuttle". She looked blankly at me until the nurse prompted her by saying "Charles Kingsford-Smith dear". Once she

had been given a specific topic there was no stopping her. (Smithy had been a friend of hers!)

The last chapter is called Personal Reflections on Life. In some cases Bob's opinion seems to have influenced his line of questioning or perhaps, through experience, he has found that older people have a rather negative impression of the younger generation with their lack of manners, mobile phones, large mortgages, working parents, plastic credit cards etc. However I found the question on religion to be particularly interesting – "How have your religious beliefs changed over the years, if at all?"

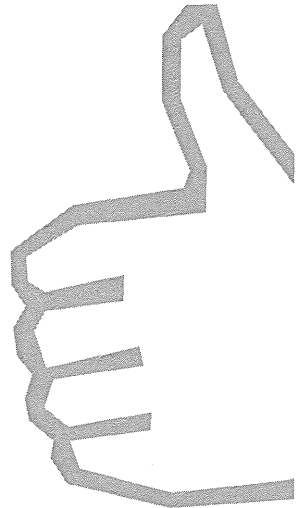
Keeping in mind that these life stories are really for the next generation, the last 2 questions are for them. "How important to you is your family?" and "How would you like to be remembered?" These are good concluding questions and the answers can be a gift to the listeners. With Bob's help they will certainly appreciate this interview and will be very grateful for all the information that his 1,001 questions have produced.

This book is a very handy, compact, easily accessible guide to get you thinking and start you questioning. No-one recommends blindly following a list of questions. Your interviewee is sure to go off on a tangent and you have to follow. The hardest part

would be choosing the questions you want to ask from the 1,001. Do your research and incorporate the relevant ones into your notes and have this list with you when you do your interview. You might not need it, but it will be there just in case. If you think it would help your interviewee, you could suggest that they too read Bob's book to stimulate their memory. It is full of ideas and different approaches and I look forward to using them in my next life story interview.

Note: Beth M. Robertson's "Oral History Handbook", now in its 5th edition, covers all aspects of conducting an interview with chapters on recording equipment, interviewing technique etc.

Reviewed by Diana Ritch



Call for papers

15th International Oral History Conference *Oral History – A Dialogue with our Times* September 23 – 26, 2008, Guadalajara, Mexico

www.congresoiohazoo8.cucsh.udg.mx

The International Oral History Association in collaboration with the University of Guadalajara and the Mexican Oral History Association (AMHO) invite paper proposals from around the world for the 15th International Oral History Conference in Guadalajara, Mexico.

Proposals may be for a conference paper, a thematic panel, a special interest group session or a workshop session. Only those proposals clearly focused on oral history will be given consideration. Proposals will be evaluated according to their oral history focus, methodological and theoretical significance and relevance to the conference theme and sub-themes.

Sub Themes

- **Contributions of Oral History to the understanding of the 20th Century**
- **Time in Memory:** Lived experience; what is remembered and what is forgotten
- **Spaces of Memory:** Community, the local, the global and everyday life
- **Ecology and Disasters:** Environmental themes, natural heritage, cultural resources
- **Memory and Politics:** Experiences of political participation; NGOs, political groups, political agency and individuals

- **Family and Generations**
- **Migrations:** Diásporas, international and local migratory movements, networks, borderlands, religious migration, the human capital of immigrants
- **Sharing and Transmitting Faith:** Religious traditions
- **Oral Tradition**
- **Theory and Method in Oral History**
- **Memories of Violence and War:** Justice, trauma and memory, survivors, civil rights and human rights
- **Memories of the Body:** Dance, tattoos, dramatizations and the emotions
- **Work:** Experiences, conceptions and modalities of work.
- **Health:** Illnesses, healing, myths, the handicapped, elderly and retired people
- **Gender**
- **The Teaching of Oral History:** Experiences in formal and informal education
- **Archiving Memory:** The interview as a source for social research, multiple readings of interviews, publication and dissemination of oral history, audio archives, audiovisual media, access and questioning



- Museums and Oral History
- Oral History and the Visual Image
- Legal and Ethical Issues in Oral History

MASTER CLASSES: Several Master Classes and workshops on Oral History will be offered before the Conference by internationally renowned scholars and specialists in Oral History.

SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS: Continuing the precedent set in Sydney, Special Interest Groups sessions will be scheduled so that participants can get to know one another, establish contacts and exchange resources and ideas.

DEADLINE FOR PROPOSALS: JULY 15, 2007

Proposal Specifications

Please submit a 300-word maximum proposal summarizing your presentation, via the Conference Website:

www.congresoioha2008.cucsh.udg.mx

You will also be requested to supply the following information:

- Name (last name in CAPITALS)
- Institutional or Academic Affiliation
- Postal Address
- Email Address
- Telephone and Fax numbers
- Relevant Sub-theme/s
- Indicate if the proposal is an individual paper, a thematic panel or a workshop
- Suggestions for Special Interest Groups Sessions.

Only those proposals clearly focused on oral history will be given consideration. Proposals will be evaluated according to their oral history focus, methodological and theoretical significance and relevance to the conference theme and sub-themes. The Organizing Committee will notify acceptance or rejection of proposals by October 15, 2007.

Proposals must be written in English or Spanish. If your proposal is accepted, you will be required to send the final paper in English or Spanish, attaching an abstract summary *translated professionally* into the second language.

Insofar as possible, papers and presentations should allow the audience to hear the voices of the interviewed narrators.

Individual Papers: Will be assigned by the Organizing Committee to international panels or workshops with other papers with similar theme or focus.

Thematic Panels: Proposals for thematic panels must have no more than four presenters, preferably from different countries.

Workshops: Workshop proposals must identify the theme or focus of the presentation and should propose a structure and a workshop chair.

Special Interest Groups: Suggestions and proposals for sessions are accepted.

Call for Papers (cont...)

Final papers and abstracts must be received on or before February 28, 2008, for inclusion in the Book of Abstracts and the CD of the proceedings of the Conference.

Travel Scholarships

The International Oral History Association (IOHA) has a *small* Travel Scholarship Fund aimed at providing *partial* financial support for travel to and/or accommodations at the Conference, particularly for those participants from developing countries. Related information and the application form are available on the IOHA Website (<http://www.ioha.fgv.br>). To be eligible for a travel scholarship, candidates must first have their paper proposals *accepted*. To receive a scholarship, finalists must submit their final paper by the published deadline.

Contacts

If you have questions or would like advice from an IOHA Council member about a conference proposal, you may contact your regional representative as follows:

Asia – Tomoyo Nakao
(tomoyopow@aol.com)

Africa – Sean Field
(sean@humanities.uct.ac.za)

Europe – Rob Perks (rob.perks@bl.uk)

Mexico – Ana Maria de la O Castellanos
(anadelao@cencar.udg.mx)

North America – Alexander Freund
(a.freund@uwinnipeg.ca)

South America – Marilda Menezes
(marildamenezes@uol.com.br)

Oceania – Megan Hutching (megan.hutching@hotmail.com)

To contact the Conference organizers in Guadalajara, please email or write to:

Maestra Ana María de la O Castellanos
Email: iohacongress@csh.udg.mx
Departamento de Historia
Centro Universitario de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades
Guanajuato # 1045
Colonia Alcalde Barranquitas
Guadalajara, Jalisco, México. C.P. 44260
Phone Number/FAX (52) 33 38 19 33 79/74

Diary of Events



OHAA Biennial National Conference *Old Stories, New Ways*

The Oral History Association of Australia – Queensland Inc will hold the biennial national conference in Brisbane from 27 to 30 September 2007.

– This will be held in a delightful riverside setting 15 minutes from the CBD and will bring together oral historians from around the country and overseas. The theme of the conference is: *Old Stories New Ways*. Sub themes include:

- interpreting story;
- working with community;
- understanding memory;
- oral history and independent practitioners; and
- addressing changing technologies

There will be social gatherings, cultural events and performances as well as papers, panels, workshops and a welcome breakfast for first time attendees.

Join us!

For further details contact Suzanne Mulligan, mulligan@gil.com.au or see www.ohaa.net.au

Committee Meeting Dates for 2007

Members are encouraged and welcome to attend meetings held at the State Library at 5.30pm. Please meet at the Mitchell Wing vestibule at 5.25pm. (Staff will direct you if you miss the group). *Do note the AGM – very welcome.*

April 17

June 19

August 21 and AGM

October 16

November 20

Annual General Meeting

**To be held in the Sir William Dixson Meeting Room, Mitchell Library, the State Library of New South Wales
On Tuesday 21 August 2007 at 5.30pm**

Agenda

Present:

Apologies:

Confirmation of minutes of AGM held at State Library of New South Wales on Tuesday 8 August 2006

President's Report

Treasurer's Report

Election of Executive and Branch Committee members

Motion for Department of Fair Trading
General Business

Seminar Dates for 2007

5 May

3 November

Noticeboard



Website Oral History Association of Australia <www.ohaa.net.au>.

Do bookmark and visit this site from time to time to keep up to date with what is happening around Australia and especially for details and links to the International Conference.

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