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OH 561/15

Full transcript of an interview with

MABEL HARDY

On 29 October 1972

By Janet Robertson

Recording available on CD

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Sentences that were left unfinished in the normal manner of conversation are shown ending in three dashes, **- - -.**

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J.D. SOMERVILLE ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION, MORTLOCK LIBRARY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIANA: INTERVIEW NO. OH 561/15

Interview of Miss Mabel Hardy by Janet Robertson, recorded in Adelaide for broadcast on ABC Radio 5CL on 29th October 1972 as part of the series 'Now in retirement'.

TAPE 1 SIDE A

Miss Hardy, your family were pioneers in South Australia, weren't they? What part of England did they come from, and when did they arrive?

Well, my grandfather arrived in 1838. He came from London, where his father was a surgeon and man midwife, and his elder brother had come out with Colonel Light. He had been given a job in the Survey Department, so he came out in 1836. He'd been there for a couple of years, and when my grandfather arrived – who, incidentally, had his twenty-first birthday on the way out – he discovered that his brother was married. And he settled down, and he had a piece of land at Paradise, and he set out to form a little farm there. He worked very hard, and I don't know how much he knew about farming. I wouldn't have thought he had known much about it – he had been trained as a solicitor in London, and as far as I know he'd had no sort of country life – but he made a great success of his farm.

Well, you obviously take a great interest in your forebears. What kind of people were they? Was it a legal background they had, or were they all lawyers, or did they have – they were just professional people generally?

Oh, I think they were professional people generally. Amongst their ancestors there were a good many clergymen and a good many school teachers. They came from the north of England originally, but my great-grandfather had settled in London.

Did your grandfather practise law here, or what did he do?

He did practise law here. He had apparently practised it in London, but both he and his elder brother were tubercular, and their father sent them to South Australia on account of that because he thought the climate might cure them and, in the case of my grandfather, it did – I don't think he ever had a day's illness after he arrived. But the other one was not nearly so strong.

Was he interested in land? You said he started farming – is it land that interested him when he came here?

I think very much. His father had given him money with instructions that he was to buy land with the money, and then, presumably, to sell it at a vast profit and send the money back to Father.

It didn't work out like that?

Oh, to some extent I think it did, but I don't know anything about his commercial transactions or how he came to make money. He made a great deal of money in the first ten years or so that he was here. He was the first Crown Prosecutor.

Oh, yes?

But I think he must have had other interests as well. I think they all did – I think they all imported things and sold them. And then in 1849 he had made enough money to go back to England and see his own people again, which he did. And then he got married and he took his wife for a trip all over the Continent, and then he came back to Adelaide with his wife, and then he started to build Birksgate after he got back. That was the first house he built. And then he decided to move to Mount Lofty because his wife felt the heat so much in the summer. So he built Mount Lofty House, which was the first house up near the summit, and they lived there – his children were all – he had four children and they were all born at Birksgate, but they were quite small when they went to Mount Lofty. He was a very good citizen. He was interested in all sorts of things. He was a Member of Parliament for a long time. He represented the Albert district, which was down in the South-East, so he must have had some property there.

What about your father's generation? What did they do?

Well, my father was – there were two sons. The elder son was called Arthur, and they sent him to England to be educated. Do you remember how Trollope used to talk about people making somebody an 'elder son' –

Oh yes, yes.

– in his books? Well, my grandfather had that sort of idea, and so my Uncle Arthur was the 'elder son', and he was sent to England to be educated at vast expense. He was there for about eight years. And then he started to lose – my grandfather started to lose his money, and my father, who had been sent to St Peter's College, was taken

away from school at fourteen and he had a job in Elder, Smith's – and my father knew Sir Thomas Elder; he'd sold Birksgate to him and they were friends – and he went there and he was there for all the rest of his life till he retired.

What about the girls in the family?

Well, they were apparently educated by their mother. I don't think they ever went to school. But they were very well educated. They were a family that read a lot – they were very intelligent people. And when my grandfather lost his money, which was about the time that my brother and I were born, they worked out that they must do something to support the family, so they bought a typewriter, which had just been invented, and they taught themselves to type and they set up a typewriting office. And there they stayed until they were quite old, for a great many years.

And they did quite well out it, did they?

They did quite well out of it. Everybody knew them, and they were very capable and very well educated. They didn't make spelling mistakes, and things like that.

That wasn't how you came into Daisy Bates' typewriter, was it?

Oh, no, not through them at all. No.

Although did they in fact know her?

Oh yes, they did a lot of her typing?

Did they?

Oh yes, they did, they knew her quite well. They did quite a lot of work for her.

What about your own early days? Where did you live and go to school?

Well, I was born at Malvern, in Wattle Street, in a little house there. And I was a twin – I had a twin brother – and we were very delicate children. The doctor had told my father, anyway, that he thought it was unlikely that we would live, but I don't think he told my mother that. And my grandfather – not the Hardy grandfather, but my mother's father, whose name was Cunningham – he acquired a four-wheeler cab and went – it was a Saturday, and he went off to try and find a parson who would come and christen us, as we were expected to die that day. He had great difficulty in finding one. He said himself afterwards he imagined they

were all at the races! But anyway, he did get one and the parson came and he christened us in the bedroom basin. And Mother had a nurse called Emma, who was an excellent nurse. Mother always said it was due to Emma that we survived. And Emma, who was a very devout woman, bottled the water in the basin and put it on one side for emergencies. And the doctor had told Mother that she must have some brandy and water and a feather alongside of her, and must apply that to our tongues if we collapsed. So Mother did this once or twice, and Emma then came to life with the holy water and gave us a sip of that. So anyway, we survived, so it was evidently quite a good idea.

What about your schooling? Where did you go to school?

Well, first I went to a little school which wasn't a school until we went there. It was run by two Miss Hacks, who lived in the same street as we did, really just across the road from us. And Mother asked them if they would start a little school because there was no school near for us and children were supposed to go to school at the age of seven and we were seven by then. So she did, and at first we were the first pupils. By then I had another sister, and she also went. But after a while a few other children came. We weren't there for very long, I suppose about two years – two or perhaps two or three years – and then we were sent to the Gilles Street state school which was quite a new school and it was the nearest one to us. There were no other schools anywhere near. I liked the state school very, very much, and I realised that the teaching was excellent. I was very fortunate. There were men teachers, but the first teacher that I had had a passion for poetry, and I was mad on poetry myself, and I was delighted with him. He was really a wonderful teacher. And I liked the strict discipline and the being kept in order and having to sit up and fold your arms behind your back and – – –.

Didn't worry you?

No, not a bit, no. I quite enjoyed it.

When did you decide that you wanted to go on to higher education? I mean, women graduates were pretty unusual in those days.

There were a fair number of women graduates in Adelaide – probably more than in some of the other states, and certainly more than in a great many of the English

universities which, up till that time, hadn't thought of having any at all. But there were some. I didn't actually know any of them, but I had a cousin who was older than I was and was a very clever boy. He was at St Peter's College and he was going onto the university, and that made me think about it too, and I just wanted to learn more. I had a passion for reading and I wanted to learn all that I could.

How did you manage to do it, though, because your family were not very well off at that time, were they?

No, they weren't. We never recovered from Grandfather's collapse of his fortunes, and I think my father had to help then, had to help his father and his mother, who was an invalid by then, and his sisters. So we never had very much money, but that didn't worry us at all. But I got a scholarship from the state school – that's one reason why my father had wanted me to go there, because I got what was called a 'government bursary'. There was an examination for that, and we were helped so much by our teachers who gave up a lot of their own spare time, came early to school so as to give us a bit of extra coaching and that sort of thing. And the awful part was I don't think I ever thanked one of them. It never occurred to me to. I feel dreadful about that – it's too late to do anything now. And I got one of these bursaries, and I went to Tormore House School, which was a private school at North Adelaide, run by Miss Jacob who was a well-trained teacher. It was a very good school and they had good teachers.

What was the university like in those days for a woman student?

Oh, well, we didn't see anything of the men –

Really?

– unless you were doing – I mean, if you were doing Medicine you would. But they were kept in watertight compartments, more or less. You might see them in the Library, and you didn't get much chance to talk to them there. The Librarian, Mr Clucas, was frightfully against what he called 'honeymooning' in his library, and if he heard even a whisper he'd come out of his little lair where he lived and he'd rush about making a clicking noise with his fingers and say, 'Silence, please!' So you didn't get a chance to get very friendly with them there, even if you wanted to.

I suppose you met in lectures, though, didn't you?

A few, yes. The only people – the only men who went to lectures in English or History were either school teachers or budding parsons. No other men seemed to take those.

What about the women in the Medical School? They did – how did they operate? Were they kept away from the men too?

Oh yes, they were. When they were doing any dissection or anything of that sort they had a table to themselves with a curtain around it – at the beginning, anyway. I don't know how long that lasted. But Doctor Ruth Mocatta told me that, that when she was doing it they did that.

In spite of all this segregation, do you think that in some ways women were more emancipated and forward-looking then than they are now?

They were certainly quite as much so, I think. We had women there who were interested in all kinds of modern ideas, modern ideas for those days. I think more so – I think the men were more conventional. But, as I say, we didn't see very much of them. They paid a lot of attention to sport – well, we did to some extent – but it meant much more to them, I think, than it did to us. We talked and talked all the time. When I think of the people of today, the young people who talk so much, I'm sure we talked quite as much. We wanted to put the whole world right.

Most of your professional life you've spent as a teacher, haven't you? What type of schools did you teach in?

Well, at first, when I went to the university I was teaching at the same time, to begin with. Miss Jacob had bought the Unley Park School, which was at Hawthorn, and she gave me a job there as a full-time teacher. I hadn't really had any training at all. I was teaching mostly English and History to girls who were doing public examinations, and some of them were older than I was. I didn't like it very much. And the ones who were older than I was were rather stupid, I thought, but still I was quite happy there. But it was a hard day's work and then at the end of the day I went to what was called an 'evening lecture' at the university, which happened between five and six, and after that of course I got home fairly late for dinner, but still I managed it.

How long did it actually take you to get your degree, doing it part-time like that?

It took me six years. Normally it takes three for an Arts degree, but I could only do one subject at a time.

How did you manage financially, because you didn't get much financial help, did you?

I did not. The first year that I taught my salary was twenty pounds a year and that was paid three times a year so that six pounds thirteen and fourpence used to have to last from Christmas till May.

And you managed it?

Oh, I managed it – with a bit of help from my mother. (laughs) But after three years of that, the next year I got twenty-five pounds a year and the third year I got thirty, and by then I was getting a bit wiser to how things went on in the world and I discovered that I could get a part-time job and get at least thirty pounds a year.

What's been your main interest since you retired from teaching?

Oh, well, I think what I've mostly been interested in is different sorts of local history. I think partly it's because I was so much interested in my grandfather and his family and that always gave me an interest in early South Australia, although I never had the sense to talk to him or get him to tell me anything about his life here.

Were there any family records that you were able to refer to?

Well, after he died I was helping my father to sort out a whole lot of papers and things he'd left and we came across two diaries, one being the diary that he kept on his way out here on the ship, and the other one being one after he arrived. And then there was a third one. I've got copies of them – I gave the originals to the archives but I typed them out myself first so I've got copies of them. I'd always had an interest in historical places, and my father, who'd been brought up mostly at Mount Lofty and adored Mount Lofty, he was tremendously interested in that, so he told me quite a lot about his childhood, and I was always interested in that. And then that was how I came to write the first little local history which I wrote, which was the history of Crafers. Crafers was having their centenary and I was on a committee up there which had been formed to decide how they would celebrate it. So they decided to have a sort of garden party in the butcher's paddock, and they also decided that they would like to have a history of Crafers, the first hundred years, and they asked

me to do it. Well, I was terribly busy at the time, because I was running a school of my own at Mount Lofty, but still I managed to do it. It was quite hard work, but very interesting work and I thoroughly enjoyed doing it and it wasn't a very detailed or a really complicated thing to do, but I think – I've always been very pleased with it. I think it does give you the atmosphere of the place and gives you some indication of the sort of people who lived there.

Of course, you yourself lived in Crafers for some time, didn't you?

Yes, I did, I lived up there for quite a long time.

You must see a tremendous change over the years.

Oh, a very great change. So much of it has become suburban. It was the real country, and it was very like – Crafers was very like the English country, really, and the old – the village people who were people who'd migrated from England, they were still English peasants, some of them. They were delightful.

And you knew all those people when you were up there in Crafers, did you?

Oh yes, you knew everybody in those days.

What are you doing now?

At the moment I have promised the Rector of Crafers to help him to do a history of the church. The church is mentioned just slightly in the history of Crafers that I wrote originally, but he wants it done in more detail so I have had a talk to him about it. I haven't actually done anything much myself yet, but I intend to do that.

Miss Hardy, if you could live your life all over again, would there be much that you'd live differently?

I doubt it. But certainly at one time I rather hankered after the idea of being a journalist. But after talking it over with other people I came to the conclusion that the only sort of job that a woman journalist could get in those days was to be a social journalist, just write accounts of parties and race meetings and things like that and what people wore, and I wouldn't have been interested in that at all.

END OF TAPE: END OF INTERVIEW.