On Tape

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Seasons Greetings Fellow Members!

The last few months have been very busy for our committee, particularly for Secretary, Lesley Jenkins, as she organised our State Conference held at the State Library on 16-17 November 2002. Congratulations to Lesley on a very successful conference!

More than 50 people attended our conference which was formally opened by State Librarian Lea Giles-Peters who introduced our keynote speaker, Robin Hughes. Robin gave a fascinating and informative presentation. She was a very approachable and easy-going person who was happy to field questions and share her experiences throughout the weekend. All who attended her presentation and workshop greatly benefited from the obvious passion she has for her craft.

Other speakers included Denis Drouyn who presented a paper on an innovative approach to presenting an oral history project in DVD format. Elisabeth Gondwe and Tracy Ryan gave a delightful presentation on their North Stradbroke Island Oral History Project which involves the whole community. Dr Greg Mallory discussed his views on Brisbane rugby league's decline mirrored by the decline in local community spirit. Norman Sheridan gave a presentation on Institution of Engineers' project. Kay Cohen asked whether there was a difference between interviewing powerful people and "ordinary" people. Leith Barter presented a very interesting paper/video on his ongoing Pine Rivers project where an enlightened Council has recognised the value of oral history in documenting the history of that area. Margaret Klaassen entertained us with a challenge to improve our voice quality to make our interviewing more effective.

This newsletter contains most of the papers presented at the conference or summaries of my own notes as a record of what was an outstandingly interesting and successful conference. We came away inspired to look for new opportunities to put our newfound knowledge into practice.

That's all for now. Very best wishes for a Merry Christmas and a Happy 2003 filled with lots of oral history interviews.

Suzanne Mulligan
Editor

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DYNAMICS OF INTERVIEW

Speaker – Robin Hughes

Robin Hughes is a producer, writer and television presenter who has won many awards. She was Head of Film Australia from 1985-1989 and in 1993 became an Officer of the Order of Australia. She has been a producer and interviewer for the SBS documentary series "Australian Biography" since it began in 1991. She saw there was a need for a visual recording of the lives of our "major national treasures" when she was head of Film Australia and novelist, Christina Stead died. She discovered that no one had done a screen interview with her.

A few years later, Robin was asked to do the interviews for the "Australian Biography" series. These were to be very different to the usual celebrity interview. The person being interviewed was the main focus with the primary purpose being archival. The complete interview extends over three days where the interviewee is given the opportunity to reflect on their life in detail.

"We wanted a collection of stories that cover the 20th century, the historical and social life of the century to give us a collective impression of what the century was about."

Over the three days – the first day found the interviewee telling the "tried and true stories." On the second day there was a different level after the interviewee has thought overnight and remembered new things. Robin also had time to reflect and think about questions for the second day. On the third day, a deep level of emotion came to the surface - "I usually go back and pick up on what I see as patterns or links."

The half-hour version presented on television is edited from about 10-12 hours which is, of course, very difficult. The full interview is archived. Robin does not appear on screen so that the focus remains on the interviewee. Photos and film are used to cover cuts in the interview. Each series of seven people are selected from all over Australia and includes one indigenous person. They have wide political and social backgrounds that include ordinary people as well as the "great and famous." All interviewees are over 65 (indigenous younger because of life expectancy).

The first series has gone "one line" with the National Library. There is also a book of the series *Australian Lives* published by Harper Collins.

Robin spends a lot of time on research where she accesses written, audio and film material on the interviewee and the area in which they were involved. She advised that when researching a person who is not well known, you should read about the circumstances that attracted you to interview them.

"I am the navigator and it is important not to forget areas of the map. I prepare a mental map so I can take them through it. The interview is about the whole way in which you relate to the person. I really try through the reading and the thinking to get as much inside their head as I can, at the same time being objective."

"I have never been involved in a project that gave me so much pleasure and satisfaction, contributing to something that outlasts you."

Presentation summarised by Suzanne Mulligan.

QUEENSLAND VOICES

Speaker – Niles Elvery

Niles Elvery is the Acting Curator of the Original Materials Unit at the John Oxley Library. The Oral History section sits within the Original Materials Unit along with Photographics and Archives.

Niles started at the John Oxley Library in the 1980s and at that time did not know anything about oral history. He learned from other collections around Australia – Mitchell Library (NSW), Mortlock Library (SA) and J.S. Battye Library (WA), the oldest. The John Oxley Library collection was established in 1992. Niles has retained responsibility for the collection and is available to provide advice on oral history. The collection has not developed as well as it has with other libraries but that will change when the new library is built in 2005 and a dedicated Oral History officer position is established. The new area will have facilities for the storage of collections in an appropriate atmospheric environment.

There are 122 collections with over 900 tapes with the projects including university interviews and community groups. There is a recent acquisition from Family Planning Qld with nine recordings. The web site has more details:

http://www.slq.qld.gov.au/jol/collections/oralhistory.htm

Donated tapes are copied at real time with bulk of interviews being on 60-minute cassette tapes. Everyone is encouraged to donate collections to the John Oxley Library.

Presentation summarised by Suzanne Mulligan.

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FEDERATION MUSTER

Speaker – Denis Drouyn

Celebrating Stories of Remote Learning
Centenary of Federation Project by Nudgee College Old Boys' Association.

Introduction - The Program says we are going to have a Case Study featuring rural and remote communities and how the collected oral histories were edited and converted to DVD. However I would like to comment on the Business of Multimedia - its impact on Project Management, Planning, Organising, Understanding and Communicating Context, Building Trust and Delivering Good Community Outcomes.

The Interactive DVD takes about 70 minutes from beginning to end so we will have to be selective and some of you may be wondering can I really use this technology anyway ... what to do?

Edwin Land, the inventor of the Polaroid Camera once said ...

"My view of business and the ordinary business world's view of business are quite antithetical ... (My essential concept is) that the role of industry is to sense a deep human need and then bring science and technology to bear on filling that need".

Land's view in mind, could we take a "back to front" approach? Let's look at OUTCOME first. I suggest we explore the DVD for about 12 minutes, then throw the program open to your questions and hopefully vigorous discussion as to how we might use the new technology to identify and fill "deep human needs".

Raison d'être - A little over a century ago five Colonies agreed by referendum to join together to form the Commonwealth of Australia. In Alfred Deakin's words *a Nation for a Continent a Continent for a Nation.* So, as you probably noticed, last year 2001 marked the Centenary of Federation.

In 1999, calls for Expressions of Interest were advertised by Commonwealth and State Governments for community organisations to undertake suitable projects. Funding was offered to those meeting prescribed criteria.

Nudgee College was established by the Irish Christian Brothers in 1891 to provide Secondary Education for country boys. The need was great, enrolments grew rapidly and by 1901 founder Br Treacy claimed Nudgee was the largest boarding school of its kind in Australia. The College has an active past students' organisation, the Nudgee College Old Boys Association Inc. Having supportive research data, I was able to persuade the Association we could meet the criteria and to sponsor an application.

Project Description - A community based history muster to collect, conserve and celebrate stories of remote learning. Supervised students will interact with regional communities to develop skills and technological resources for the collection of oral history. The collection will be stored and published in digital format and celebrated in storytelling, festivals and displays.

Confident Launch - Our proposal had to with many others. Somewhat to our surprise it received approval and on 26 June 2000 the Project was launched in front of 1500 students and staff by Author James Moloney. A full time co-ordinator was appointed who organised Community Involvement Workshops. The OHAA book *Talking Together* was used as a main reference. In addition we agreed to fund a CREATIVE WRITING WEEK for young people in Charleville and Cunnamulla. This was run by Jill Morris and produced excellent writing published under the title "Stories of remote learning".

Diversion - Is the ladder up against the right wall?

In December our Management Committee reviewed progress, compared achievement to criteria and goals. It was decided to re-direct effort towards collecting Oral History. Two Sony mini-disc digital recorders were purchased and a Canon digital camera.

Cradles of Learning - The Nudgee College Old Boys' Association has a database of over 10,000 of past students and where they came from. Looking at a map while comparing a century of data it was obvious, specific towns and regions west of the Dividing Range and in the Far North had sent hundreds of lads to boarding school at Nudgee. In many instances, three or four generations from the same family.

We called these regions our CRADLES OF LEARNING and prioritised resources accordingly.

South West Queensland - One such "Cradle of Learning" was the SouthWest. In April 2001, a project team travelled there by road collecting Oral History and raising awareness. Six towns were visited, Mitchell, Augathella, Charleville, Cunnamulla, St George and Dalby where we set up a tent at the annual race day,. Interestingly our route criss-crossed the Major Mitchell Heritage Trail, a primary tourism scheme supported by Centenary of Federation, a fact of some importance later on. The distance travelled on this trip was 2000 kms. 10 hours of useable interviews were collected.

Central Queensland - A similar team recorded interviews on a circuit which again touched upon the Major Mitchell Trail, this time in the Central West. Sue Pechey ran two impressively attended Workshops for us in Springsure and Rolleston. In many respects these were the most practical and productive activities and the most appreciated by the local community. Other mid-west inland towns visited were Emerald, Alpha, Barcaldine, Longreach and Blackall.

North Queensland - At this point, financial considerations and an expiring timeline persuaded my Management Committee to decide against a North Queensland tour. However one of our team recorded Sir Joseph McAvoy, a former leader of the Sugar Industry then in his 90th year (since deceased). I managed to interview former Rugby State and International representative Dallas O'Neil who originally hailed from Mackay, so the voice of the Far North could be said to be represented.

DVD Production - Armed with thirty hours of recorded interviews and lots of photographs, I approached several Multi-media firms for production concepts and quotes. The most attractive response came from Big Bridge Productions who suggested a DVD/CD format with a computer screensaver featuring the name of the Regional Library. Distribution would be through participating Libraries. Big Bridge promised to deliver 10 disks in six weeks within a fixed budget. We accepted.

Giving the benefits back - One DVD was completed in time to premiere at the Discovering Democracy Educational Summit in Longreach on 15 September. A week later it was presented in the Blackall Community Centre to an audience of over 200 in conjunction with the Major Mitchell Trail Celebration.

Nudgee Presentation - Fast forward from Blackall - on 22 September "we played it again Sam" at Nudgee, in Ryan Hall (appropriately built in the Federation period from 1901-4) The audience was a

select group mainly project workers who were thanked for their efforts by Mr Neil Roberts, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Employment, Youth and Training.

Exhibition - John Oxley Library - Due to the kind support of JOL and in particular Mr Niles Elvery, a display of photographs and oral history text described as "innovative" was exhibited in the entrance foyer of the Library. The Exhibition was opened on 26th October by Mr Bob Rasmussen, Principal of the Brisbane School of Distance Education. BSDE were pleased to participate in the event and contributed to the display. The Exhibition continued until the end of December when the project concluded.

Summary - Through the Centenary of Federation we have tried to build a bridge to a perhaps very different future in Distance Education. The outcome I hope adds to our understanding of the contribution made by this unique form of learning to the culture of our Country.

The DVDs are available for sale through the State Library or Archives of Old Boys Association of Nudgee College. See web site at:

http://www.nudgee.com/fedmuster/

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Lea Giles-Peters opens Conference
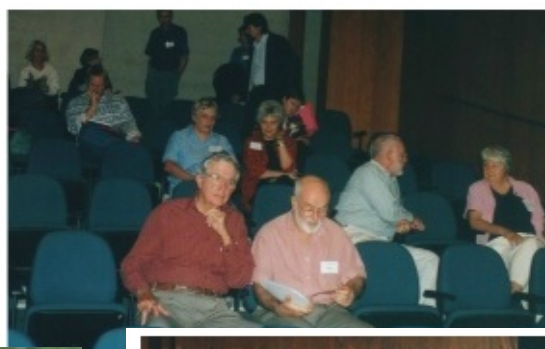
Robin Hughes

Sue Pechey

Lesley and Sue greet attendees

Margaret Klaassen

NORTH STRADBROKE ISLAND ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Speakers – Tracy Ryan and Elisabeth Gondwe

Redlands Shire Council has been collecting oral histories since 1992. They have 120 in the collection – general life story histories, outcome "Passing of the Time" book. Members of the communities are getting elderly.

Project issues:

- ongoing intrusion into indigenous community on the island – people constantly coming to study community
- big pressure – working for council "big brother"
- native title claim – concerns about what the project was really looking at.

Resolution:

- outsource – Elisabeth Gondwe and the Quandamooka Land Council – separates Redlands Shire Council from the work
- tailored copyright forms. Done in negotiation with the community. Had to separate copyright, usage and sensitive material. Conditions of Use form. Permission for Use form.

The community of Stradbroke Island comprises towns of Dunwich, Amity Point and Point Lookout. Permanent population of 2,200 people. Most families 5-6 generations (non-indigenous) plus aborigines. Each township is separate and unique. Letters were sent to island organisations asking for lists of interviewees and people to be trained as interviewers. Outcome was identical lists – list prioritised to short list of 40 interviewees – 50/50 indigenous/non-indigenous.

Interview team – 24 school children – Year 8. Dunwich Secondary students – nine interviewees.

Method – Quandamooka running project as collaboration, community exercise. Choices were given to interviewers and interviewees. People involved have input and ownership of intellectual property.

Major concern – what would happen to the interviews? Interview material retained on the island in three different repositories – elders and council, museum, Quandamooka Lands Council. Interviewees nominated where their interviews would go. Regular meetings to share experiences and raise issues.

Interview principles:

- narrow focus – life stories. Concentrate on one aspect that is special about that person's life e.g. raising children.

- preliminary interviews essential – part of the collaborative aspect of the project. Planning the interview, meeting interviewees.
- oral rather than written communication, research. Preliminary interview to explain the project's aims, interviewees involved and long and short-term use of interview explained. Help them understand copyright resides with the interviewee. Access is a separate thing – concern about exploitation.

- reflective practice – most of the interviewers had no previous experience. Interview summary sheet to record information about the recording session to provide context for future researchers.

Transcription – interviewers are encouraged to transcribe their own interviews. By transcribing the interview, the interview becomes a learning process to reflect on their interview. Project for CEDP Commonwealth Employment Development Program (Aboriginal equivalent of "work for the dole").

Transcribing needs to be done by the island residents because of colloquialisms of the island. Must be familiar with the language and terminology.

- proof reading – leave to the interviewees and interviewers – might listen to the tape together. Sometimes required transcriptions to be read out loud.
- culturally sensitive material passed by elders.

Reflective practice is a training tool for future research.

Year 8 students – two series of workshops at the museums. Students sent in pairs. Students had good rapport with their interviewee. After interview, students write letter to the interviewee to thank them which is part of the reflection.

School child involvement – logistics – parental permission required. There were a variety of interview locations. This is a work in progress.

Project issues:

- effective communication – verbal communication. Community communicates verbally. Had to have project verbally and individually explained to them. Requires establishing a personal relationship.
- timeframe – this is a work in progress – growing and evolving – Flexible responses are required. Prescriptive frameworks do not work. Need to re-recruit interviewers for interviewees.
- Community events and political climate. Need to be aware of e.g. funeral, deaths. Deadlines cannot be imposed from above.
- Oral history training – must have an understanding of the type of community they are providing training for. Native title issue. Conception about future. Purpose to record social history of North Stradbroke Island for future generations.

Presentation summarised by Suzanne Mulligan.

THE BRISBANE RUGBY LEAGUE
The Decline of Brisbane Community Culture – An Oral History Perspective

Speaker – Dr Greg Mallory – Tom Brock Scholar 2001

Introduction

In 2001 I was awarded the Tom Brock Scholarship awarded as part of the Tom Brock Bequest given to the Australian Society of Sports Historians (ASSH) and administered through the Centre for Olympic Studies at the University of New South Wales. The scholarship has enabled me to continue on my work on a social history of the Brisbane Rugby League, a project that I began a few years earlier. I proceeded to interview former leading identities of this competition, including players, referees, and commentators.

Interviewees

- George Lovejoy – 4BH Rugby League caller
- Henry Albert – flamboyant referee
- Norm Pope – Valleys fullback
- Marty Scanlan – Valleys 5/8
- Peter Gallagher – Brothers front row
- Brian Davies – Brothers front row
- Barry Muir – Wests ½ back
- Mick Crocker – Souths forward
- Lionel Morgan – Wynnum-Manly winger
- Fonda Metassa – Norths winger
- Kevin Brasch – Brisbane Rugby League administrator
- Edmund Scott – former Valleys & West player, grandson of one of the founders of the Brisbane Rugby League and author of a thesis on the formation of the BRL

Proposition

I am in the process of developing a proposition that the decline in the traditional Rugby League teams in Brisbane 'mirrored' the decline in community culture associated with these geographical areas that the clubs represented. At the State Conference of the Oral History Association of Queensland I presented this position with certain evidence from oral testimony. I would briefly like to summarise my paper by way of reference to oral testimony, consider some theoretical aspects and briefly outline issues that need to be developed in order to write a social history of the Brisbane Rugby League.

A Brief History of the Brisbane Rugby League

The first club season of Rugby League began in Brisbane on 8 May 1909 with the founding clubs being North Brisbane, Toombul, Valley, South Brisbane and later on Milton. The matches were played at the Brisbane Cricket Ground and were under the control of the Queensland Rugby Football League (QRFL and later QRL).

In 1918 the Western suburbs club was stripped of its premiership points by the QRL for playing an unregistered Sydney player, Rickety Johnson. In response, Wests withdrew from the competition. This event was known as the 'Rickety Johnson ring-in' case and set in motion events that would bring about the formation of the Brisbane Rugby League (BRFL and later BRL) in 1922. The issues that drove the 'breakaway' were the dictatorial attitude of the QRL and the lack of compensation for the

players. The BRL grew in strength combating a QRL attempt to win back control in 1923-24. The original teams were Brothers, Carltons, University, Valley and the Grammars club was added the next season.

District football was an issue that confronted the new administration and meant that the players had to reside in the club's district. Two positive arguments were made for district football, one that firstly it provided a community base and secondly it made a more equitable competition. Brisbane was to be divided into Eastern suburbs, South Brisbane, Western suburbs, North Brisbane and Fortitude Valley. The Past Brothers club, by its very nature defied the district concept, however proof was needed to show that the players had attended a Christian Brothers College.

In 1933 district football became a reality when Carltons became Southern Suburbs, Coorparoo and Wynnum (formerly Wynnum Rugby Union) became Eastern Suburbs and Grammars became Northern Suburbs. According to Ryan the 'district scheme' introduced strict residential provisions for players and the BRFL hoped to ensure the true identity of the club teams by enforcing a 'local only' team makeup. Wynnum-Manly joined in 1952 and Redcliffe in 1960.

Scott has argued that the ending of district football brought about the steady decline and loss of community support for the Brisbane clubs.

Oral Testimony – Brisbane local communities

Mick Crocker discusses the rivalry associated with different suburbs in Brisbane:

> *West End had the razor gangs, you come over here and you took a sheila out from West End you could expect to get slashed with a razor, don't worry about that. If you went over to Toowong, or up to Paddo, it was the same thing especially if you took a sheila out from up there. You had to be a good runner. Easts was the same. Thompson's Estate.* (Mick Crocker, Brisbane, 2001)

Edmund Scott recalls an encounter associated with community culture when he was playing for Valleys in the 1960s:

> *I can remember being tackled by some bloke at Crosby Park and this 'clown' coming over the top of me and giving me one for my trouble and (this bloke) being attacked by a couple of women because they had hit one of their boys...so there was a strong (feeling), the Diehard, the Fortitude Valley boys, and the Paddington boys and the Stones Corner boys, they were part of a big community...and the local community came and saw them play football and supported them and barracked for them.* (Edmund Scott, Brisbane, 1998)

Oral Testimony – Community support for local Rugby League teams

Marty Scanlan remembers the atmosphere in Fortitude Valley before Valleys played in a Grand Final:

> *Well for instance, grand final days I recall on the Saturday walking through the Valley, we all met at the Shamrock Hotel and marched down the middle of Brunswick Street up to the Valley Hotel which is now Dooleys. The police stopped all traffic. That was a big thrill in itself. The crowds of people, a lot of people used to do their shopping Saturday morning in those times, and this was about 10 - 10:30 in the morning and it was a real buzz to see all that support.*
>
> *They all had their coloured blue and white streamers. I can always recall Sandra (his wife) and, we used to do our shopping in the Valley on Saturday morning. Walking into the Woolworths, the BCC at the time, Brisbane Cash and Carry. You'd see the girls there, they'd have their blue jerseys on and someone would have the Norths jersey on, the opposition to*

you. It really gave a buzz around the place. They're just memories and you cherish them.
(Marty Scanlan, Morayfield, 2001)

In Wynnum and Manly the local community used to support the teams in the street, pubs and at barbecues. Lionel Morgan describes the situation as such:

> *Yeah well the crowd was great, they supported you wholeheartedly, they came along but it wasn't only down here on the football field it was on the streets up there. People would come up and talk to you, they'd stop you in the street and get your autograph and have a talk to you and wish you all the best and really support you in what you were doing and lifting the Club. There was four or five players here that were top-line footballers and we used to go up on the terrace and sell raffles in front of McCarthy's Jewellers store on the terrace and we'd do an hour there and then pop down to the Manly Hotel and do an hour there and then we'd pop down to Fishers (pub) and do an hour there. The players were prepared to do it because they were getting the support from this area and they would give it back on the playing field and however they could meet the people on the streets. I don't think anyone turned away from you, it was just one big happy family. We used to have like a barbecue after the game and there'd be 100 or 200 people that would turn up for the barbecue, we had it at various areas.*
> (Lionel Morgan, Wynnum, 2001)

However by the 1990s, support for local teams had declined dramatically with Brisbane having a team (Brisbane Broncos) in the national competition. Barry Muir describes this loss of community support as being a tragedy:

> *Well that is a tragedy, to be honest with you. There's no club identity at all now. If you don't follow the Broncos well who do you follow? That means you've got to follow a New South Wales side. I think I'm sure that's what McAuliffe didn't want to happen. But when they bought in the Queensland side into the NRL that was the end of the BRL as far as that was concerned. It should never have happened because as it turned out, if we did lose players from Queensland to go to New South Wales we had the State of Origin. We've been winning the State of Origin, and you can imagine if we were keeping our players, the club competition would be just as good as what it was when I was playing. But that is a tragedy as far as I'm concerned is that the people miss that club identity.*
> (Barry Muir, Coolangatta, 2001)

Theoretical concepts

Two sociological concepts need to be examined to give some explanation for the general decline in community involvement in local organisations. Firstly there is the issue if 'branding' which in rugby League terms means we now support concepts like Broncos, Roosters, Panthers and not real community entities such as Valleys, Brothers, Wests. Tim Baker makes this point in the Sydney context:

> *There was a time – yesterday it seems – when Rugby League was truly tribal…A time when your local club side came from Canterbury or Cronulla rather than some place called the Bulldogs or Sharks.* (Tim Baker, *Inside Sport*, "The Lost Tribes", August 2002, p.68)

The other concept is "Bowling Alone", a concept developed by Robert Putman who argues that in the United States of America, in the past 20 years there has been a 10% increase in the number of people bowling but there has been a 40% decline in the number of people bowling in leagues (organised competitions). If you enter a bowling alley in America you are likely to see people simply 'bowling alone'. Putman examined a wide variety of community institutions in American society and discovered similar statistics. For example, union membership since the 1950s has halved and PTA

membership has declined from 12 million to 7 million since the 1950s. Tim Baker describes this when he says:

> *The current Bible of social capital theory is Bowling Alone by American sociologist Robert Putman, who makes the point that American society has become so disconnected, people's lives "time poor", they no longer bowl in leagues or clubs. If you walk into a US bowling alley today, you'll see lots of people "bowling alone" because they don't have the time to take part in organised competitions. The demise of community-based sport represents a huge erosion of our social capital, in which public assets are taken over by private business interests for personal gain, rather than the common good. The result is a less connected society and real social costs.* (Tim Baker, *Inside Sport*)

A Social History of the Brisbane Rugby League

I will list further issues that need to be examined that have arisen from the interviews in order to write a social history of the BRL.

- Deskilling or re-skilling? – has Rugby League been deskilled in some of its traditions such as ball distribution or scrums or do we have a situation of re-skilling in the shape of some of the 'new' skills that players such as Andrew Johns possess?
- Workload of players – Barry Muir states that in his time he had played 50 games in the season before he went on the Kangaroo tour. All representative players played a representative match for either Brisbane, Queensland or Australia on Saturday and backed up playing for their club on Sunday
- Bob Bax – all interviewees regard Bob Bax as the best coach Brisbane and Queensland has produced
- Shiftworkers League - a competition played at Hamilton and run by bookmakers and had many pub teams as well as the wharfies. Crowds of up to 10,000 people attended Grand Finals and players received more money in this competition (played on Sundays) than they did for their clubs. A piece of Brisbane's social history largely ignored.
- Toughness – Rugby League was a brutal game with 'stiff-arms' 'part and parcel' of the game.
- Fonda Metassa – one of great personalities of the BRL. Known as the 'Golden Greek', the story relating to the ambulance is part of Brisbane Rugby League folklore.
- Henry Albert – another great character, flamboyant and controversial referee who was never given a Test.
- George Lovejoy – the voice of Rugby League in Brisbane. 4BH commentator who used the phrase "Rugby League football, the greatest game of all". Was banned from broadcasting in Ipswich and called the Bulimba Cup game from the roof of a house overlooking the ground.
- Bulimba Cup – the competition between Brisbane, Ipswich and Toowoomba. Had passionate support, particularly from Ipswich when playing Brisbane.

HOW ENGINEERS MADE IT HAPPEN

Speaker – Norman Sheridan

Engineering Heritage Australia- Queensland is a unit of the Queensland Division, The Institution of Engineers, Australia (EHA-Q) and is responsible for the Oral History Program.

Objectives of EHA-Q include:

- Identifying and preserving significant engineering sites and artefacts.
- Recording information on engineering enterprises and the engineers involved

Activities of EHA-Q include:

- Keeping a register of significant sites.
- Placing plaques on sites where appropriate.
- Collecting and archiving related material.

A part of this latter activity is the Biographies Program which has several approaches:

- Biographic data is collected from engineers on a standard form, which is voluntarily completed.
- CVs submitted for award consideration and other purposes are collected.
- Two volumes of short biographies have been produced under the title- 'Eminent Queensland Engineers'. They contain 85 entries. All the people concerned are deceased.
- In 1992. EHA-Q commenced an Oral History Project following a successful similar project undertaken by Sydney Division of the Institution, which has a collection of around 200 histories. In Queensland, only 16 histories have been completed.

From all sources, information is available for about 220 engineers in the Biographies Section of the Archives.

Objectives of the Oral History Program

- Contribute to the recording of Australian engineering heritage.
- Identify the effects of technological changes on the development of Queensland and their influence on social wellbeing.
- Consider the efficacy of education and training of engineers.
- Discuss the level of satisfaction that engineers feel about their profession and whether their career has lived up to their expectations.
- Consider the drift of engineers to management and other careers.
- Determine if there is such a thing as engineering attitude, whether this is changing and how it is affected by conflicts between commercial profit and environmental protection.

Equipment - EHA-Q aims to produce quality tapes for the record. The interview is recorded on digital tape which serves as a master for producing research copies on analogue tape.

The digital recorder is a TASCAM DA-P1 machine. Although the equipment is portable and can be battery operated, it is preferably used in the quiet surroundings of the IEA Boardroom.

Tape copying and editing is done on a JVC twin cassette deck TDW354BK.

Audio-technica ATM15 miniature cardioid condenser microphones are used. They are mounted on the peaks of caps worn by both the interviewer and the interviewee, in an attempt to keep the recording level constant irrespective of head movement.

Miscellaneous items include a timer, headphones and a vibration absorbing mat.

An Oral History Manual describes the details of the equipment, their method of operation and the recommended procedure for conducting the interview.

Completed Histories - To date 16 histories have been recorded. The quality of recording has been improved over the years, especially with the introduction of the digital recorder.

Length of the interviews varies from around one hour to almost four hours.

Every interview has been logged and for a few, a transcript is available.

Most of the interviews have been done by Robert Isdale, who was responsible for initiating the procedures used. The cost of the interviews was an average of $1000.00, which included preliminary interview, interview time, preparation of log, copying of tapes, travelling expenses, stationery, etc.

The master tapes are stored in the IEA office safe. Working copies, together with written biographical data, tape logs, etc, are stored in the IEA Archives and are available to approved researchers.

A few excerpts will be played today to give an indication of the contents:

- The first concerns the acquiring of the first large transistorised computer to be brought to Queensland. The late Professor Prentice is speaking.
- The second concerns possible fuels for the production of electricity in Queensland. The speaker, Doug Murray, was, at one time, the State Electricity Commissioner.
- Now on a lighter note, we have the late Bob Rivett explaining the origin of his nickname.

And finally

- Bob Rivett is modest about his exam results.

It can be imagined that the tapes cover a wide range of issues from the technical details of important projects to matters of everyday life.

Engineer-Interviewer Program - The cost of $ 1 000.00 for a history has been a deterrent to EHA-Q's ability to complete more histories.

As there are a number of aspiring historians available on the EHA-Q committee, it has been decided to conduct some courses to train them as engineer-interviewers. To this end, the Oral History Manual has been updated, simplified and expanded; the setting up of equipment has

been documented; and the decision was taken to conduct interviews in the IEA Boardroom whenever possible.

Apart from practice in the use of recorders, the courses will be -concerned with obtaining initial biographic data; preparation of the candidates, timeline; the preliminary interview; the signing of authorisations, conditions of use and assignment of copyright; preparation of interview outline; conduct of the interview and preparation of the log.

The committee has boldly said that it will aim to complete 10 histories before the end of June 2003.

Oral History of an Enterprise - A more ambitious project has been investigated viz Swanbank Power Station.

The station is over 40 years old. It has undergone numerous changes, updates and make-overs.

It has been an important contributor to the State's electricity network as well as being a pacesetter in technology. Besides, it has had a major influence on the Ipswich coal industry and the development of the area.

While there are still people around who helped with the planning, design, commissioning and operation of the plant in its various phases, an interesting history should result. It could include everyone from superintendents, to engine drivers, to cleaners, to office staff, etc, not forgetting engineers.

Future use of this resource - To date, this resource has been little used. Admittedly it is still relatively small; but it may be possible to supplement it with material from Sydney Division.

An Oral History collection is not necessarily the place to find facts but rather attitudes, impressions, influences and opportunities. Thus research should be slanted in these directions.

Possible projects are:

- Suitability of engineering courses for future careers.
- Opportunity for engineers in management.
- Are engineers becoming more aware of environmental protection?
- Engineers in the public sector?
- Engineers in information technology?

How can the Institution promote such research?

Perhaps some projects would be suitable for research students in University History Departments. The Institution will need to sponsor or find sponsors to support the research. But it really needs to develop a purpose for its Oral History collection.

IS THERE A DIFFERENCE

Speaker – Kay Cohen

To introduce myself briefly, I work as an historian. I alternate between academia and public history, with most of my public history work coming from commissioned projects. In nearly all of them oral history plays a significant part in supplying information and shaping the context of the outcome. Some of them contribute to publications, in others the aim has been to produce oral history tapes with transcripts and accompanying background research material.

Comparing this field with the field of family and community oral history, for example, it seemed to me there were identifiable differences - and I looked forward to the opportunity to explore this observation further and open it up for discussion with practitioners when the occasion presented itself

So, to pose the central question. Is the practice of oral history different when it comes to interviewing people in positions of power? People in this category include politicians, business leaders and senior officials of major organisations in both the public and private sectors.

In what may be seen to be a sweeping generalisation, I considered that family and community history interviews operated from a base of benign co-operation. People want to talk about themselves, events in their lives and their relationship to family, community and place, and the majority of them are not skilled in interview techniques. Clearly there can be a self-protective dimension, as Sue Pechey recently observed in relation to her Crows Nest community, and this presents a challenge to the interviewer. And, as we have seen in the Report from the Indigenous Task Force on violence in Aboriginal communities these personal histories had immense political as well as personal significance, with public interest and personal safety becoming dominant issues.

The conditions under which my interviews took place seemed, however, to be a world away from accepted protocols and practice for personal, family and community oral history. Restriction to one interview session, usually to a maximum of ninety minutes, and 'second thoughts' censoring of transcripts were among the more obvious constraints. While people agreed to be interviewed as part of the overall project and discuss their work in general terms, many may be personally opposed to the process. A good many will be skilled in giving interviews. Moreover, there can be a marked reluctance to impart information or engage in discussion that has the potential to be commercially or politically sensitive - and always, there is the sense that the interview is hedged around by judgements about public and self- interest.

Thus, there can be co-operation but of a limited, prescribed nature - or manipulation or obfuscation.

So, is there a difference? If so, how can it be articulated or defined?

Can it be identified as arising, for instance, from the subject matter of the project, the central topic of the particular interview, the dynamics of the relationship between the participants, their preconceptions or perceptions, or considerations and concerns about the. possible outcomes of the interview?

In a subjective sense, is it connected to the following: who am I interviewing, about what, and under what circumstances, how I perceive - react to the interviewee, how does he/she perceive or react to me, and how does each of us see the potential outcome.

To begin, I'd like to set out some of my experiences in this field of oral history. I have noted that all my work here is commissioned work. It is fashionable in academic circles to denigrate the results of commissioned projects as lacking legitimacy because the author is not independent and there is censorship by vested interests and so on. The great thing about commissioned work is that it gives you access to the relevant principals and the material for background research. Secondly, some degree of co-operation is guaranteed.

With regard to censorship, the censoring of transcripts and published text derived from interviews, is not confined to commissioned work. In the end, whether or not it goes into the public domain is a matter for you, your lawyers and publishers, just as it is for non-commissioned work. In the interests of presenting a balanced account, I have never been prevented from making soundly-based criticisms, nor has my text been altered. I have some good examples of this, which time does not allow me to go into. I also can say there was one major exception - the history of the Treasury and Executive buildings for Conrad Treasury casinos.

At the same time, the critical factor is having the transcripts signed off by the interviewee. Quite often he or she has reacted to the printed record with "Did I really say that to you?" and, yes, I have been threatened with legal action if I quoted from certain interviews. Most people in positions of public responsibility undertake the vetting process with enormous care. One of my interviews required no less than three edits before the interviewee was happy with the result. So while you can feel happy about getting people to talk about sensitive issues and often make personal comments about other people, whether or not the material survives the editing process is still subject to a range of uncertainties. However, the material is not lost. You can use in terms of speculation, to pose questions to other interviewees and to verify attitudes or the passage of certain events. You just can't quote the material.

Basically I approach each of my interviews with a particular frame of reference and particular aims in terms of gathering information and eliciting comments, personal insights, and perhaps previously unknown information. Given the time constraints, I am aware that I will never cover all the aspects of the topic. Because of this, I try to piggy-back one interview on to another, seeking to test views with different interviewees, and to obtain confirmation of a particular rendition of an event or decision. In general, I will receive information and comments that accord with the official line, and will be protective of both the organisation and the person. There is nothing wrong with this and it is valuable in itself, as it adds to the store of available information. But if I wish to end up with a balanced outcome, free of glaring errors, and as close as possible to the reality of the situation, - leaving aside issues of what is truth - I would like to gather material which is informed by personal participation rather than what is contained in official or public material.

I do not have a prepared list of questions I submit before the interview, nor do I have a list with me in the interview. I usually indicate the - general area I am interested in discussing when I make the arrangements to meet. And the interviewee expects to discuss the area in which he/she plays a relevant and important role. I aim to have the interviewee feel comfortable with me, so that the tape recorder virtually disappears.

I do have a notebook with some headings, particularly if there is a special point I wish to raise and am worried that in the ebb and flow of the interview, I will forget it. I prefer to establish and maintain eye contact with the interviewee - and I feel a lot can be learned from the interview dynamic.

When I begin, I do not know where the interview will lead - As I am in search of information, I am prepared to be as flexible as possible. I try to keep the discussion open-ended. I do have points I must cover and I have 'signpost' questions if things seem to be going too far off track - which, of course, is

a technique interviewees use to divert discussion. but I will let it continue if I think it might in the end be productive.

I have learned to recognise various elements of the interview relationship. The most straightforward interview will deliver information and give considered comments on a variety of subjects and issues. If a topic is judged to be unsuitable for discussion, a clear indication of this will be given in straightforward language - and that is usually the end of the matter. Most politicians and officials are very good at this. If I can, I will return to this subject later in the interview, in a different or oblique way, to see if I can elicit the information I seek. Even in the most benign interview situation, there is a basic element present - that is, the issue of control. Who will control the direction and content of the interview?

The interviewee will wish to deliver information and comments on a specific range of topics in a way that is positive for the person and the organisation. They have things they want to tell me about their organisation, its work and their role in it, and they wish to present all this in the most favourable light. That is natural.

It is my aim to delve deeper, to go beyond the explanatory presentation. I find that people in positions of responsibility and often considerable decision-making power, like to talk about themselves and their professional achievements - this provides a useful indicator of their outlook, personal and professional philosophy and career perceptions. What has interested me is that people in positions of power appear to want to disclose to me, potentially sensitive or damaging information. That is my aim, in a way, but I am surprised that, with all their experience and knowing the tape recorder is there on the table, that they would proceed. Possible reasons for this:

- They are trying to impress me - also knowing they have an opportunity to delete the material in the editing phase - although often this does not happen.

- Pay back - for perceived injustices - hostile relations with particular people, for either personal or professional reasons.

- Finally it is a device for emphasising an issue they see as important or critical to them or to the organisation, and want it to be recorded. People may signal information of this kind by, for instance say, "I would like to say more but yes, it is a controversial point" - and this can be highlighted by a laugh. Laughter is an elective device and one that is frequently used by interviewees - again for a variety of purposes.

For my part, I alternate between trying to convey that I know everything, that I am profoundly ignorant, or am articulating views of dubious provenance. Most people like to be able to correct wrong information or impressions and this can lead to more rounded disclosures. I go fishing, I fly kites and so on, and regularly fall flat on my face. I haven't yet learned to keep quiet if this happens, as I usually and instinctively feel the need to justify myself or to rescue the situation. All I can hope is that it gives the interviewee some entertainment while sometimes, to my surprise, I end up with the information I was only guessing about.

For me, it is essential to retain the goodwill of the interviewee. We both have a contract in a sense to produce the best outcome for the project. And nothing should jeopardise that.

There will be limits beyond which I am unable to go. If I push too hard, the result can be - hostility - its negative effect on the interview relationship and a very strict editing of the text before it is signed off to me. Those are the limitations and, although I can exert influence on the interview process, in the end, I tend to concede that control of the interview does remain with the person being interviewed.

TWO CENTURIES – A HISTORY OF THE PINE RIVERS SHIRE

Speaker – Leith Barter

The film 'Two Centuries: a history of the Pine Rivers Shire' was produced during the early months of this year by the Pine Rivers Shire Library Service in partnership with Bluegum Media, a local video production company. Although it was never our intention to promote the film to any great extent outside of the Pine Rivers Shire, over the past few months, I have been overwhelmed by the level of interest in the film throughout the greater south-east Queensland area.

BACKGROUND

I would like to say a little about the genesis of the film and my own involvement in the history of the area. As I have now nearly completed nearly five years of service as the Pine Rivers Shire's Local Studies Librarian, I can say that it has been the most enjoyable and rewarding position of my career as a librarian. It is also the first job that has allowed me to combine my 30 or so years of experience as a librarian with a lifelong love of history. My most exciting project, so far, has been this film which, in many ways, has been the culmination of several years of researching and thinking about the history of the Pine Rivers area.

The Pine Rivers Shire occupies an area of some 767 square kilometres and is home to around 120,000 people who enjoy a blend of urban and rural living. The Shire is bounded to the south and south-east by the City of Brisbane, to the north by Caboolture Shire, to the north-east by the City of Redcliffe and to the west by Esk Shire. These boundaries are largely the result of geography in that they have been determined by the catchment area of the North and South Pine Rivers. I don't believe that there are too many other Shires in Queensland, or the whole of Australia for that matter, which are so neatly defined by geography. In many ways, the history of the Pine Rivers Shire is the history of the North and South Pine Rivers. In consequence of this, I have made the river system a constantly recurring theme in the film. The Shire is blessed with a diversity of geographic zones with distinct scenic landscapes that vary from the peaks of the beautiful D'Aguilar Range, through the picturesque townships of Samford and Dayboro, down to the river estuaries and coastal wetlands of the Dohles Rocks area bordering Moreton Bay. Lake Samsonvale and Lake Kurwongbah supply water to the Pine Rivers Shire and the greater Brisbane area, as well as providing venues for aquatic pursuits.

The film not only presents my current understanding of the history of the Shire, but it also showcases the natural history and the beauty of the Pine Rivers area. The film will remind Brisbane audiences, just as it has reminded those who live in the crowded eastern part of the Pine Rivers Shire, of the incredible diversity of the area and just how large an area is encompassed by the Shire. As mentioned, around 120,000 people currently live in the Shire, many, of whom, have moved into the area in recent times from interstate or elsewhere in Queensland, but there are large numbers of descendants of the original pioneering settlers still living here. In my position as Local Studies Librarian, I have been privileged to get to know many of these descendants, to be welcomed into their homes and to be told their family stories. As many of you would have experienced, at times, this can be an intensely moving experience. Because I am an 'outsider' who moved into the community only during relatively recent times, I feel particularly honoured by this. In my work as Local Studies Librarian, I have been struck by two things: firstly, the justifiable pride of these descendants in the pioneering achievements of their ancestors; and, secondly, the new families moving into the Shire also have a high level of interest in the history of the area. The film was created, hopefully, to appeal to both these categories of interest.

The genesis of the film lies in an oral history program rather quirkily entitled 'The Eyes of the Shire'. This program was commenced less than three years ago as an attempt to record oral histories, not simply on cassette tape as has been traditionally the case, but on high quality digital video so as to preserve images of the interviewees along with the recorded sound. A couple of Shire Councillors sowed the seeds of this program by urging me to consider this approach. Somewhat reluctantly, I commenced conducting videotaped interviews

with past or present residents using unsophisticated equipment without the support of a cameraman. As I had obtained some personal practical experience of video production in a university environment, I knew that fairly unsatisfactory results would be virtually guaranteed, but I needed to convince my Council of the necessity of adopting a more professional approach. A lack of suitable Council-owned equipment was overcome by forging a partnership with Chris Bradbury, the proprietor of Bluegum Media, a local video production company based in Lawnton. Since that time, Chris has established a solid reputation for providing the technical expertise necessary for many similar oral history projects elsewhere. Once they became acquainted with our goals, Pine Rivers Shire Councillors became equally passionate in their support of the program and they ensured that annual funding of $5,000 was added to the Local Studies budget and earmarked specifically for recording video interviews.

After trialing the program with members of the Petrie Historical Society, a group I had been working with for several years, we moved out into the wider Pine Rivers community searching for suitable subjects. Although many people find the process of being interviewed on video rather daunting, we were gratified by the large number of individuals who volunteered to have their reminiscences recorded. News of our work spread rapidly by word of mouth and a number of articles in the local press also helped to publicise the program. We also worked in close co-operation with local community groups such as the Samford District Historical Museum Society.

We had always presumed that the oral history program would have great value, not only as an end in itself with respect to the creation of a library of oral history tapes, but also as a potential source of raw material for films and audiovisual displays in our new Pine Rivers Heritage Museum located in the North Pine Country Park. When the opportunity presented itself to us to apply for a Library Board of Queensland 2001 Innovation Grant of $15,000, nobody was more surprised than ourselves when we eventually learnt that we were successful and that we would be able to utilise our oral history resources for film production much sooner than we had anticipated. My thanks are due to the Library Board and the State Library of Queensland for looking favourably on our slender application and somehow perceiving that we would be able to bring the project to fruition. It was hoped that the Grant would provide the bulk of the funding needed to produce a video documentary on the Shire's history from pre-European times to the present. The 45-60 minute film, which would combine some of the existing oral history resources with other documentary materials. Such was the level of commitment to the film that both the Council and Bluegum Media indicated a willingness to provide additional funds to ensure the success of the project. Chris Bradbury pledged $5,000 of his own money at the outset, but I have to say that, if I we were to take all of his time into consideration, we would find that he greatly exceeded this contribution.

In creating the film, we tried to achieve comprehensive treatment of the Shire's history over the past 200 years. Consequently, the history of this period has been painted using a broad brush with not much detail. Perhaps too much emphasis has been placed on the very early history, but we hope to produce further programs that will focus on more recent developments in the Shire. We also tried to provide equitable treatment of all parts of the Shire. Somehow, however, there are still many places in the Shire that have scarcely rated a mention. Once again, we hope to rectify that with future programs of a more specific nature, both regional and thematic. An important aim was to allow the people of the Shire to voice their own understanding of their history. When we commenced editing the film, 40 videotaped interviews had been collected, averaging 40 to 60 minutes in length, but we were able to use excerpts from only 21 of these in the film.

All of the interviews were filmed in the home environment of the interviewees. Most were interviewed sitting in a favourite chair in their own living room, but, increasingly, we have tried to film many interviews in appropriate outdoor locations. I do not appear on camera and, in most cases, I have quite deliberately not used a conversational or interrogative approach. When it has been necessary for me to ask questions, I have tried to encourage the subject to rephrase my question as part of their response so that my voice is not required on the edited tape. In a great deal of the interviews, most of the questioning and negotiation of the subject matter takes place off camera prior to recording each segment. Although I have never attempted to deliberately create short 'sound bytes', I have encouraged the interviewees to understand that they do not need to keep talking incessantly. Moments of silence and contemplation later provide very useful break points for editing purposes.

METHODOLOGY

An important initial step was to create transcripts of a selection of twenty of the forty videotaped interviews; about $2,000 of the Grant money was set aside for this purpose. These transcripts later proved to be invaluable when we needed to choose segments for inclusion in the film. The remaining interviews, not quite so vital to

the film, had detailed contents notes prepared so that we could quickly assess their suitability and access the subject matter contained therein; these proved to be almost as useful as the full transcripts.

Although it is standard industry procedure to create a detailed storyboard to guide the production of a documentary film such as this, we decided to shortcut the process by employing a professional scriptwriter to prepare a script for the narrator. Despite the importance of the oral history interviews, we did not want the content of the film to be entirely dependent on the available material; it was essential that the history of the Shire be told in a comprehensive and systematic manner. At this point, we made the decision to employ the services of Peter Maxwell, a well-known professional communicator. A great advantage was that Peter came as a 'package' in that he was able, not only to write the script, but to provide the voice for the narration. As all this came at the very minimal price of $3,300, a low cost for professional services of this calibre, we were very grateful to Peter for his commitment to the project. We gave Peter a copy of our published local history, Lawrence Smith (ed.), *Tracks and Times: a History of the Pine Rivers District,* (Strathpine, Qld., Pine Rivers Shire Council, 1988), for background reading. At the end of the day, however, my discussions with Peter and my own *Shire History* on the Council's website (www.prsc.qld.gov.au) proved to be invaluable and large chunks of the script were derived directly from the web material. Peter demonstrated his skill by taking the history and masterfully weaving it into an evocative story. In retrospect, I would now consider personally undertaking the writing of such a script. At the time, however, I was unsure of my ability to translate my own academic style of writing into something with more popular appeal. In any event, I met regularly with Peter and we worked together closely to ensure that the script treated the history of the Shire in an accurate, comprehensive and equitable manner. Last minute changes to the script were made right up to and including the day of recording the narration in the sound studio.

The audio recording took place in Ethereal Studios, Kallangur, with Peter providing the narration and I also contributed some voice re-enactments of several key historical figures. Remarkably, the cost for this was only $400. In the absence of a storyboard, this soundtrack provided the skeleton around which we were able to complete the assembly of the film. This was done by inserting 186 historical photographs (selected from the holdings of the Local Studies Collection) and approximately 100 contemporary scenes (filmed on location throughout the Pine Rivers Shire) to provide the visual component; at no stage does the narrator appear on camera. Because a great deal of the early history of the Shire cannot be presented in the form of photographs due to the lack of suitable material, Chris Bradbury devoted an enormous amount of time to capturing footage which could be used to 'cover' some of this early history. As we lacked both the finance and the means at our disposal to create historical re-enactments, we relied very heavily on this material. The result is that, not only in the opening sequences of the film, but throughout its duration, there are many stunning contemporary images which, in addition to providing a context for the history, reveal something of the beauty and diversity of the Pine Rivers environment that I spoke about earlier. Underlying the narration throughout the entire duration of the film (56 minutes) is a musical score specially written by Peter Carasco and performed by Master Performers Australia. The cost of $1,500 was a moderate but necessary expense to ensure that we had a unique musical background; it will be appreciated that copyright restrictions limit the way in which pre-recorded music can be used in commercial film productions.

At appropriate places within the script, short segments from the oral history interviews were added to reiterate important points or to otherwise enlarge upon particular topics of interest. As mentioned, in total, portions from twenty-one of the interviews were used in this manner. In a few cases, more than one segment was taken from a single interview. All of the interviewees gave very generously of their time and provided us with a 'window' into their lives. Collectively, they form a good cross section of the people of Pine Rivers, not just the 'great and famous'. To reiterate a point already made, in many cases, the recording of these interviews was a very personal and intensely moving experience.

LAUNCH OF 'TWO CENTURIES'

The 56 minute video film, *Two Centuries: a History of the Pine Rivers Shire*, was completed just in time for a public launch on Thursday 18 April 2002 in the Strathpine Community Centre. Pine Rivers Shire Councillor David Dwyer was the master of ceremonies for what turned out to be a very successful major function. Chris Bradbury and I delivered short speeches before the Minister for the Arts, the Honourable Matt Foley, officially launched the video to an audience of around 320 people. The Mayor, Councillor Yvonne Chapman, also addressed the gathering to thank the Minister and the other participants. After a short intermission, the video was rear projected onto a large screen using equipment hired from a professional presentations company. The catering, serving and hall arrangements were organised by the Strathpine Library staff who wore a variety of historical costumes that were much admired by attendees.

In order to more accurately assess audience reaction to the launch and the screening of the video, Strathpine Library staff also distributed evaluation forms during the screening. 147 of these sheets were returned (45.9% of the attendees), of which 96% recorded the event as 'very good' (the highest rating provided). Nearly half of the responses also added very positive comments about the video and the evening's launch. The only negative replies received, and there were only two or three of these, were along the lines of "why wasn't my family singled out for a special mention in the film"! Copies of the video were made available for sale during the evening at the discounted price of $20.00 (normally $22.00 including GST). As nearly 100 copies were sold during the night, the demand for these far outstripped our initial expectations.

OUTCOMES

The release of the video allowed us to achieve our primary goal which was to make known the rich historical heritage of the Pine Rivers area to a wide audience, especially those who prefer a visual experience to a literary one. Many residents of the area have already benefited by having an audiovisual history of the Shire available for purchase or for loan from the Shire Council libraries; this benefit will increase substantially as the video is marketed more widely. Although there are a number of published monographs available on various aspects of the Shire's history, there was a total lack of material in other formats until our video was released. The need for a wider range of audiovisual materials has become apparent following the film launch. As this work, our first video film, was necessarily a generalised account of the history of the whole of the Shire, many people have expressed the hope that we will create further programs which will treat individual regions within the Pine Rivers Shire, or specific historical themes, in much greater detail.

To date, nearly 400 copies of the video have been distributed or sold in the local community. This figure includes the provision of free copies to all schools in the Pine Rivers Shire and to a number of other institutions such as Osprey House Environmental Centre, Pine Rivers Heritage Museum, Samford District Historical Museum and Tourism Pine Rivers. Although it is still too early to fully assess the educational value of the video to local schools, early indications suggest that students and teachers are finding it to be a very useful resource. Lending copies were quickly provided for the four branch libraries and the mobile library service operated by the Pine Rivers Shire Library Service. As well as VHS video copies, a small number of copies were also provided in DVD format. Copies in both these formats have been in constant demand by library patrons.

The successful launch of the video was a very tangible demonstration of the positive community response to the project. The launch was also widely publicised in the local press, both before and after the event. A not wholly unexpected result of the launch, and of the availability of the video, has been the exposure of the Local Studies Collection to a much wider audience than has been the case hitherto. During the period following the film launch, a large number of individuals contacted me to donate or lend copies of historical photographs, or to share information and volunteer as potential participants in 'The Eyes of the Shire' oral history program.

Pine Rivers Shire Councillors have been delighted with the finished product. Although all Councillors were given a copy of the video for their own purposes, many of them have used their Divisional funds to purchase additional copies for distribution within their own respective Divisions. Councillor Bob Millar, the Councillor for Division 1 which covers the entire western half of the Shire, organised further public screenings in Samford and Dayboro to ensure that residents in the remoter areas received the same opportunity to view the film as those in the more populous eastern part of the Shire.

The most unsatisfactory part of the process of creating the film was our inability to accurately forecast the expenditure necessary to achieve the results we desired. Even with the best technical advice, our budgeting remained shadowy until the final stages of the project were underway. As it happened, we exceeded our initial estimates, but we were able to complete the film to our satisfaction by securing a small amount of extra funding from the Pine Rivers Shire Council and from Bluegum Media.

WORKSHOP WITH ROBIN HUGHES

Robin's workshop was well attended and proved an enjoyable and revealing experience. Robin said that it was essential when collecting our oral history stories that we are getting their truth. That is fundamental to the whole process. Oral history interviews are different to the normal media interviews which can be combative or "display" interviews. That's not what we are about. We must be open and honest about our project with the interviewee. The interview is two human beings engaged in a transaction founded on trust.

"Your opinion as the interviewer is not of interest. There is a transaction there – a generous exchange. They should not know what you think. There is no necessity to agree with them. Also don't disagree with them because that will affect what they say to you."

"Allow people to say what they really mean. Be true to a person's view of the truth. Keep yourself very small. Don't feel superior. Respect their reality, whatever it is. You cannot achieve that unless they are comfortable enough to really talk naturally. This is particularly true of the 'high and mighty'".

Preliminary interviews can set the tone but be careful not to cover ground you are intending to cover in the main interview. Don't go into details. They must not feel they have already told you when you come to the main interview.

Technical points – archives are important. Ask to see relevant photographs. Ensure you have a good recorder and microphone. Your interview may be required for a radio program so you have a responsibility to produce a reasonable product. Eye contact is absolutely crucial. Put a lot of effort into preparing a "mental map" (from extensive research) for conducting the interview so you can concentrate on being intensely engaged with the interviewee. Robin does not have a list of questions in front of her – that can be a distraction as you must be able to internalise to leave yourself free to look at them and to really listen to them. Ensure you don't make any noise in engaging. Keep eye contact and sit as close as possible.

Try to ask questions that can't be answered with "yes" or "no" – very basic. Remember the five W's and the H - who, what, when, where, why, how. "Why" is the heart of the issue – motivation is really interesting – why people did what they did.

Robin said it is a good idea for interviewers to subject themselves to being interviewed to gain a better understanding of the process.

"It is important to understand that a lot of work that we do is at a level which is okay to deal with as a human exchange. Sometimes we enter deeper psychological areas - into the area of a therapist. Remember – don't try to play the therapist. If someone is in need of more skilled help –back off and suggest that. When someone starts telling you something they need to say it is important for them to finish telling you. If they want to talk, let them finish – let them have a cry even if it isn't relevant to what you are doing. Hear them out, engage the depth of where that is taking them and then move on."

Presentation summarised by Suzanne Mulligan.

Oral History Association
of Australia (OHAA)

Membership of the OHAA includes a subscription to the Journal of the Association, published annually. There are branches of the Association in all Australian States. Northern Territory members are attached to the SA Branch and ACT members to NSW. Branches hold regular meetings, run workshops and publish regular newsletters, and also provide a friendly and informative forum for those interested in oral history from any perspective.

Membership Fees (1 July 2002 to 30 June 2003) (please tick the appropriate box)

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