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OH 613/6

Full transcript of an interview with

ALAN BRISSENDEN

on 7 April 2004

by Alison McDougall

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, STATE
LIBRARY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA: INTERVIEW NO. OH 613/6

Interview with Alan Brissenden recorded by Alison McDougall on 7th April 2004 at in South Australia for the State Library of South Australia's Friends of the State Library Oral History Project.

TAPE 1 SIDE A

Alison McDougall interviewing Dr Alan Brissenden for the Friends of the State Library of South Australia Oral History Project on Wednesday, 7th April 2004. Tape one, side A. (break in recording)

Can you give me your full name?

Alan Theo Brissenden.

And the date and place of birth?

Thirteenth of October 1932, Griffith, New South Wales.

Now, tell me a little bit about your parents, their names and backgrounds and occupations.

My father, Arthur Piercy Brissenden, my mother, Nellie Annie Rogers was her maiden name. Dad was a third generation Australian, his great-grandfather came out – no, *my* great-grandfather, rather – his grandfather came out from Kent in about 1860. He was a wheelwright. My grandfather was born in Pyalong, Victoria, my father was born at Hillston on the Lachlan River, and the Lachlan's been quite significant in our family's history. I lived in Cowra, which is upstream from Hillston, my father and mother met at Forbes on the Lachlan, which is halfway between (laughs) Hillston and Cowra, more or less, and there are still some of my cousins who live in that area. And my nephew married a girl from Forbes, so (laughs) the Lachlan's quite significant for us.

My mother came from England, she was born in Bridgnorth in Shropshire in 1900 – same year my father was born in Hillston – and they emigrated in nineteen hundred and twelve; and my grandfather on my mother's side was a carpenter and stonemason.

Both my mother and father became teachers; my mother was in the first batch of women to be trained as sewing teachers in New South Wales. When I later joined the Education Department in New South Wales and worked in the head office, there

were two women in that department, one who was the Superintendent of Sewing and one was a Chief Inspector: (laughs) they had been with my mother in that first cohort. They, of course, hadn't married. As I mentioned, my parents met at Forbes when they were both teaching there. In those days, if a woman got married she had to leave the service. However, she continued her interest and when Dad became a teacher in small schools, one-teacher schools, she would give a half-day to teaching girls sewing, and they were very fortunate, of course, very fortunate. They were both excellent teachers, I realised that when of course I became a teacher myself, and wherever we went there were books. We always had books in the house. In fact, the packing cases that the books travelled in later became the bookshelves that they (laughs) rested on. My brother, Bob, who is four years older than I, he became an academic, as I did, and he was also a poet, which I never became. (laughs) And we shared a great interest in books. With both of us, the *Argonauts* session on the ABC [radio] was a very important part of our lives and encouragement to our writing and creative ability generally. Our parents encouraged creativity and music especially – they were both fine singers, my mother played the piano. We used to have Sunday evening sing-songs round the piano every week, Sunday evenings. The Francis and Day *Community songbook* was the main one. And they used to organise school concerts, every year there was a school concert, and this meant that Mum played the piano for them. I used to run around and I think I first went on the stage when I was about three and a half, because (laughs) it gave me something to do during rehearsals. So that encouraged our theatrical instincts and of course mine developed rather more – we'll come to that later.

When I was at school I had a very good library teacher at high school in second – when I was in third or fourth year she came, her name was Patricia Webb, and I discovered later that she was the sister of the late Chancellor of The University of Adelaide, Bruce Webb. Interesting sort of connection. But, to go back to primary school, I went to Neila Creek Public School, which was about eight miles from Cowra; Dad had gone there. We moved around quite a bit. I suppose I ought to say from Griffith we went to Pleasant Hills, which was in the Riverina, we were there for six years and I grew up in those six years with playmates who had names like Lindner and Terlich and Gartner, because these were the descendants of people who had travelled over on a great trek from the Barossa Valley. And of course I didn't

discover that until we came to live in Adelaide. But that is an interesting connection to have later in life. We moved from there to Sutton Forest on the Southern Highlands of New South Wales, near Moss Vale, which was a damp climate. It was very English, extremely English, a place where there were big country estates from Pitt Street farmers, and the school had been built in the 1840s, I think. It was extremely damp, we nearly all died there, my brother got rheumatic fever and my father got influenza, I got pleurisy and congestion of the lungs, and the doctor, when Bob came out of Bowral Hospital – (laughs) it was in the days before penicillin, he was there for many, many weeks – he said, ‘You’ve got to go to a dry climate’. So that’s how we came to live in Cowra. And there was a little school, we went there in 1940, I think it was, ’40 or ’41, and there was a small school eight miles from the town and we drove out there every day. There were only ten to twelve pupils including me, and it was a wonderful place for an education because there were trees all round, there was a creek running round not far away, wonderful birds. The farms around, I used to go and stay on some of the farms sometimes. And I’ve retained friendship with one of my contemporaries there, we keep in touch, and I’ve stayed with him since he’s moved into the town, retired as a farmer.

So anyway, that was primary school. Then high school, Cowra High School, when I got into school drama. There was no drama taught, of course, but we used to have play nights and so on. I devoured all the plays that were in the school library. I should say at Neila Creek there was a library press which had books in it, and most of those I probably read, (laughs) I suppose.

I was going to say access to books, you know, when you’re in the far country, would have been a bit problematic.

Yes. Well, Dad got boxes of books from the Public Library Service, or it may have been an Education Department initiative, I’m not sure. But I can remember the excitement of these quite big boxes coming and we’d open them up, and there was (sniffs) a lovely smell, and – – –. (laughs) Yes. So, as well there was those sorts of books.

But during my high school years a public library opened in Cowra, and during the school holidays, or maybe it was – my memory’s at fault here – it may have been when I came back from university holidays. But I acted a couple of times as

relieving librarian, even though I had no training. It wasn't very difficult to stamp books in and out for a week or two. So that was significant. I think that I was also probably – I also helped in the library at the high school, I think that would be the case. And so that was significant, as I said. And then when I went to the University, I went to St Andrew's College, and I think I was the student librarian sort of in charge of the library there.

So there's quite a strong thread –

Yes.

– coming through there already, wasn't there?

Yes. I hadn't really ever thought about this thread going through, but I can see it, when I was making some notes, that this was the case.

Were your parents involved in other aspects of the community?

Oh yes, yes.

It was a strong part of your family?

Yes, yes. My mother was one of the founders of the CWA¹ at Pleasant Hills, for example. She was involved in the Red Cross. Dad was the Secretary of the parish council of St John's, Cowra. He was also very involved with Freemasons, he was involved with rifle clubs all his life – he was a very good shooter, I've still got some trophies that (laughs) he hadn't thrown out, and there are some in my brother's house in Canberra – and, oh, he was involved in the Primary School Athletics Association in the district. Mum was part of the Women's Guild in the church, I expect – did I mention she was involved with the Red Cross? So that, yes, community affairs were just a normal part of life. So it sort of becomes natural that you do these sorts of things.

Did you have particular ambitions for the future, or your parents have ambitions for you?

No, I don't think so, I think that we were allowed to develop the way we were. Our family history was a little bit unusual, insofar as Bob's illness was a dominating

¹ CWA – Country Women's Association.

factor for many years. He had an enlarged heart from rheumatic fever, and he wasn't able to walk fast or run for quite a number of years, walk upstairs. I think he became ill about 1939 and I know that he used to have to – he was on a cane lounge as a convalescent for a long time. He developed drawing skills and writing skills, he had correspondence lessons, he didn't go to high school until he was in third year, I think, after we'd been at Cowra several years. And I know when one doctor said, 'Oh, look, you're all right, you can walk up some stairs,' you know, 'get up and go', and we went to the local picture theatre the following week, and I remember him walking up the stairs one by one because my mother was so terribly careful still! But eventually he was, when he became an adult, he did the usual things – went sailing, played squash and all that sort of thing. But I *think* it probably did affect his whole system, because he died from a combination of asthma and Parkinson's disease in 1991, and he was only sixty-three I think then. So yes. It also gave him a very interesting attitude to life, having been so close to death when he was in – you know, he was about twelve, I think, at the time – he just didn't worry about anything. So he was – it certainly affected him in that way.

And the family as well.

Yes, yes.

But you were then able, though, to take advantage of a university education.

Yes, that's right. Well, he went on to – he did English Honours and he started in 1947, I started in 1950, so we overlapped by one year which was nice, in college. And then he went off, he went overseas, to Leeds. He had a British Council scholarship.

And yourself?

I had a Teachers' College scholarship to take me through the university. I wanted to do English, I *wanted* to teach. Bob wasn't so sure what he wanted to do, and he went into academia earlier than I did. I had to get – he got a bursary and that helped him, and then when I got my Teachers' College scholarship I helped him also, because I got some money from that. And we both got scholarships to college, residential college. Then we both participated in the university revue in 1950, he was the director and I helped script and acted in it, so that was good. Then yes, I

went on and did English Honours also. I had a Teachers' College scholarship, as I said, which bonded me for five years. I went and taught at Cessnock High School for a year, I went back to Sydney (laughs) every weekend I could –

To make the most of the cultural life there.

– yes, exactly. Because I had started writing dance criticism. When I was a student I wrote for *Honi Soit*, the Sydney University paper, and while I was there I had the good fortune to be asked to write for the *Sydney Morning Herald* also, and so I was the ballet critic for the *Sydney Morning Herald* for three and a half years before I went to the country.

That's at quite a young age, really.

Well, it was really, yes. And when I came back I couldn't take that up again, but I was asked to write for various papers, which I did. And journals. And I was appointed to the head office of the Education Department as a research officer. I developed there a particular interest in archives, because I was writing histories of schools. I suggested that when I'd worked my bond out in 1960 I stay there and start an archive department, but I think the boss of my division saw this as empire building, wasn't very pleased, so I said, 'Righto'. I'd always intended to go overseas, so I went over to England without any firm intentions of studying. I had consulted my old professor, Wes Milgate at Sydney University, about doing a postgraduate course. I said, 'What about Oxford or Cambridge?' and he said, 'Well, I don't think so. It might be a bit expensive.' (laughs) I wasn't likely to get a scholarship. But he suggested University College or London. So I wrote to them and never heard back. So that was that. And when I got there I thought, 'Well, I'll go and have a look at the place anyway', I went up to the (laughs) English Department, spoke to one of the lecturers, he said, 'Well, where have *you* been? Been waiting for you.' And I said, 'Oh!' And the secretary had sent the papers sea mail instead of air mail.

Oh, no.

Anyway, I started then on an MA which I later converted to PhD, ran out of money because I only had my savings that I'd come over with. In the midst of this wrote and asked the girl I'd been seeing for the last few months in Sydney, we'd been

getting on very well – she'd been overseas before. Elizabeth King her name was. I didn't know her name was Elizabeth, I'd known her as 'Libby' at the university. And anyway I wrote over and asked if she'd like to come over and get married, even though I only had about (laughs) a hundred and fifty pounds! Anyway, she had saved up enough for a piano, and that was enough for her sea fare over so she spent it on that and got me instead of a piano. And she had been a secretary for – she was secretary of the French Department when I wrote to her, at Sydney University. When she'd been in England before she'd been secretary to a number of people including David Magarshack who was the translator of Russian novels – Chekhov, Turgenev, plays as well as novels, quite famous in his day, actually – he lived in Hampstead. And so when she came back she was able to go and work for him again for a while. And then she did temp jobs, and then our son Roger was born. And my parents helped us, it was in the last year of – that was '62, the last year of my thesis writing. Libby typed my thesis and I applied for several places in Australia to come back to, and the first one to reply was Adelaide. And interestingly enough the man who interviewed me was Professor Colin Horne, who was on holidays in London at the time.

So you applied for the job at Adelaide and – – –.

That's right, and he interviewed me in London. And he told me years later, (laughs) 'You must have known that you had the job as soon as we finished the interview.' Well, of course I *didn't*. But he apparently cabled Vic Edgeloe, the Registrar, just saying, 'Grab him'. So he must have been impressed. Anyway, we came out here intending to stay here for three years, I was appointed to the English Department, University of Adelaide, and intended to stay for three years and then go back to Sydney. But in fact we've been here ever since, and it's now 2004.

It's been Adelaide's gain.

(laughs) Thank you.

So tell me about your involvement with the State Library from the early days.

Well, my involvement with the State Library was simply as a user, and I didn't use it all that much because I used the Barr Smith Library. And then I helped build up the Elizabethan collection there because my field is Shakespeare and Elizabethan Drama

and Australian Literature, those were my two main areas. My thesis was on Jacobean dramatists, my PhD. And so what I needed most was mainly in the Barr Smith Library. However, later on, when I began to develop a further interest in bibliography, which I'd always had – that is the study of books as physical objects – then I discovered the riches of the State Library's Rare Book Collection, and I would bring my students here to look at books which Valmai Hankel, who was then of course the Fine and Rare Book Collection's librarian, would put out for us and talk to us about, rather like a White Gloves Tour, as they later became known. And then 1976, I think it was, Ira Raymond, the Barr Smith Librarian, set up a postgraduate librarians' course. And I had a Bibliography course as part of my honours course at the university, and we melded the two and set up a special room in the Barr Smith Library. We had a printing press which Professor John Colmer had found, there was lots of type that my colleague Tim Mares had found at Kadina, and we actually got it – one of the students, Cheryl Hoskin, actually got the press into working order – and she later went into library work and is at the Barr Smith Library now, and she later became my research assistant at one stage. Well, now, that library course, which only went for two or three years, meant that several people who became librarians in the State Library or were already librarians in the State Library did that course. So I had a contact in that way, a personal contact. Valmai Hankel was one, Jenny Tonkin was another, I think Joy Sizer [now Searle] was one. Carolyn Spooner was another.

Diana Honey?

Diana Honey was one, yes. So those sorts of contacts became quite significant. And I can't remember when I first became a Friend, to be quite honest. You've got a date there?

No. (laughter) How did it come about, though, that you became involved with the Friends?

Well, I suppose one just did because I wanted to support the Library. I wasn't an active Friend in those days, I was bringing up a young family with my wife. I was involved in things like schools and Scouts and so on and so forth, Adelaide University Theatre Guild, University Literary Society and – you know, all those kinds of things. But I was asked to give a paper. I think I spoke more than once. Because in 1976, I think it was, we set up the Early Imprints Project in South

Australia, which I directed, and it catalogued early printed books, that is books printed before eighteen hundred and one, in South Australian public and private collections. (break in recording)

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE A: TAPE 1 SIDE B

(feedback) So to what extent were you aware of the role of the Friends and their activities in your early contact with them?

I know that they had evenings with talks, because I'd been asked to do this myself. I went to some of them myself, they were held in the Symon Library. I think I went to one of their annual dinners, where there was a speaker. But I didn't really become involved in any (laughs) productive way until I was invited to stand for President, because (laughs) I was the only nomination. So that was after I'd retired from teaching at The University of Adelaide where I'd been since 1963. I took early retirement in '94, and Noël Hayman who was a member of the Committee rang me up, I'll always remember, asking me if I'd like to be nominated and accept the position. And so I thought, 'Well!' (laughs) I knew several people who were on it, of course. I knew that Colin Horne had been President for several years. And so I went home and we talked about it, and this was the first invitation – first of a number, I have to say – that came when the word got round that I'd retired. And fortunately it was the first one and so I said yes.

Do you have a memory of your first Friends' meeting?

Yes, I remember lots of smiling faces and a feeling of pleasure at being among congenial people. And a wonderful feeling of goodwill. And of course, as I say, I did know several people.

Who did you know?

On that first committee there would have been Peter Abbott-Young, I think, Valmai Hankel, Colin Horne of course, Noël Hayman. Ooh, can't remember others.

Can you tell me a bit about their contributions to the Committee?

Yes. Well, Valmai of course was a great mainstay of the Committee and still is, because of her huge knowledge of the Library and its workings, even though it's changed now, and her care for and understanding of books. Very, very wise person and very down-to-earth, as you know. And so she's a great asset – the Library's

national living treasure, I think. (laughs) Well, hard to speak about Colin because I've known him, he appointed me and he's, I suppose, my first friend in Adelaide. And I still miss him. I knew that he'd been the driving force of the Friends for twelve years in his quiet way, but I'd also gathered that he was becoming something of a spent force and that the Friends had become – well, not exactly inactive, but not a very vital organization so far as raising funds and supporting the Library were concerned. Then Peter Abbott-Young I knew from the university, where he worked in the administration, and his principal contribution to the Friends was running the newsletter, which was a small, mimeographed, quarterly journal which carried a variety of articles, some of them scholarly, many of them less than scholarly – a 'comfortable' sort of publication, I would have called it. And I met Sydney Buttrose who I'd also met before because he was friends of close neighbours of ours, and he was in fact the President at the time because Colin had just finished the year before. I met Peter Morgan for the first time, and Kathleen Symes.

Do you have memories of their roles?

Yes. Well, Peter was a wonderful help to me, because he'd been involved for so long and his father was one of the people who set up the Friends in the first place. Kathleen, I think, had joined it in 1932. She's ninety-four this year anyway, our oldest living member. And she was a very good reference point, and such a gentle soul, lovely person.

Why do you think people became involved with the Friends?

I think it was probably because they believed the Library was an important part of our community, and it was worth supporting, and that it had been the channel for funds and gifts. For instance, the Mortlocks had given their money through the Friends, and the Friends had raised the money, two hundred thousand dollars, to buy Banks' *Florilegium*, and many other situations like that. It had been founded in 1932 by a group of gentlemen, several of whom were knights, so it was a socially acceptable association to belong to. It was associated with Adelaide's old families. Now, that aspect of it had gradually declined by the time I came to it, I think that the Friends of the Art Gallery has risen a great deal with a higher public profile, because it's more visible. The Friends of the State Library had been founded first, of course – in fact, it was the first Friends group associated with a Library to be founded in

Australia. And I think that all these sorts of things would have attracted people to belong to it. But when I joined there were about 359 members, and now we have about 500 I think, or is it 600?

Because yes, you said the membership was low, and that was one of your main aims was to increase the membership.

That's right, yes. Yes. As well as that, the way in which the Friends had been accumulating funds to help the Library was terribly easy. When photocopiers were introduced – and I don't remember the particular year, it was under Ray Olding's – – –? I think it was Ray Olding was the Librarian – it was worked out that the Friends would get the income from the photocopiers. And this amounted sometimes to \$30,000, and so that was a very easy way, they didn't have to do very much in the manner of fundraising. Now, when Fran Awcock became Director it was costing money for the Library to maintain the machines and she felt – and I think quite rightly – that the funds from photocopying really should go to the Library rather than to Friends. This meant that suddenly the Friends didn't have (laughs) an easy source of income! So we had to look at other ways of doing it. And so we had quite a lot of thinking about that, and – well, when I came in in '95, the membership funds amounted to \$74,167. Well, in 2003 they were \$190,203. So it's quite an improvement. And that's the result of a number of programs.

We instituted, for example, 'Wednesdays at One', which is a series of talks on the first Wednesday of the month given by people who talk about the books in their lives. And we started off with the Archbishop, Anglican Archbishop, Ian George. We had 54 people in the audience. Later on we outgrew the function room which is now part of the Bradman Collection room, and we moved into the lecture room of the Institute Building, which has a capacity of 150 and we did exceed that a few times, against the rules and regulations. I particularly remember one – probably more people came to hear Robyn Archer than have come to hear anybody else, they were sitting down on the floor in the aisle. And we've had a little bit of a drop during the redevelopment, which is now complete, when we had to move to the Art Gallery, but now we're back in the Library and I hope that the numbers will build up again.

Who's involved with organising that?

Our Executive Officer, Helen Williams. The President with the Program Committee compiles a list. When I was President the whole Committee was involved in compiling a list, but it was generally left to me to make a final selection. Elizabeth Rogers, the Honorary Secretary, is involved with the Program Committee and Pamela Sherwin – I'm talking about current committee people – and we've been able to draw up a list for a whole year, which is good. Almost inevitably somebody drops out, but nevertheless, considering that they give their time, they're not paid, and some of these people I think could be paid if they went on the circuit, (laughs) I think it's quite a wonderful contribution they make. And they are given a gift, and usually one of our facsimiles now, and also a year's membership of the Friends, so it's a little something for them.

Do you think you've generated more members by having people coming to this?

Oh, undoubtedly, undoubtedly, yes. Now, the other, and much bigger, way in which funds have been raised is through the facsimile series, which was initiated originally by the Libraries Board of South Australia in 1962, and that series ran till 1979. But at the suggestion of Mark Gilbert, a member of our committee – I should have mentioned Mark before, shouldn't I? I knew Mark before. He was on the Committee when I came onto it. He'd been an Engineering student but he'd also done Australian Literature at the university. He's a director and partner of Wallbridge and Gilbert, a large engineering firm which was involved with the redevelopment of the State Library, I might say. But he's a very passionate – quietly passionate – bibliophile! (laughs) And in 1995 he suggested that we reactivate the facsimile series, facsimile editions, that the Libraries Board had ceased publishing in 1979. I think this was also a suggestion by a friend of his who was a book dealer, George Lieschke, who subsequently joined the State Library Friends Committee and particularly the Facsimile Committee, and he's been absolutely invaluable. And what the facsimile program does is publish excellent editions in facsimile of rare books, mainly dealing with Australian exploration, in the State Library collections. But more recently we have branched out into publishing Parliamentary papers connected with exploration, and most recently we have published the first translation of Volume II – that is Book IV – of François Péron and Louis de Freycinet's *Voyage of discovery to the Southern lands*, and Péron was the zoologist and Freycinet the

cartographer on Baudin's expedition, Nicolas Baudin's expedition, to Australia, to the Southern lands, and of course Baudin and Matthew Flinders met at Encounter Bay in 1802, as we all know. That has been extraordinarily successful. It's a beautiful edition, with illustrations from the – colour illustrations from the Atlas volume. We have in train a new translation of Volume I of the *Voyage of discovery to the Southern lands* by the same translator, Christine Cooper who is Christine Cornell, and daughter of much-loved Professor of French, JG Cornell, at the University of Adelaide, and that will be published we hope 2005, 2006.

How do you go about choosing what's going to be the next – – –?

(laughs strongly) With much difficulty! Oh, dear! We have a great, long list! But it's on the recommendation of members of our committee – the committee includes Valmai Hankel, for example, and Mark himself, and George Leschke, now Elizabeth Hambly whose husband Peter was formerly Reader in French at The University of Adelaide, he's had a great deal to do with the publication, the checking of the translation and doing research on the translation of the Péron. We decided to do this Péron – it's an interesting story which I'd better not spend too much time on – but the translation had been originally done for the Museum, South Australian Museum, in 1985, funds had run out and it couldn't be published and it was suggested that this be taken up to celebrate 1802-2002 and the encounter. And a grant was given to us by a French organization set up by the French Government called Terra Australis, which has helped, and we had another grant to help us republish Baudin's journal which was part of the original facsimile series published by the Libraries Board, and that's coming out this year. So that was the reason we did the Péron, and that sort of got us onto a bit of a treadmill, because now we've done the one we feel we ought to do the others, and we're in a little bit of a bind about that. But we *are* going to get back to some Australian exploration as well.

Sounds like a very time-consuming process, getting this ready.

Well, it is, actually, yes. I acted as publishing editor, and it was very, very, *very* time-consuming, but – ah well, well worthwhile, in the long run. And we learnt a lot so it won't be – I *hope* – quite so time-consuming the second time round.

What kinds of issues come up with these publications?

Well, for example, how are we going to design it? Are we going to have a ‘th’ for the ‘7th’ – are all those ‘th’s’ going to be above the line or *on* the line? Something as simple as that. Are we going to translate the Latin? There’s a little bit of Latin here and there because Péron quotes from Latin books. Are we going to translate that? Yes, well, we decided we’d better, so that involved getting somebody from the Classics Department to come and help us – which she did very willingly. There are different spellings of names that no longer exist. Now, where do you go to find what spelling we should use? Are we going to keep original forms of punctuation or not? These sorts of things have to be considered and weighed and discussed, and there’ve been lots of emails, lots of faxes with our translator in Sydney, who’s excellent – she’s done a marvellous job, it’s very readable.

Now, the other, and very exciting, thing we’re doing next is not facsimile again, but it’s the publication of Matthew Flinders’ private journals. And that’s being transcribed from the original journals in the Mitchell Library by Tony Brown, Anthony J Brown whose book, *Ill-starred Captains*, details the story of Flinders and Baudin, and he’s working on that with Gillian Dooley, the Rare Books Librarian at Flinders University – has a special interest in Flinders, of course – and, although I’m not acting as publishing editor, I am consultant for that. (laughs) I couldn’t give the time to another one so soon, I’ve got to have a little bit of my own life and my family’s life. So it’s fascinating work, and it makes money for the Friends. We do a *de luxe* edition of these books and an ordinary standard edition, and of course Friends get special discounts and, as I say, it’s the major way the Friends are making money at the moment.

And you’ve developed a loyal following?

Oh, absolutely. Our *de luxe* editions regularly sell out. And the Péron sold out before publication! (laughs) So it’s very good. Because they’re limited editions, you see.

So it’s wonderful to have gone from money from photocopies to something very creative that is so linked with the Library.

Yes! Yes, indeed. We even get reviewed now, which is good – and very good reviews, too.

Excellent. Are there any differences of opinion in how the money that's raised by the Friends is used?

Yes. The management of the Library would like to see us buying things like furniture sometimes. (laughs) It was suggested when the new development came that perhaps we could buy some display cases or this and that. We staunchly argue against that, because our charter, really, is to buy books that would not normally come within the range of the budget – not only books, but other things as well, such as manuscripts, pictures, paintings and so on. So it's quite firmly – to my mind, anyway – enshrined in our beginnings what the money should go to, and that is enhancing the collections, not buying movable objects such as furniture, which will go the way of all things. (laughs) And of course we do have special events for which we raise money, like the *Florilegium*, which I mentioned. The *Book of Kells* was another, and for the redevelopment we spent \$20,000 and had some special fundraising for that to buy a facsimile of the *Lindisfarne Gospels*, which makes a lovely pair with the facsimile of the *Book of Kells*, and the *Lindisfarne Gospels* cost \$20,000.

You were quite involved, I think, with the glorious *Antiphonal* –

Oh yes, yes – – –.

– in the '90s. (break in recording)

Yes, well, the *Antiphonal* is one of the greatest treasures in this library, and in fact was included in an exhibition in the National Library, and was one of the star attractions last year of 'Treasures in Australian Collections'. The State Library bought this and presented this to the Library – the *Friends*, rather, the Friends of the State Library presented it to the Library in 1945. It's a magnificent thirteenth century Italian *Antiphonal* which is written on vellum, it contains text and music for the sung responses for church services for the temporal cycle of the Christian year from Christmas Eve to the end of the Feast of the Epiphany, as they were celebrated in a Northern Italian monastery. So it's quite rare – in Australia, anyway; go to Italy and you'll find hundreds of them, but – – –. (laughs) In 1992 the *Antiphonal* was withdrawn from public access for conservation treatment – we'll come to that in a minute – but, to go back to when we got it, it was bought for only £77 10s 0d (laughs) at an auction in New South Wales, and that's the equivalent of about \$4,000

today, I should think. I should think that if it came up for sale today it would be about three-quarters of a million dollars, so that's it. It's the most valuable single item in the State Library's Rare Book Collection, so we're very proud to have presented that to the Library.

It was, however, felt that it had not been handled extremely well over the years, it had not been kept in properly air-conditioned conditions in the early days, and so it was decided that it should be treated with conservation and that was as long ago as '92. And it was *completely* taken down, the pages were all taken apart, and it was decided to use this opportunity to – in 1998 – to make the manuscript accessible through computerised, digitised images, and it's been released on the internet complete with transcription and translation and notes – and even music, part of it – and, so far as we know, at the time it was the first entire Medieval manuscript of its kind to be put on the internet, to be digitised. So it was a world first.

One lovely response to this was a letter we had from someone in a school in Victoria, from a teacher who said his whole classroom had been turned into a Medieval scriptorium, (laughs) because the boys were so very interested – and maybe girls as well, but I think it was a boys' school – and here it was up on the internet for them to look at and learn how to do it. So that was wonderful.

That could be a significant event for particular children, and actually give them an idea of something they might like to pursue later on, you know, and to broaden your base of people that you can reach. Wonderful.

Yes, yes. Well, I mean, it's worldwide, so we have – I know that there have been enquiries about it from various parts of the world. So that's really terrific. And the newly-restored book was launched, I suppose you could say, during the 1998 [Adelaide] Festival [of Arts]. Robyn Archer was there, who was Director of the Festival that year, and part of the music, one of the 'Glorias', had been transcribed by a man called Tom Farnan – who just happens to be my son-in-law – and he has a small choir called Flight of Ideas, and Flight of Ideas actually sang this as part of the launch. And it was, I expect, the first time (laughs) it had been heard for hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of years.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE B: TAPE 2 SIDE A

Alison McDougall interviewing Dr Alan Brissenden, 7th April 2004, tape two side A. (break in recording)

So that must have been a very exciting occasion.

Yes! And to go along with it, we produced a range of commercial artefacts, I suppose you'd call them – postcards and greeting cards, bookmarks and a book written by Jenny Tonkin called *The glorious antiphonal*. I don't think there are any copies of this left, because they went over to the exhibition at the Australian National Library. We kept a few back and they wrote and said, 'We've sold them all, could we have some more?' So I think we haven't got any left. So it's a rare book itself now, little booklet. And so that was part of our publication program, which is a fundraising thing. And there are other fundraising means, of course. I've mentioned our talks, but there also – as well as talks and the publications like the facsimiles – but there are also excursions. These are a fairly recent innovation that came from a suggestion by our Honorary Secretary, Elizabeth Rogers. And these are visits to places with literary connections. The first one was to Laura and Auburn and other places associated with CJ Dennis, and that was just a one-day one. In March 2001 we extended it to over three days and two nights, and that was to the South-East and places including – to places associated with writers, including Adam Lindsay Gordon and Will Ogilvy and John Shaw Neilson and Max Harris. There's been one to Western Victoria, there's been one to round Eudunda connected with Colin Thiele. The next one is to Kangaroo Island, and there are some literary relationships there as well as discovery ones, of course, with Flinders and Baudin. And that ties up with our facsimile publications.

So are there always more people that want to go on these than places?

Oh! Well, they're *always* all booked out, and some people go on waiting lists. And I think the Laura one, the very first one, they had to repeat it twice. (laughs) So yes, it's very good. And they do make money for us as well.

And who came up with that idea initially?

It was Elizabeth Rogers, our Honorary Secretary, and she's the organiser. And it's very interesting, the letters of appreciation we get from people who've been on them.

But again that must take an enormous amount of honorary effort.

Well, absolutely, yes. It's a great deal of work, but Elizabeth thrives on it, apparently, (laughs) as well as doing all the usual honorary secretary things which she does.

And the Friends benefit by people enjoying a literary event together in close proximity, not just a one-hour ---.

Exactly, exactly. And we have also had Friends who've taken friends or relatives who aren't Friends at the beginning, that almost all those, they become Friends of the Library too.

Ah, yes.

So, you see, it's ---.

A stroke of genius.

Yes, that's right. So those sorts of things work very well.

And we also have raffles. We're fortunate that people give us things to raffle – for instance, Kingston Estate has on a number of occasions given us magnums of wine, and it seems that there's no trouble in raising a thousand dollars with a raffle for a magnum (laughs) of Kingston Estate shiraz or cabernet sauvignon or something. So we have those kinds of things, which are more usual. But I think that we are able to offer very specific kinds of events which people are interested in, and I think that certainly helps us and it also gets us involved with other organizations.

We don't charge for Library tours, but our guided tours are also very popular, and we have a group of guides who undergo training for quite some time, and one of our committee members, Gerri [Gerrit] Stafford, built up the guiding system, although it had been in existence for some time before. He was previously the Reference Librarian at Flinders University, and he's a collector of miniature books himself, and gave one of our talks on this, 'Books in my life', several years ago. He's just stepped down and has been – his successor is Elizabeth Hambly, another Committee member, who was for many years the librarian at Wilderness School, so she's extremely involved. She, as I mentioned earlier, got her husband involved because of his French connections! (laughs) He did a quite wonderful thing, in fact: he's found out which libraries have original copies of the French edition of Péron's *Voyage of discovery to the Southern lands*. Got on the internet, found out which

libraries all over the world, and so we have sent brochures about our English translation to all these libraries.

Right. So again, spreading that word.

Spreading the word –

Yes.

– yes!

That networking is such an important part, isn't it.

Oh yes, invaluable. And during last year, Admiral Bellec, who was the head of *Terra Australis*, which is the organization which gave us funds for the publication, in France, he and two other people from his committee came to Adelaide, went to Kangaroo Island to present a plaque to put on Kangaroo Island and a bust of Baudin, which now is in the Zoological Garden, in the zoo here – very appropriately, because that was – the Baudin expedition was a great scientific expedition, and took back 2,000 exhibits. What am I trying to say? (laughs) Examples – specimens, that's the word. So yes, so we've got quite a few good connections.

What about the connections you have with the Library staff and leadership? When you became President Fran Awcock was –

Yes.

– the Director.

Fran was the Director.

So what kind of relationship did the Friends have there?

Really excellent, really excellent. I know that in the past there have been Directors who were not very friendly to the Friends, for some peculiar reason. In fact, I've heard said that one of them actually thought that we shouldn't exist and tried to get rid of us. That was some years ago. But Fran Awcock was exactly the opposite. She came to virtually all our meetings – the Director is an *ex officio* member by virtue of – all Directors are *ex officio* members – by virtue of who they are. Fran had a great deal to offer, kept us very much in touch with what was going on in the Library, was very helpful to me, very supportive. We got on well, we used to have regular meetings, and I was very sorry of course – as we all were – when she went.

Her successor, Robyn Collins, we got on very well with also, and when Bronwyn Halliday was appointed the association continued. And in fact it was due to Bronwyn, really, that the current President was found – Tony Shinkfield, who was not a member of the Friends, and we drew up a list of people to ask, invite, but none of them felt they could. And I discussed it with Bronwyn and she knew Tony Shinkfield, who was formerly Head at St Peter's College and had retired, he was I think Chair at one time of the St Mark's College Council, was certainly on the Council, and she suggested he might be interested. So I went to see him and he'd certainly not thought of it but he accepted the offer and I think he's doing a very good job. And so yes, our relationship with the Director has been very good.

Also with the Board. The Board Chairman in my time as President was Peter Wylie, and again we used to have – well, at the beginning, regular meetings, but they became a bit irregular because we suggested that somebody from the Board ought to be a member of the Friends Committee to act as a link, and Felicity Gunner was a very good representative of the Board on our Committee. I don't think that's continued, but I think that I would try to reactivate it because I think it's necessary.

In terms of communication –

In terms of communication and to know what we are doing. I think it's very important the Friends know what the Board's thinking and we can have some input to the Board as well. Because we are a very significant body in the structure of the Library, and have been since 1932! (laughs)

You have a fount of knowledge and familiarity with what's been going on in that time.

Yes, there's quite a lot of history. In fact, there's been more continuity in the Friends than (laughs) there has been with either the Board or the Directorate!

And what about the Libraries Board, or is that –

That's the Libraries Board I was talking about.

– that is the Libraries Board.

Yes.

Yes.

Yes. The current Chairman of the Board is Peter Goldsworthy –

Right, yes.

– who was one of our speakers for ‘Wednesday at One’ some years ago.

And what about between the Friends and the general staff? You’ve mentioned Valmai Hankel.

Yes. Well, since the redevelopment I think that we don’t have so much contact. I hadn’t thought of this before, but it’s a bit like the difference between Old Parliament House and new Parliament House [in Canberra], which I understand is very isolating. I heard Parliamentarians saying that they missed the rubbing together of people in close confinement. Now, in the old building our office was right over in the corner, in the north-west corner, so to get there one had to go past the Reference Desk, right through the Library, so you were in constant view and contact with people and you’d say ‘G’day’ as you went past. Well, our new room is at the northern end of the Mortlock Chamber, and you come in – you don’t even go past the reception desk, you turn immediately right and you don’t see anybody in the Library at all. I think that’s a great pity. Hadn’t thought of it before. But I’m not saying that the new Library isn’t great, in many ways it is. The light, the access to the books, the banks of computers which come first (laughs) I’m afraid! You walk in and there are the computers and the books are behind the computers. Well, we are in the technological age so we can’t do much about it, but not to my way of thinking is it the best way to arrange things.

It sounds like you just have to work a little bit harder now to keep up the contact.

I think we will, I think we will. I wouldn’t know quite a few of them now, because of course we’ve lost so many – a third of the Library staff have gone in the last five years. And so there are new people who have come in since. But the opportunity to meet them, I guess, for Friends and Committees of Friends is not there where it used to be.

And in terms of having someone to research something for you from within the Library, do you still feel you have that level of contact?

I think that that would be there. I haven’t had need for that, but I think that would be – there’d be no problems at all. And of course our Executive Officer, Helen

Williams, is a constant link, and she's a very good 'person' person, so that I think that she will maintain and develop links with new staff.

Yes. That was a position that evolved over time, didn't it.

Yes, indeed. I think it was 1989 that the first part-time Executive Officer was appointed, and she's now virtually full-time. It used to be a volunteer position, then we managed to get some funding from the Libraries Board for her position, and now it is a position which is – I *think* – built into the Library's salary structure.

So you don't have to –

We don't have to worry about –

– fund that.

– no. I think it's still done on a triennial basis, but we don't have to worry about it any more, which is good.

Have the Friends ever taken on the role of lobbyist or pressure group?

Not in my time. I know that Colin – there was a period when the Library was having real problems and the Friends spearheaded a movement to regain the position, insofar as the funding went with the government, that it had had in the 1950s. I think this would have been in the early '80s. I think that the Library has *never* been properly funded, it's not a glamorous institution. It's got a bit more glamour now, but it's not had – it's been the Cinderella, which I think is quite wrong as it's the major information resource for the whole state. I can't understand why Parliamentarians – who have *all* made use of it throughout their lives, they've just taken it for granted – how they can't see that it's such a vital institution which needs proper funding. I mean, even the redevelopment, the original estimate that Fran Awcock came up with was something like \$68 million, I think – it might have even been a bit more – well, it ended up being \$48 million, I think. And it's *very* short-sighted, it's just so short-sighted. And now the budget won't even allow us to get a display case for our Friends products to be placed in the foyer. I mean, it's quite ridiculous. And we just mustn't buy that ourselves, that's part of the Library's business. I mean, what we're concerned with, as I said earlier, is to – and I'll quote this because it's in 1936, a resolution in 1936, that the Friends' funds be used, quote: 'to help the Library by acquiring manuscripts and other unique pieces, books of

exceptional rarity or beauty or interest, which could not be obtained in the ordinary way’, unquote. And I think we have to stick to that, as I said earlier.

And we’ve certainly, in recent years, done that. For instance, there was a very beautiful painting by John Gould of blue wrens, which was used in his – not that he did the colouring, of course – but those two blue wrens which featured on the front cover of *Bibliophile* a couple of issues ago, we now have that painting in the Library. So if you go to the Treasures Wall in the new extension, you can see the painting hanging up above the book where it’s open at the plate, and that’s a wonderful thing to be able to do.

Absolutely.

Then of course we bought the *Lindisfarne Gospels* facsimile, as I said. A few years the Children’s Literature Research Collection, a gift to that was a very rare jigsaw puzzle of the 1840s or 1860s called ‘Early risers’ – made in England, but it contained a number of Australian animals and birds, you see. Then we recently bought a painting by Stan Ostoja-Kotkowski, who is a pioneer in I suppose you’d call it these days ‘digital art’ in Adelaide, and we have several of his papers here, I think, and this was a valuable addition, you see, to them. So that we not only buy books, but we buy works of art and other artefacts as well.

You mentioned the Mortlocks earlier as –

Yes.

– major benefactors, and I’m aware of Mrs Mortlock’s name appearing quite often in *A richness of gifts* that was published.

Oh yes, yes.

Has there been any effort to encourage others to do the same?

Through the Friends? We have received gifts without asking. I mean, (laughs) I felt – well, most recently we received a magnificent bequest, I can’t remember right now how much it was, from Jean Whyte, who was a librarian and became head of the Library School at – I think she set up the Library School – at Monash University. And she died last year and left us a very large amount of money, you know, running into the tens of thousands. Or even hundreds of thousands, I think. Anyway, I shouldn’t be mauding on, should I? (laughs) I’ve raised sponsorship in small

ways, for example, one generous sponsor gave us \$5,000 for the publication of *Bibliophile*. I think that probably more could be done, but the role of getting the big bikkies has now passed to the Foundation.

Have you been involved with that?

Yes, as President of the Friends I was automatically on the Board of the Foundation, and it had also been a relatively moribund organization for some years. It was set up by the Friends and so in some ways it's the greatest gift to the Library (laughs) that the Friends has ever made! I think we could say that. Because now – well, let's go back a little bit: it was under Fran Awcock that the Foundation became revitalised, and over a million dollars was raised to mount and present the Bradman Collection which is in the Institute Building now, and then has been money raised through the Foundation for the Wine Collection, Wine Literature Collection, which is now online. And various other things. It was the Friends' suggestion – in fact, I think it was probably *my* suggestion, if I recall – but anyway, the suggestion came from the Friends that the first major presentation to the Library by the Foundation was a facsimile of the Ellesmere Chaucer, which is the finest Chaucer manuscript in the world – it's a big folio, as big as an antiphonal – and it's in the Huntington Library, California, where in 1979 I was fortunate enough to have a Fellowship, so I actually *saw* the real thing! (laughs) But I'm very pleased that the Foundation said 'all right', they'll give some money to buy that.

But I have to say it would probably be a good idea if the Friends did go out and try to garner more income from grants and so on. Well, I suppose you could say grants from Terra Australis, which amounted to \$27,000, is very significant – for publication – well, there you go. It mightn't be for something which you see on the shelves – well, you do in a way, the books are there – but that means that we are able to publish these books, we're able to sell them and therefore to raise funds. And so that's one way. But I guess that ordinarily now a magnificent bequest like the Mortlocks', Mrs Mortlock's, would come through the Foundation rather than the Friends. The Foundation didn't exist, of course, in those days.

And the Foundation has a broader brief than the Friends.

It does, yes. And it also has an Associate Director, the Foundation Manager is an Associate Director of the Library now. When she first came I think she was a part-

time employee and then became a full-time employee of the Library, and now is in charge of [what] you might call 'library development' funds, fundraising, 'fundraising development officer', I suppose you'd call her.

So it's become a broader brief that's been acknowledged with increased status, almost.

Yes, exactly, exactly, yes, that is the case.

So how is the relationship between the Friends and the Foundation?

Oh, it's pretty good, really. I guess it was a little bit uneasy at the beginning when it started on this upward march, because I felt we could see that people who might have supported the Friends in a big way would now consider the Foundation a place to put their funds, and that certainly has happened. However, I've described some of the ways in which we've raised funds, and they've gone into the Friends in different ways, you see. And being a voluntary organization, well, we're quite happy to hand over to the professional side to really do the really big fundraising and go out and lobby industry.

And you can enjoy spending.

(laughs) Yes, that's right!

Has the social side of the Friends been an important part of your involvement, of people's involvement?

Ah, yes. Yes. For me personally, you mean?

For you and, yes — — —.

And the Friends generally. Right. Yes, well, we always have, for example, a dinner and our annual general meeting, quite often with some entertainment – sometimes a speaker, sometimes musical. And that's always a very joyous occasion. In fact, they get booked out. We've instituted lunches in Spring and Autumn, with a speaker. And there are occasions, for example, exhibition openings: when John Martin's closed some memorabilia, quite a lot of it, came to the State Library. There was an exhibition called 'Remembering Johnny's', I think it was called, and the Friends had a special viewing of that, as there was for the *Antiphonal* exhibition. And I imagine that now we've got the new Library and particularly when the Mortlock Library – Mortlock Chamber, I have to call it now – becomes an exhibition space, I expect that

we will be involved in launches and previews and those sorts of things, and they'll be very nice social occasions. And I must say our Catering Committee, which is an *ad hoc* committee but generally seems to be under the kindly guiding hand of Noël Hayman, they do a wonderful job with sandwiches and beautiful food. So that, yes, social occasions of that kind are a very important part of our life.

Do you feel the types of people who join the Friends has changed over time now?

I think that – (pause) yes, I'd like to see a few more of the really wealthy kinds of patrons (laughs) that used to be the case in the '30s and '40s, because I think that they would be valuable assets. We still do have some, and they're very, very welcome and helpful. But we don't have quite the same social *cachet* as I believe that we used to have then. I think the composition of the Friends is (pause) the grey-headed brigade, particularly, retirees. I'd *love* to see more young people involved, but I have to admit that the Library's image, even with its upmarket redevelopment, is still not quite the kind of image that attracts the twenties and thirties people.
(break in recording)

END OF TAPE 2 SIDE A: TAPE 2 SIDE B

I suppose I'd have to say that people in their twenties, thirties and forties don't have quite the same amount of time as retirees like me, retired people, to give to voluntary activities but, as I say, I'd like to see more of them coming to our functions. We gave up having evening talks except an occasional one – we used to have regular ones, but the attendance became fewer and fewer, and now our main one, as you know, is 'Wednesdays at One' and that's not a time when ordinary people can come, I guess. And I've just got to face that fact.

Do you feel that people's sense of community involvement and volunteerism has changed?

I think that that's right. People have less time, I think that it's – in the 'gimme' society which we live in these days – it's the older people who came from an earlier generation, like me, who grew up with a sense of responsibility for the community. Even though I know 'volunteerism' is the big word and everything, and volunteering, and there's a great deal of it and it's being recognised as it never was

before, I think that for our particular area there doesn't seem to be very much interest from the younger generation.

So how do you perceive the future of the Friends, then?

We'll certainly go on as we are. I think that we'll develop new means of raising funds for the Library and becoming involved in the Library, particularly with the redevelopment I can see we can make use of the areas that are there. If we could get some younger people onto the Committee – and in fact, I must say that we do have two new members this year who are younger, I've just remembered (laughs) because I've only been to one meeting [with them]. And there's a distinct possibility that they can come up with some fresh ideas that may be more appealing to people of their generation. I hope that that will happen.

I'd like to talk a little bit about the Library redevelopment –

Yes.

– and how you viewed the process and the outcome.

Right. It was a very messy process, a *very* messy process. Finally – and we lost Fran Awcock owing to it, because it was the government – she had been around the world on a fact-finding tour and came back with some magnificent ideas and plans drawn up and all the rest of it, and I'm afraid that good as she was as an Arts Minister, Di Laidlaw and Fran didn't appear to get on, and I think that this might have been a cause of difficulties. In the event, the money that was needed was not forthcoming, and when Fran paid a visit to her home town of Melbourne and Jeff Kennett gave her an open chequebook to redevelop the – more or less – the Victorian State Library, she said, 'Yes, I'll go'. It only took half an hour. It was (laughs) pretty amazing! But anyway, it was very typical of Fran that she came back, she did not tell anybody until she had called a meeting of the whole Library staff the next morning and told [them] that she was resigning to go to Melbourne. And I thought that was a magnificent thing to do.

So she was very strong on communication and caring for the employees?

Yes, absolutely. Absolutely. It was a wonderful culture that had developed during her time here. Well, there was a little bit of a hiatus during Robyn Collins's time, which was only a couple of years, and then Bronwyn Halliday was appointed who

was a management consultant, an expert who lectures in management, in fact, and she had written a report on the Library, in fact, for the Arts Department. And so she was appointed as the next Director, and she was in many ways an excellent person for the job because she got things done, she was not emotionally attached to the Library in any way, she was able to cut staff – did it pretty diplomatically, but it was very, very hard indeed, very hard indeed. She suffered a bit too, although people didn't realise that, because underneath her managerial carapace she's a very sensitive person, I think, Bronwyn. And she did get it done and she brought it in within budget. And we've got a very interesting building, as a result, and I think in many ways it's a brilliant building, but it's rather cold. I think it's wonderful in all its light, lightness, but I think the entrance areas are not inviting, I think this is most unfortunate, and you go in feeling a sense of lost space. I mean, the Treasures Wall is great but it's over to the side and you'd never know it was there unless somebody told you about it. The Friends are over, as I said, on the northern end of the Mortlock Chamber, and it's wonderful having that space, it really is, we've got the best Friends premises of any Friends organization in Australia, I should think. The Mortlock Chamber is going to be an exhibition space, for which a great deal of money has been raised – I think each bay, which used to be bays of books with a desk down the centre with chairs where one worked, with windows at the side, in a very typical manner for that period of library building, those bays are now becoming exhibition bays, and the Friends have contributed with the Foundation to one called 'Radical South Australia' which will have a changing exhibition on South Australia. And the Library will lose – has lost – that as a library work area, I think it will just become a dead space because it's not a through space to anywhere, nobody's going to walk through it, they'll have to go there to look, and I think that's a terrible mistake.

We were told – we were sold the story, and I do think we were conned, say this on tape, (laughs) doesn't matter who hears me! – but I do think we were conned because we were told that it couldn't go on being used as a library space, as a work space and to keep books, because the books were deteriorating. And I think that that was probably a furphy. Anyway, that's what's happened, and we have this wonderful new light, technologically okay, area for the new Library, which is, as I say, when you get there it's quite good. But I don't think it's a friendly space to

walk into, and I don't think that the entrance to the Library really works properly, even though it's pretty spectacular from the outside.

So again, perhaps people are having to work a bit harder to make it work, do you think?

Yes, yes, I think so, yes. I mean, you come in, it's just a blank open space, you've got the circulating library on the – Adelaide Lending Library on the left, and the very nice Flinders Gallery, which is good, but then you have to walk up some stairs onto the level to get to the main library. I mean, if there'd been stairs going *straight* up it would have been much more welcoming, I can't understand why they didn't do it. Anyway, there we are, we've got what we've got, and so far as efficiency goes I'm sure it's a *much* more efficient building (laughs) than the old one!

So just in way of finishing up, just reflect on your time with the Friends, and perhaps particularly your time as President, and what you feel you've gained from your involvement.

Well, the time went very fast. I was there for six years and I had a *wonderful* committee to work with. I mean, we couldn't have achieved what we did in those six years without the committee we had, and the Executive Officer, Helen Williams, who, when she was part-time, used to come in and work a nine to five day quite often, at least ten to three, and she's really just being paid now for what she always did, in a way. And she had come in only just before me so we sort of grew up together through the Friends, which was very nice. And Elizabeth Rogers was appointed Secretary a couple of years after I came, and she had been Executive Officer at Carrick Hill, so she was very experienced. And she's been a wonderful asset. And then the members of the Committee – there's not been a what I would call a 'dead' person on the Committee, everybody has had some kind of portfolio. I mean, there was Alison Dolling who ran the newsletter that we published and gave a great deal to it. She's now handed over to Jane Walkley, who was a member of our Publications Committee for a while beforehand. And the other various members of the Committee all had things to do and have done them.

You mentioned one member who decided to leave – – –.

Oh yes, Peter Salu – oh, very early on, yes. Peter Salu was a young lawyer who was on the Committee the first year when I came, and he was a little bit of a rebel, and he

felt that we ought to be much more politically active and lobbying Parliamentarians more, all that kind of thing. And I dare say we *could* have done more of that. My relationship with the Minister was very good, but I never really had an inclination to take Library matters up with her because I was concentrating on developing Friends. I think that perhaps when the redevelopment started we did talk about it on the Friends Committee and wondered if we ought to get involved with the action, but I think it had gone beyond the point where we'd have been of any assistance at all, and it was much better for us to develop our own programs which were coming along and beginning to bubble, and so we did that. And I think, though, that we have assisted the Library rather more than if we'd spent time lobbying Parliamentarians, which takes an awful lot of time. And that's my view. Maybe I was wrong, maybe we should have got in there and fought tooth and nail. But I think it wouldn't have contributed very much.

And there are so many hours in the day.

(laughs) Exactly. And so far as myself concerned, what I've gained from it: well, I've certainly gained lots of friends. And it was – ordinary friends as well as friends of Friends! – and, well, I have to say that, without being too immodest, I do feel we did achieve quite a lot under my Presidency, just the number of members, to begin with, which I mentioned earlier, almost doubled; and the amount of Friends funds which, invested at interest, brings us income. And we've certainly added some very beautiful items to the collections, and we've added beautiful items to people's homes and libraries through our facsimile and printing and publication program. So yes, it was a very rich period. (laughs) It also took six years out of my life which I'm still trying to regain. I had a book on the stocks which is still on the stocks! But I guess it will get done eventually.

Are there any other comments you'd like to make about the Friends?

Well, I think it's a very strong organization now, and I think there's no reason why it can't continue to develop new avenues of exploration in helping the Library and supporting the Library, and that certainly would be my aim while I'm still on the Committee, to do that.

Well, thank you – – –. (break in recording)

I suppose that I could also add something about *Bibliophile*, which I dare say no-one would mind me saying I'm a bit proud of. (laughs) We decided to turn it into an annual publication instead of a quarterly one. My aim was to turn it into a fairly scholarly journal, but one which had popular appeal as well. So we've turned it into a journal which is about 36 pages – rather glossy, I suppose you'd say, because we have colour on the covers and on the inside covers, which allows us to have colour reproductions. We have high-class colour printers available to us, it's beautifully designed by John Kingsmill of Tabloid and his staff, and the – well, to give you an example, the last issue was devoted particularly to the performing arts, and there was an article by Jo Peoples, Manager of the Performing Arts Collection, South Australian Performing Arts Collection, on collecting the state's theatre history. There was one from Neil Thomas, the State Library's – he's more or less the music librarian, I suppose you'd say – 'Collecting the state's music history'. Then one from New York Public Library's Dance Collections librarian, Monica Moseley, 'Collecting the world's dance history', because the New York Public Library has the largest collection of dance material in the world. Then one by Cheryl Hoskin on the Allan Wilkie-Frediswyde Hunter-Watts Collection – (laughs) a wonderful title! – which came to the Barr Smith Library. And then there were reviews of books on theatre and a few – it has a lovely cover of a song about the Boy Scouts called 'We're prepared' in the State Library's collection, written and composed by Jack Fewster, writer of 'Sister of pal o'mine', 'Brother Bill Jim', *et cetera, et cetera*. That was in the 1920s, I think. And then I've tried to have – I edit it, and I try to have a theme for each of them. And the theme of another one, for example, is on art, and they've had illustrated books in the Barr Smith Library, the Art Gallery of South Australia's research library, by the librarian there – who is another old student of mine, I might say, Jim Whittington. Roger Andre of the Archives Department here, recently retired, wrote on Friends-funded art works, and one of our Friends wrote on Thelma Afford, whose costume designs are in the State Library. And one was a botanical issue, another one was on institute libraries along North Terrace. And so I've tried to make it, as I say, a bit more scholarly, and I think it's worked. We get a lot of compliments on it.

There was some concern, I believe, when it was first in the of change.

Yes, yes. People were a bit wary. (laughs) But I think that would be well over. Not least because of the letters and emails we get ---.

It sounds like another great collaborative effort again.

Oh, yes. Yes, it is. Yes. It's very good. I mean, our Publication Committee looks at all the articles, I invite articles but I also invite people to contribute, but I've only had a couple of people come to me and say, 'Look, I'd like to write about something'. Two or three I've had, and we've accepted them, but if they hadn't been up to the mark they wouldn't have been accepted. The others I've asked people I felt could write on the specific subjects that I want. And, as I mentioned earlier, we've managed to get some very good sponsorship to publish it, and so I feel it's fairly successful. It's not just a chatty newsletter type of thing. And they are – well, you might say refereed articles, because people have to submit them and if they're not up to the standard that we'd like, well, we have to send them back. And we managed to include illustrations with all of the articles and – yes, it's a nice thing to have.

And nice to see that it's ongoing. Yes, indeed.

Yes, indeed. And I even have somebody in mind to take over for me (laughs) when I feel I've had enough of it.

Because that's often the case, isn't it, with voluntary things, this having someone that runs with it but then having someone else to pick it up.

Yes, exactly. Well, I mean, it's difficult enough with being President of the Friends, you know, had a bit of trouble to begin with to replace me. But anyway, as you know, it's in safe hands now and I do think it will go on, as I said earlier, to become an even stronger organization.

Well, thank you very much for your time today, it's been much appreciated.

Good. Glad to do it.

END OF INTERVIEW.