

# Real to Reel

Newsletter of Oral History Tasmania Inc.



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## NEWS FROM THE EXECUTIVE – Jill Cassidy

### Oral History workshop

A reminder that the 2021 Covid-safe workshop will be held at the Glenorchy library on 29 May. A registration form with further information can be found on page 7.

### 2021 Biennial National Conference 14–16 October

As Australia continues to deal well with Covid-19 we are increasingly confident that the national conference, *Oral History in Troubling Times: Challenges and Opportunities*, will be able to be held in Launceston, and may include participants from New Zealand as well. Should a Covid break-out occur the conference will be held online. Please spread the word amongst family and friends

It appears that others are also increasingly confident of coming as we received over 60 submissions for presentations. The national program committee are going through the abstracts, and a draft program should be available by June.

Some information can be provided now. On Thursday 14 Professor Alistair Thomson will give a workshop on 'Interpreting Memories'. This has been offered in other states and is always very popular, so we are lucky to have the opportunity in Tasmania to benefit from his experience. Michael Green will present a podcasting workshop, again a popular topic, and Hamish Sewell will give a day-long workshop on his innovative Soundtrails software, where participants will be taught how to develop locative audio for their own localities that visitors can download to their phones. That evening there will be a reception to welcome delegates.

As advised earlier, Mark Cave's introductory keynote address on Friday 15 will be entitled, 'Why Did This Happen? *Making Meaningful Answers in the Aftermath of Crisis*'. It is most improbable that he will be able to come from New Orleans, but he intends to pre-record his address and then be available for a Q&A session afterwards. I am delighted to let you know that three well-known Tasmanian Aboriginal people will speak at the concluding plenary session on Saturday 16 about the significance of memory and oral history for Tasmanian Aboriginal people. They are Dr Julie Gough, Theresa Sainty and Adam Thompson. That evening there will be a farewell dinner at the Grand Chancellor Hotel.

On Sunday 17 there will be 2 half-day tours, with the ability to attend both. In the morning Aunty Patsy Cameron will give a guided tour of the Cataract Gorge, relating Aboriginal experience. Then in the afternoon there will be a visit to the Beaconsfield Mine and Heritage Centre.

Information will be available as soon as it becomes available at the Oral History Australia website:

<http://www.oralhistoryaustralia.org.au/>

## Oral History awards – deadline August 1

As previously advised, nominations for the Hazel de Berg Award and applications for the OHA Book Award and OHA Media Award are now open. Nominations for the Hazel de Berg Award are via an online form:

<https://oralhistoryaustralia.org.au/awards/hazel-de-berg-award-nominations/>.

Those applying for the book and media awards, however, must submit to each of the judges according to guidelines outlined on the website: <https://oralhistoryaustralia.org.au/awards/book-award-apply/> and <https://oralhistoryaustralia.org.au/awards/media-award-apply/>.

## *DIAL A LOCAL – THE ROSS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT*

**Debra Cardogan-Cowper**

*Talk given at the Oral History Tasmania seminar on 5 September 2020.*

By way of background, I have always had an interest in people's stories. The most profound was back in my early teens, speaking with a family friend who had carried his swag around Victoria during the Great Depression. It opened my mind to the past and the extraordinary older people in our communities.

Having a passion for Australian history, I was fortunate to be employed at Elizabeth Farm in Parramatta when it was first opened to the public. This was John and Elizabeth Macarthur's first home, dating back to 1793, which makes it the oldest surviving house in Australia. My four years there as a guide broadened my knowledge about the early beginnings of the Australian wool industry and merino sheep which undoubtedly paved the way to where I am today as manager of the Tasmanian Wool Centre. So, all things happen for a reason!



*Interior of the Tasmanian Wool Centre*

The Wool Centre was built in 1988 as a Bicentennial project. The local Council understood that with the new highway bypassing Ross there was a danger that it could become a ghost town. So the community decided to build something that would attract visitors and help sustain the local economy. It was built with many streams of funding from federal, state and community, and opened in February 1988. We have two museum galleries – one about the wool, one about history – and a retail space. It's a great success; in that 32 years it's achieved all it set out to do. Overseen by an honorary Board of Directors, it employs 11 staff and is self-funded. It is open every day of the week.

I moved to Ross 32 years ago and after raising three sons was fortunate to get a part-time job at the Tasmanian Wool Centre as a retail assistant and tour guide. I took on the role of manager in 2009. Not long afterwards, an opportunity arose to benefit from Arts Tasmania's Roving Curators scheme. With guidance from Melissa Smith and Veronica Macno, the museum has improved the care and cataloguing of its collection, expanded the interpretation of themes and held many short-term exhibitions.

In all our great achievements, oral history was one area where we fell short. An opportunity arose a few years ago to attend an Oral History workshop here at the Queen Victoria Museum. Feeling inspired after the workshop, we started to look around for a recording device with the intention to collect the stories of our locals. As often happens, other areas of the business got in the way and it was many more months before the project began.

It all started in Wool Week in May 2017 when I conducted interviews with five different people connected with the wool industry. This was a public event, one a day over five days, and was filmed as an archive. It was a great experience to cut my teeth on and we are hoping to do this again in the coming months. My son videoed

the whole thing for us. We didn't get as many visitors as we would have liked but the ones who did come just loved it. We had a shearer, a wool classer, someone who started out as a marine physicist and is now a wool farmer, so it was really an enriching experience.

After this foray into interviewing, I began to consider again the need to interview our older residents of Ross. The catalyst for this was a disused Tasman Flag-style red telephone box in the main street of Ross. It was one of two. The other box housed a Telstra pay phone. Many years ago, Telstra wanted to replace both boxes with one of the standard modern versions. Thankfully, the Ross community objected, and the Northern Midlands Council backed us up. A lease was subsequently drawn up between the Council and the Tasmanian Wool Centre for us to maintain the Tasman Flag phone boxes. Telstra then agreed to retain a pay phone in just one of them, leaving the other empty box languishing for many years.



*Another area of the Wool Centre*



*The Ross phone boxes*

I walked past this empty phone box so many times knowing somehow there was a use for it. Finally one day I came up with an idea. Why not get an old phone installed that could tell our locals' stories? I could record interviews with some long-standing locals and have short snippets loaded into the phone and heard by dialling a number. I knew of a creative group called Enterprize in Launceston so one day I popped in to meet them and was introduced to James Riggall and some of his co-workers. I talked about my wild idea and it turned out he was just as excited as me! I asked him to come up with a quote to create an old phone to hold the stories of our locals.

In March 2017 the Wool Centre applied for a grant, through the Tasmanian Community Fund, to pay for the infrastructure and installation and once approved, work got under way. We called the project Dial a Local, because we definitely wanted to have a phone with a dial, not one of the press button kind. It was at this point that I met the incredibly talented Joe Robinson. Joe was to become the brains behind the entire creation and technical capabilities of the telephone. Joe based it on an old-fashioned design and built the telephone from spare parts and dogged determination.

To record the interviews, we purchased a Zoom H5 Handy Recorder and I had a few test runs before I was confident to interview my first local.

Bob Davis was my first interviewee. He was 95 at the time, the oldest resident of Ross, and a delight to interview. He had some great tales about growing up in Ross and his life after the war.

Talking about footy: going back to 1935, when I was only seven, Ross had a good side. You're not going to believe what I'm going to tell you: Cleveland won the grand final! It was played at Cleveland and I had a push bike and I rode it up to watch them play. It would be roughly 20 kilometres. Ross were the minor premiers, but Cleveland beat them - twice actually [that



*The Zoom recorder*



season] - at Cleveland, beat them comfortably. So if I talk about football today, I say to them, 'Look at Cleveland today'. [The footy ground] was alongside the school, just north of the school, in one of those paddocks. Big crowd there. The trucks didn't go very fast in those days so I hitched a ride on the back of a truck and had a free ride for a little while, just hung on. [The roads] were pretty rough, they were gravel. It was the Main Road, a good gravel road though.

I learnt from this interview that I would have to try harder not to say 'yes' and 'mm' too often! We had well over one hour of recording and it would have gone on longer if the District Nurse hadn't arrived. Bob was the consummate storyteller.

Buoyed by my first attempt I had a flurry of interviews with mixed success. Some people were quite intimidated by the recorder and I found that their best stories occurred after it was turned off! I had made a set number of questions to ask but found that while this provided a framework, in some cases it hampered other memories that were more important to the interviewees.

I had one disaster when I thought the recorder was running, only to find when I got back to work that I had inadvertently turned it off instead of on. Another lesson learnt, to know your equipment. Consequently, the whole interview was committed to my memory and I hastily wrote down everything I could remember before it was lost. I vowed this would never happen again.

The farmers are hard to pin down. The wives like chatting, but the men are too busy. One I did get was Richard Bennett from Ashby. He talked about the Ross rodeo that brought thousands of dollars into Ross and helped pay for the sewerage plant and underground power in the main street. He told me how his Dad had had a Jersey bull which was a bit cantankerous so he decided the best thing to do was get rid of the horns. And the best way was to shoot them off with a shotgun! Anyway, after a long life it was time for him to take the trip into town to the slaughterhouse. There used to be a stockyard next to the railway line where stock could be picked up and taken to market. So Richard's Dad was taking half a dozen heifers and this bull up to the stockyard. They came across the bridge and at the cenotaph a car pulled out and completely spooked the cattle. The heifers went straight up the road to the saleyard but the bull took a detour through the door of the pub to the back door, ending up where the heifers were. Anyone in the pub who'd had too many drinks would be wondering if he'd imagined it.

In all, I recorded seven interviews and then began listening to each to find a story or two to install on the phone. Once this was established the files were sent to Joe who called on the skills of a proficient editor he knew to fine tune them. The stories were cut down to a time limit of between 48 seconds to a maximum of 2.22 minutes. So that was a big ask of the editor.

The project was not without delays as in February 2018 we had a severely windy day and the door of the phone box was blown off its hinges and left hanging by a hinge. Much of the glass in the door was broken and the door itself was too damaged to be fixed. Thankfully there was nothing in it at this stage. A local builder was employed to replace and refit the door. To match it exactly to the old door took considerable time and as an extra precaution a safety bracket was installed to prevent it happening again. Thankfully, the Northern Midlands Council insurance covered this expense, but it took the project many months to get back on track.



*The Campbell Town telephone exchange c.1969-70*

Once it was weatherproof, the next stage was the fit out of the interior of the phone box. My valued co-worker, Margaret Young, and I began to consider the interpretation design. Margaret came across a picture of some ladies working in the Campbell Town Telephone Exchange in the late 60s or early 70s. Right at the front was a local Ross lady, Enid Harding.

We employed Futago, a design company in Hobart, to incorporate Enid and the text to support the stories. We also had a piece of anodized metal engraved with the titles of the stories to be placed on the front shelf of the phone.

The day that Joe arrived to install the phone was such a thrill. The recording system is connected to a solar panel on the roof of the phone box and the system can be checked by Joe remotely. (Unfortunately, Joe was called away on business today and sends his apologies. I have his contact details if anyone would like to give him more work.)

So finally, after almost two years the project was officially launched on 22 February 2019. We invited Enid Harding to cut the ribbon. It was a great day. We had morning tea out on the front verge of the street and some of her co-workers at the exchange also came along. Chair of the Tasmanian Community Fund, Sally Darke, was there along with some of the locals whose stories we'd recorded. The total cost of the project was \$9360.00 with TCF funding of \$5684.00. The shortfall was provided by the Wool Centre.

It has been wonderful to see visitors enjoying the experience, reliving the memory of dialling a telephone number and enjoying the stories. Social media has helped to promote the project near and far and I have known of people coming to Ross specifically to use the phone. When the doors were closed because of Covid a lady rang me asking if the telephone was still in Ross. I had to tell her it was removed for the time being. She had an autistic son and the only thing he wanted to do was come to Ross and listen to that phone. An unexpected issue was the lack of understanding that some millennials have about using a dial on a phone! All of us who remember dialling a number on the phone have no issue, but



*The finished telephone, created by Joe Robinson from 'The Creative', with the list of speakers at the bottom*

millennials have a real problem. I walked past it one day and there was a teenager there with her parents. They were laughing because she didn't know what to do.



*Enid Harding cutting the ribbon, with some of her co-workers behind, 22 February 2019*

In March, Joe took the phone away to upgrade the software, not realising that the onset of Covid-19 would prevent its return. Unfortunately, the phone box's remoteness means that it is not possible to clean it after every use and holding a receiver close to your mouth would be a potential way to spread the virus. We have not come up with a solution yet but hope that when safe, it will be back in action, maybe with some new stories about the year when the world closed down!

Sadly, two of our story tellers have recently passed away, but thankfully some of their stories will live on. After their passing, we gave a copy of their interviews to their families, which they treasured.

I will finish with a wonderful story told by Sandy Harvey, which was re-told by his son at Sandy's funeral.

There's a policeman here named Dick Blair. And up where the plumber lives on the corner, this Bea Davis used to live there – this is going back. It had a beautiful apricot tree. We didn't live too far away, and this policeman had two or three demon boys too. So one day we were out to get these apricots and he saw us. He came round – because we only lived a hundred yards away –



*Enid Harding with an earlier image of herself*

and said, ‘Come on boys’, and ‘Mona’, my sister, ‘I’m taking you up to your parents to straighten things out. And my sister said, ‘Wait a minute. What about that bloke up the top of the tree? Aren’t you taking him too?’ It was his son! [Laughter.] He let us off.

Debra can be contacted at [taswoolcentre@bigpond.com](mailto:taswoolcentre@bigpond.com)

Joe’s email address [joe@thecreative.tech](mailto:joe@thecreative.tech)



*Joe Robinson, Debra Cardogan-Cowper and  
Enid Harding*

### **Do you have a project to tell us about?**

We are always looking for items for the newsletter, anything from a few sentences to a lengthy article. All members are interested in knowing what is going on in the state, and you may make some good contacts through responses to the article. See contact details at the bottom of the page.

### **WEBSITES**

**Oral History Tasmania:** [www.oralhistorytas.org.au](http://www.oralhistorytas.org.au)

**Oral History Australia:** [www.oralhistoryaustralia.org.au](http://www.oralhistoryaustralia.org.au)

**IOHA (International Oral History Association):** [www.ioha.fgv.br](http://www.ioha.fgv.br)

### **EQUIPMENT HIRE**

A **Fostex digital recorder** is available for hire to members. It comes with its own lapel microphones and *User Guidelines*.

Cost of hire: \$20 a week, plus transport costs if necessary. You will also be required to sign a form agreeing to pay to replace any part that is damaged or lost while you have the recorder, up to a maximum of \$250 for individuals or \$500 for groups or institutions.

To make a booking, contact Jill Cassidy on 0418 178 098 or email [president@oralhistorytas.org.au](mailto:president@oralhistorytas.org.au)





## ORAL HISTORY WORKSHOP – COVID-SAFE

10.00 am – 4.45 pm, Saturday 29 May 2021. Room 2, Glenorchy Library, 4 Terry St.

The workshop will be conducted by Jill Cassidy of Oral History Tasmania and will cover all aspects of oral history practice. Topics include: interview technique, possible pitfalls, use of digital recorder, ethics, transcription & publication. Participants will be able to listen to interview excerpts and do practice interviews. Oral History Tasmania’s digital recorder, available for members to hire, will be demonstrated.

Numbers are strictly limited and prior registration is essential.

For safety considerations due to the coronavirus we will not be providing food. Please bring your own lunch and morning & afternoon tea, and you may prefer your own mug. A microwave, hot water, teabags & instant coffee will be available.

Safe spacing requirements will be adhered to, and hand sanitiser available.

PLEASE BRING A MEANS OF RECORDING IF POSSIBLE such as a phone or tablet, and a notepad and pen.

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### ORAL HISTORY TASMANIA Inc. WORKSHOP REGISTRATION

ABN 19264 496 176

Registration must be received by **Wednesday 26 May**. If you are paying electronically or an institution is paying your fee, please ensure that Oral History Tasmania receives a copy of this form.

Name:.....

Address:.....Postcode.....

Email:.....Phone:.....Mobile:.....

Payment of \$\_\_\_\_\_ is for (please tick):

- Registration @ \$25 members Oral History Tasmania
- \$35 non-members
- \$25 students

\$.....

- Membership of Oral History Tasmania (if desired)

\$.....

### **Payment options**

**Electronic transfer to:** Commonwealth Bank, BSB 067 003; account number 2803 2783

Payment to ‘Oral History Tasmania’.

Please provide your name as a reference. Date transferred: \_\_\_\_\_

**After making electronic payment, email form to [president@oralhistorytas.org.au](mailto:president@oralhistorytas.org.au)**

or

post to The Treasurer, Oral History Tasmania, 40/177 Penquite Rd, Newstead 7250.

**Cheque or money order:** made payable to: ‘Oral History Tasmania’ and sent with completed form to:  
The Treasurer, Oral History Tasmania, 40/177 Penquite Rd, Newstead 7250.

**Office use only** Cheque/Money Order/Cash/Electronic Receipt No \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

THE OBJECTIVES OF ORAL HISTORY TASMANIA

promote the practice and methods of oral history  
educate in the use of oral history methods  
encourage discussion of all problems in oral history  
foster the preservation of oral history records  
pursue common objectives and maintain links with other Australian oral history  
associations through membership of Oral History Australia Inc.

MEMBERSHIP SUBSCRIPTIONS

Individuals	\$40.00	Households	\$55.00
Student/unemployed/pensioner	\$30.00	Institution	\$65.00

ORAL HISTORY TASMANIA EXECUTIVE

President, and delegate to Oral History Australia:

Jill Cassidy 0418 178 098 Email: [president@oralhistorytas.org.au](mailto:president@oralhistorytas.org.au)

Secretary: Alison Johnston

Treasurer: Lana Wall

Committee members: Jon Addison, Karin Lê, Jai Paterson, Leonie Prevost, Cindy Thomas.

All correspondence should be emailed to [president@oralhistorytas.org.au](mailto:president@oralhistorytas.org.au) or directed to Jill Cassidy, Oral History Tasmania, Queen Victoria Museum, PO Box 403, Launceston Tas 7250.

*Real to Reel* is edited by Jill Cassidy. The next edition is due in August 2021. Contributions are welcome and should reach the editor no later than 31 July. They can be emailed to [president@oralhistorytas.org.au](mailto:president@oralhistorytas.org.au)