**Oral History Source Sheet No. 33**

**What is Oral History?**

Oral History is people’s memories, their stories and images of the past, recorded on tape. In most cases, it refers to interviews recorded on audio cassette, but it can also refer to videotaped interviews. Oral History interviews are normally recorded in a question and answer format and are conducted by an interviewer who has completed some background research in the area covered by the interview. Interviewees share their memories, and provide information on different areas of historical interest, depending on the purpose of the interview. Interviews are recorded to preserve information that cannot be found in written records, but only in the minds and memories of individuals. Oral History gives a human element to history. While written records provide information on ‘what happened’, Oral History tells ‘how it felt’.

**The City of Adelaide Oral History Project**

The Council’s involvement with Oral History began with a Pilot Project in 1978 which aimed to record on tape the reminiscences of former Lord Mayors, Councillors and Corporation staff to provide and preserve an alternative history of the Council, supplementing the written records held by the City Archives. This initial foray into Oral History continued for a year and then lapsed. In 1984, the City of Adelaide Oral History Project was formally funded, and the first of four successive contract oral historians was hired to work part-time. The oral historian’s brief was to select interviewees from among former Members, Council staff, residents and business people of the City of Adelaide, to conduct background research and record interviews with these people thereby contributing to and expanding the Oral History Collection. The historians undertook 110 oral history interviews with individuals who had a strong association with the City of Adelaide with the aim of capturing their memories, experiences and relationships with the City. The project ended in 2001 but was revived during 2011-13 when another oral historian was engaged to conduct interviews with a further 20 individuals who had made a significant contribution to the City.

**The City of Adelaide Oral History Collection**

The collection includes interviews with former Lord Mayors, Councillors, long serving Corporation staff, long term City residents as well as business people, Market traders and community identities. The oldest person interviewed was born in 1884, the youngest in 1942. Interviewees come from many and varied backgrounds and their recorded memories of the City span almost a century, passing through the Depression, two World Wars, Jubilees, Centenaries, Bicentenaries, bushfires, storms, floods, developments and re-developments.

***Some* of the interviewees represented in the City of Adelaide Oral History Collection**

Mr. John Alexander ACC staff 1939 - 1973, Foreman Gardener

Miss Mary Baker ACC staff 1943 - 1963, Social Worker

Mr Walter Bridgland Lord Mayor of Adelaide 1966 – 68

Mr. P. & Mr. G. Caon City residents & Restaurateurs

Mr John Chappel Adelaide architect & ACC Member, 1971 - 1981

Miss Mary Conry Lifelong resident of Margaret St, North Adelaide

Mr. Peter Griffin ACC staff 1950 - 1985, Traffic/Health Inspector

Mr. K. A. Harris Lifelong resident of Adelaide

Mr. Harold Horsfall East End Market Merchant, 1932 - 1984

Sir James Irwin Lord Mayor of Adelaide 1963 – 1966

Lady Jacobs Member of ACC 1956 – 1978

Mr. C. K. James ACC staff 1904 -1954, City Treasurer 1947 – 1954

Mr. G. and Mr. J. Purcell Former residents East End Market

Sir Arthur Rymill Lord Mayor of Adelaide 1953 – 1954

Miss D. C. Somerville Adelaide Solicitor, 1922 – 1988

Mr. V. & Mrs. E. Vignola City residents and business proprietors

Dr. John Watson Lord Mayor of Adelaide 1981 – 1983

**Using the Collection**

This collection is held in the City Archives. The old tape recordings have now been digitized. Samples of them are available on the City Archives website and copies of the digitized recordings have also been provided to the State Library of SA.

Recordings can be listened to on the Search Room public computer. The recordings were all transcribed and the written interview transcripts are available to read in the Archives’ Search Room. To get the true flavour of oral history and to experience the voice and character of the interviewee, it is recommended that researchers listen to tapes as well as reading through the printed transcript. The transcripts also contain photographs which relate to the interviews. If a researcher is seeking information on specific topics, a large number of the transcripts now contain subject, name and street indexes and timed summaries.

In 2001 Council published the book *City Memory* which contained details of the collection including biographies of all the participants and a detailed index to the contents of the transcripts.

**Access**

The vast majority of interviews in the collection are on open access and therefore available for use by researchers. There is a small number of restricted access interviews which are not readily available. These have been restricted at the request of the interviewee. They may contain sensitive information, or it may just be that interviewees would prefer the material not be used until after their death. In some instances, access to these interviews can be granted, with the permission of the interviewee concerned. If you are seeking access to restricted interviews, please discuss this with the Archives staff.

**Copyright**

Copyright in the tapes and the transcripts of Oral History Project interviews is shared by the Council and the interviewee for the duration of the interviewees life, and vests wholly in the Corporation on the interviewee’s death. If you wish to quote excerpts from the interviews or take photocopies, please discuss this with the Archives staff.

**Further Information**

**City Archives:** Topham Mall, off Currie and Waymouth Streets, Adelaide 5000

**Counter / telephone enquiries:** 9**.**00 am to 5.00 pm Monday to Friday

**Search Room open for public research:** 10.00 am to 4.00 pm Tuesday to Thursday

**Telephone:** +618 8203 7439

**Email:** [cityarchives@cityofadelaide.com.au](mailto:cityarchives@cityofadelaide.com.au)

**Web:** <https://cityofadelaide.com.au/cityarchives>