

# Sound History Recollections

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## **Family background**

My father was born in Sydney and worked for the Bank of Australasia (now the ANZ). I was born in 1936 whilst he was posted to Parkes in central west NSW.

My mother came from Narrabri and was trained as a typist and secretary. From Parkes our family moved to Tamworth where we lived until about 1941 when the bank transferred my father to Newcastle. We lived in Newcastle until 1949 when a move was made to Abbotsford in Sydney. For schooling reasons, I lived with an aunt in Newcastle in 1952-1953. After my father retired from the bank in the 1950s my parents moved to the NSW central coast, where they stayed until joining my family in Canberra in the early 1970s.

## **Education**

From 1942-1948 I attended The Junction Primary School, Newcastle. I enrolled for the first two years of high school at Drummoyne High in Sydney. I concluded my high school at Cooks Hill Intermediate in Newcastle in 1952-1953. The same school my mother had attended during WW1. I commenced a three-year diploma course in agriculture (W.D.A.) at Wagga Wagga, from where I graduated at the end of 1955.

## **Employment: 1956-1960**

For two years I worked for the NSW Department of Agriculture on a wheat quality survey, which involved visiting wheat silos and farms at harvest time (September to December), starting at Warialda in the north and finishing at Tocumwal in the south. I saw a lot of rural NSW.

For another two years I worked for the Sydney & Melbourne Publishing Company, Wentworth Avenue, Sydney, as Assistant Editor of "Power Farming in Australia" monthly magazine. The company also published "Pacific Islands Monthly", which had Alan Fitzgerald on staff. Alan went on to become a prominent political journalist in Canberra.

In early 1960 I toured New Zealand for three months on a 98cc James motor bike. Upon my return home I joined the NSW Department of Education as a Junior Farmer Supervisor. My first district was the Monaro and ACT, based at Cooma, covering from Delegate to Yass. I made part of my duties liaising with Canberra embassies to recruit guest speakers for Junior Farmer Clubs. In 1963 I transferred to the Far South Coast District, with headquarters at Bega. In 1966 I had a short stint at Coffs Harbour, before joining the staff of Ashwoods, Sydney's leading dealer in secondhand books and records. The company had

been established in the mid-1930s, when it was located between Ashfield and Burwood. The original owner was Mr Dick Gumpertz.

After almost seven years with Ashwoods as a valuer and salesman I was appointed to the staff of the Centre for the Advancement for Teaching (CAT) at Sydney's Macquarie University, a public relations role as assistant to the Director, Dr. Rex Meyer. My duties included publishing a regular CAT newsletter and liaising with faculty staff and caring for visiting dignitaries.

Whilst at Macquarie in 1972 I was chosen to be a Sound Recordings Consultant to the National Library of Australia. In 1974 I was appointed to the staff of the NLA as a member of the Music and Sound Recording Section. I remained with the NLA until 1984 when the Federal government decided to create the National Film and Sound Archive, where I was appointed Director of Sound Recordings. In 1992 I decided to accept an early retirement plan which enabled senior long serving officers to stand aside in order to allow younger employees the opportunity of promotion.

These recollections will conclude with the creation of the National Film and Sound Archive in 1984.

## **School Days**

During my primary school days, I was an avid listener to radio, being very fond of radio serials, such as "The Search For The Golden Boomerang" and "Yes, What?". I also was a keen listener to the various Hit Parades (usually the top 8 songs). My other interests included weekly visits to the cinema (Saturday afternoons) and reading comics (such as "Champion"). If one couple these interests with marbles, street cricket, and cowboys & Indians, it suggests a fairly normal lifestyle for a wartime Oz child.

My enjoyment of radio hit parades commenced about 1943, listening to Newcastle commercial stations 2KO and 2HD. I was particularly taken with presentations by Pat Barton, an announcer who always provided biographical information to accompany each recording. In those days this was unusual as announcers seldom provided background details on songs, composers, and performers.

In my two years at Cooks Hill High School in Newcastle I started attending jazz concerts at the Civic Theatre, located in Hunter Street. These night concerts

featured the Bob Gibson Orchestra from Sydney and the Horrie Dargie Quintet. I lived with an aunt in Darby Street which was within walking distance of the Civic. At about this time (when I was 14) my auntie Sibyl bought me a brand-new Columbia wind-up portable gramophone and gave me ten shillings to go to Palings and buy two gramophone recordings. She suggested I select artists like Richard Tauber and Gladys Moncrieff. I came home with Gene Autry and The Sons of the Pioneers. On learning that I had a gramophone an elderly neighbour (Mr Hicks) kindly gave me a collection of about 30 old discs, which helped introduce me to music of the 1930s. This was to become an introduction to a new hobby.

## **A Career in Agriculture**

It was during my three years studying at Wagga Wagga Agricultural College (1953-1955) that I commenced making tentative correspondence with other collectors, like Jack Mitchell and David Crisp. I also wrote to some record companies asking for catalogues and information about different recordings. When the holidays came, I returned home to Sydney where on a limited budget I would visit secondhand record shops to see what recordings I could acquire. At that time the cheapest 78s were often by Australian artists which possibly explains why I was attracted to such recordings. A Les Welch disc would cost 3d whereas a Glenn Miller would cost 4/-.

## **Working in Sydney**

After graduating from Wagga Wagga, I settled back home in Abbotsford working in several jobs. The most valuable position was helping publish "Power Farming", where guided by the Editor, Mr Septimus Underwood, I learnt some of the skills of journalism and magazine production.

The period 1956-1960 allowed me to meet and learn from a number of older collectors, including Gordon Williams who introduced me to Edison and the cylinder phonograph. I realized that the phonograph had been an enormous cultural influence between the 1890s and 1929. It was during this time that I commenced joining gramophone and phonograph societies, both in Australia and overseas. I commenced writing to overseas libraries and archives seeking information about sound recording history. I also did regular research at the

Mitchell Library, which founded in 1910 to concentrate on Australian content held only 56 sound recordings and had no record player. In the middle of 1960, I spent three months touring New Zealand, learning, where I could, a little about their sound recording history.

## **Looking After Junior Farmer Clubs**

The period 1960 to 1966 saw me working in the NSW Department of Education as a Supervisor of Junior Farmer Clubs, based at Cooma from 1960-1963; Bega 1963-1966, Coffs Harbour (part of 1966). This occupation allowed me to make contact with many rural radio stations, often broadcasting JF news. I became aware that such stations had ceased playing 78rpm discs following the arrival of LP recordings in the early 1950s. These stations had also ceased playing radio serials and soap operas in the 1960s due to the advent of television. In some instances, stations had dumped these unwanted sound recordings. However, many stations still had these recordings stored on premises or at a transmitter building. I commenced visiting these stations and where possible purchasing discs for my own collection. The first major acquisition came from 2GF Grafton, where I rescued about a thousand discs.

## **Ashwoods**

On a visit to Sydney in mid-1966 I visited Ashwoods to check recordings that were on offer. This long-established shop had an extensive turnover of all forms of sound recordings and secondhand books. It always seemed very busy with a rapid turnover of stock. During my visit the Manager Fred Starkey asked me if I would be interested in joining their staff. I had only recently been married and I discussed the invitation with my new wife Carolyn, and we decided this would be a good career move. This led to us buying a house in Hornsby. Working at Ashwoods provided interaction with many customers who were experts in many aspects of music and sound recordings. The shop was a regular haunt for musicians, record company staff, media historians, journalists, broadcasters, record collectors and discographers. A work environment where one was constantly learning.

## **A Few Words About Sound Recordings**

Sound recordings perform three main functions. The first is to reflect history; the second is to educate; whilst the third is to entertain. Australia is unique in that for a small nation it supported a major sound recording publishing industry, one of the largest in the world outside the United States, India, and England. Australians had a love affair with both the cinema and the talking machine and up until local gramophone factories opened in the mid-1920s a huge number of 78rpm discs were imported. For some 40 years we also enjoyed the best of both English and American phonograph cylinders, imported in their millions. The appetite of Australians for recorded music was truly incredible and continues until this present day. We not only bought recordings but we provided many major recording stars, including Billy Williams, Albert Whelan, Nellie Melba, Peter Dawson, Florrie Forde, Ada Crossley, and Hamilton Hill, all major international recording stars. They were the Madonna's and Elton Johns of their day. The Australian gramophone factories were recognized for making some of the best quality 78s in the world, especially EMI's Homebush factory with its laminated pressings. For this reason, Australian second world war pressings are highly prized because American and English pressings from 1939-1945 are made from inferior wartime materials. It is also surprising how many overseas recordings were only issued in Australia. From the birth of sound recordings Australian record buyers have been able to buy the best of both English, American, and European singers and orchestras.

It should be noted that prior to the mid-1950s the record shop was mainly the domain of adults, with teenagers hardly ever seen. Up until then young people did not have much pocket money and the record catalogues were yet to welcome rock and roll.

Record collecting was always considered an affordable hobby. If you could not pay new prices you could resort to secondhand sources.

Today, whilst still an affordable hobby, there are many international dealers selling rare records for mouth-watering prices. One highly regarded dealer I patronize quite often lists auction 78s with minimum prices in the \$10,000 to \$20,000 price range. For a more detailed account of the Australian recording industry, I recommend "Sound Beginnings" by Ross Laird, published in 1999.

## **Collection Building**

Between 1966 to 1974 (whilst living at Hornsby) I undertook many field trips, using a rather old blue Holden utility, visiting commercial radio stations in rural NSW, Queensland, Victoria, and South Australia, seeking to acquire redundant 78rpm recordings from their sound libraries. It was not uncommon to come home to Hornsby with up to 3,000 records on board. At one stage I had close to 100,000 records stored and I engaged a close friend, Mike Sutcliffe, to build me a large shed in our back yard. Mike was not only a builder but was a leading discographer. He went on to publish "Australian Record & Music Review", for which he edited 72 issues from 1989 to 2007. In 1974 the National Library purchased 30,000 recordings from my archive to kick start the national collection.

## **Radio Transcriptions**

During my frequent field trips, I kept an eye out for radio transcriptions, which were mainly 16-inch discs which played at 33rpm and provided up to 30 minutes playing time per side. These discs were used widely from the mid-1930s until the late 1950s and featured an enormous array of musical material, historic events, product advertisements, and plays & dramas. They entertained a nation for over a quarter of a century and made household names of entertainers like Jack Davey, Bob Dyer, George Wallace, Hector Crawford, Roy Rene and many more. Some of Australia's best authors, like Morris West, became script writers. Nearly every leading stage actor and actress were engaged in radio drama. Everyone from Lloyd Lamble to Judith Anderson.

Sadly, quite a lot of material was lost, such as the Macquarie 2GB collection of some 30,000 discs which became road base for the Manly-Warringah expressway. Fortunately, I was able to save a few hundred discs a few days prior to their destruction. The decision to establish the NLA collection also resulted in Grace Gibson and AWA (both based in Sydney) donating their library of 25,000 discs whilst a further 7,000 radio programs were presented by Australian Radio Productions, based in Melbourne. About a thousand episodes of "Mrs. Obbs" were rescued from 2RG, Griffith. The NLA also was the recipient of tens of thousands of radio scripts, an enormous archive of typewritten radio shows which I last saw stored at OGPO but hopefully are now stored in a better environment.



## **Self-education and Networking**

I took an early interest in discography and was always curious about the background to a recorded performance such as recording venue, number of takes, identity of vocalists, and recording dates. The identity of singers working under a pseudonym was also a problem waiting to be solved. A whole new world of information was revealed to me when for my 14<sup>th</sup> birthday my father bought me a copy of Charles Delaunay's 1948 edition of "New Hot Discography". Best present ever.

Throughout the 1960s I joined several learned societies such as the British Institute of Recorded Sound, the City of London Phonograph and Gramophone Society, and Gramophone Societies in Canada, USA, England and New Zealand. Membership allowed me to receive their monthly magazines. I also took out membership with about a dozen more collecting societies for the same purpose. I slowly developed a network of contacts around the world to exchange information. My network included Brian Rust (England); Ernie Bayly (England); Bill Moran (USA); Peter Downes (NZ); Rainer Lotz (Germany); & Ronald Dethlefsen (USA), all expert sound recording scholars and discographers. For many years I provided information on Australian issued 78s to Brian Rust in London for inclusion in his jazz, dance, stage show, personality, and spoken word discographies which for decades were standard references for researchers and the music industry. I was fortunate to spend time with Brian during a Middlesex visit. Brian had worked as a BBC Librarian.

At home I had the benefit of meeting with a number of senior sound recording historians, some of whose interest in the discipline had commenced in the 1920s or earlier. This list included Ladislav de Noskowski (Polish attaché & Melba Manager), Laurie Gravino (Maltese opera authority), Dr. Jack Mitchell (discographer), Laurie Hevingham-Root (Vocal art authority), and Bill Collins (Film Historian). Early magazines show that people collected sound recordings as a hobby prior to the first world war.

## **Publicity and Promotion**

My activities in sound archiving resulted in occasional press reports including a feature article by Margaret Jones in "The Sydney Morning Herald" entitled "On

The Record: Tarzan and Billy Hughes” (30/10/1971) and about the same time a large report by “The Australian Woman’s Weekly”. I also demonstrated a cylinder phonograph for Channel 7 Breakfast show and hosted a visit by Roger Climpson for a television special. These publicity opportunities allowed me to mount a case for preserving sound recordings as historical documents. John Pearce, a leading radio journalist with 2GB was very supportive as was Ray Bean, Program Manager at 2UW.

My appeals also prompted quite a few people to contact me to provide stories about their early experiences with talking machines, including some who worked in record making factories.

## **Oral History**

Oral history is defined as the collection and study of information by audiotape using planned interviews. Some archivists also view it as including discussions, speeches, lectures, talking books, debates, and talkback radio. I was always impressed by the work of the G. Robert Vincent Voice Library at Michigan State University, which is now a collection of interviews with over 500,000 people from all walks of life. Robert Vincent called them Voice Portraits. This pioneer oral historian started collecting in the 1930s and by 1940 had audio examples of many world dignitaries (like P. T. Barnum, Edison, Gladstone, and Disraeli) as well as sound effects like London’s Big Ben clock recorded striking on July 16, 1888. An account of Vincent’s exploits appeared in the “Newcastle Sun” on 18 May 1940.

I believe such recordings are essential source material for biographers. Author Gerard Henderson wisely included a CD of Liberal Party Prime Minister Robert Menzies speeches in his 1994 biography “Menzies Child”. Voice and oratory were key factors in the success of Menzies as a politician and to have not heard him would severely disadvantage any study of his life. Imagine trying to learn about Churchill without hearing him (although some of his wartime speeches were read by an actor when he was too busy to get to the BBC studio). The National Library Oral History collection began in the 1950s, inspired by pioneer oral historian Hazel de Berg (1913-1984). It was very well run by Mark Cranfield and as far as I am aware there was never any move to combine the NLA Oral History and Sound Recording sections, which on reflection was probably a good thing.

Throughout the 1960s I had become increasingly interested in documenting the careers and achievements of Australian performing artists. I decided in 1970 to commence tape recording oral history interviews with veteran musicians and composers. The first interview I undertook was with the Australian baritone Harold Williams (1893-1976), a major recording artist with Columbia Records. Between 1970 and 2000 I recorded over a hundred interviews, concentrating on people who were closely involved with the recording industry. Subjects I interviewed included Mrs. Amy Jennings, widow of music hall artist Billy Williams; contralto Essie Ackland; soprano Dame Joan Hammond; tenor Browning Mummery; actress Queenie Ashton; comedian Bobbie le Brun; composer Mirrie Hill; record producer Hal Saunders; author James Glennon; 'cellist Lauri Kennedy; jazz band leader Abe Romain; music critic Ron Wills; showman Jack O'Hagan; Hawaiian singer Johnny Wade; hillbilly singer Smoky Dawson, and pioneer television producer Harry Pringle (whose father was Lempriere Pringle, a famous Tasmanian bass singer). I managed to provide Harry with a 1908 recording of his father, whose voice he had not heard since he was a child.

I never considered myself qualified to tackle such a diverse team of personalities but pushed on as it seemed in those early days that no one else was undertaking such interviews. I was of course very keen to gain as much information as I could on their recording experiences to aid discographical accuracy. I well remember the surprise on Harold Williams' face when I reminded him that his first recording was made with Pathe in London in about 1921. Something he had forgotten or preferred not to remember. He went on to become one of Australia's most famous baritones. In 2021 I donated fifty-one of my interviews to the Oral History section of the National Library, which are listed on their website.

## **A National Sound Archiving Resources Survey**

In February 1968 I forwarded a questionnaire to the National Library, each State Library, all Universities, some museums and selected Conservatoriums of Music asking for details of their sound recording collections (if they existed). The survey revealed that the archival preservation of sound recordings in each state and nationally was almost nonexistent. As an example, the State Library of South Australia advised it held a total of 73 recordings (fifty 78s; 23 cylinders; and no LP). The Public Library of Queensland held 109 microgroove

recordings and 9 audio tapes. I concluded that none of the twenty plus institutions I approached were seriously engaged in sound archiving. Most had no equipment to play audio recordings.

## **The Australian Institute of Recorded Sound (AIRS)**

Motivated by the alarming results of my survey into Australian sound recording resources I decided in 1969 to establish the above institution to preserve our audio history. The development was announced in the July 1969 issue of "The National Trust Bulletin" and resulted in a number of influential supporters coming to our home, including Professor Roger Covell & Patricia Brown (Music Dept., Sydney University); Frank Van Straten (Performing Arts Historian); Ross Laird (Discographer); Professor Henry Mayer (History Dept., Sydney University); Jean Whyte (Librarian); Professor Russel Ward (History Dept., University of New England); and Philip Geeves (Royal Australian Historical Society). All were genuinely interested in the acceptance of sound recordings as a means of documenting history and were generous with advice and encouragement. At about this time I also formed a close friendship with Barbara and Findlay Mackenzie, authors of the reference book "Singers of Australia" (309 pages), who kindly presented me with a copy of their 1967 first edition inscribed "To a man of ideas and shared enthusiasm, from the authors ...." In many ways the Mackenzies, who were visiting Australia from the United States became an inspiration for my research into Australian performing artists.

## **Enter the National Library of Australia**

In 1970 I wrote to the National Librarian Mr. Harold White (later Sir Harold) suggesting the NLA establish a sound recording archive. Within a very short time Sir Harold visited our home in Hornsby to discuss my proposal. He arrived in a chauffeur driven Rolls Royce. I do not know what his impression of the AIRS was, which was simply a rather tired 1920s 3-bedroom brick home, best described as comfortable but not trendy. On the dining room table, I had prepared an audio-visual display to illustrate the importance of sound recordings both for education and entertainment. I outlined how all five senses are essential to the process of learning (a chef can't function without taste and smell). I traced the history of recorded sound starting in the 1890s. I

listed some of the great orators, authors and politicians whose voices had been captured on disc and cylinder. The names of world-famous Australian entertainers were worked into the lecture. Without hesitation Sir Harold suddenly announced this was a most important project and declared that the National Library would accept the task. I remember Carolyn politely asking if money might be a problem to which he replied (with a flourish) "Money is no problem whatsoever". He thanked us for our hospitality, returned to the Rolls and moved on to his next appointment. A long time later it dawned on me that I had been lecturing the nation's most distinguished librarian. I sometimes wonder if he may have been a trifle bemused by the experience. Throughout my life of promoting the importance of sound recordings as historical documents I have found administrators tend to fall in to two camps, one who immediately grasp the validity of the argument and act decisively, and secondly, give a knowing nod and decide to form a committee and/or a sub-committee, with endless reports.

Sir Harold fortunately understood immediately the worthiness of the proposal I was making. I had a similar experience years later when I suggested to the South Australian government that they establish a performing arts archive. I was invited to meet with Premier Don Dunstan in his office in Adelaide. I outlined the idea supporting it with a list of outstanding SA entertainers (Peter Dawson, Judith Anderson, Robert Helpmann. etc.). Within ten minutes he declared the idea a winner and announced he would initiate the proposal (which he did). I have always admired and respected such initiative (and dare I say intellect).

I was fortunate to have Sir Harold White on side and I was disappointed when he retired in mid-1970. Not all who followed him shared his acceptance of sound recordings. I was quite chuffed when Rod Wallace wrote to me for Christmas 1990 and said "Saw Harold White a couple of weeks back. He had a weak spot for you, and we had a pleasant time yarning about some of your collecting exploits!"

## **NLA Consultancy**

Toward the end of 1972 I was invited by the NLA to become a sound recording consultant. My point of contact was Rod Wallace, a senior librarian who was very experienced and very enthusiastic. For the next 18 months there was a

regular exchange of ideas and suggestions. Rod was very supportive of film archiving and became equally enamoured with sound recordings. When I joined the permanent staff of the NLA in 1974 Rod was to prove a most valuable tutor and friend.

## **NLA Music and Sound Recordings**

The National Library decided to create a department called Music and Sound Recordings which I joined in February 1974. The Head of the new section was Prue Neidorf, a very capable Music Librarian. For the first few years the section was housed on the third floor of the NLA with the rapidly growing collection stored on the fourth floor which also included a very basic sound recording studio. At one stage the 4<sup>th</sup> floor was home to several hundred pallets of vintage recordings. In due course an attractively designed area was opened on Lower Ground Floor One which initially housed the sheet music collection and about half the sound recording collection. The marriage of music and sound worked well with Prue proving a good leader who shared my enthusiasm for sound recordings. The immediate problem for the new section was a shortage of staff, a problem which the NLA never solved.

## **What's in a Name?**

At the start of my employment, I discovered that officially I was a "Clerk" which I did not think described my role or activities. It was a term which would have meant little to people outside the NLA, such as workers in the sound recording and radio industries. I therefore coined the word "Sound Archivist", which nobody in the NLA seemed to mind. The term was not uncommon in overseas archives. It should be pointed out here that there are no academic qualifications applying to sound archiving or being a sound recording historian. In most professions or trades there are formal studies at university or technical colleges, allowing one to become an architect or a plumber, or whatever. In my experience most librarians receive little training in dealing with sound recordings, apart from cataloguing. Consequently, most of the authorities and experts involved in sound archiving are self-educated and are often broadly known as "record collectors".

To illustrate my suggestion here is a short list of highly skilled sound archivists (aka collectors) with whom I have been associated showing their profession or trade:

Dr. Geoff Davis	(Gynaecologist)
Bob Maynard	(ABC broadcaster)
William R. Moran	(Oil geologist)
Hedley Charles	(Train driver)
Dr. David Rentz	(Entomologist)
Ron Wills	(Record producer)
Dr. George Gluck	(General practitioner)
David L. Crisp	(Sheep grazier)
Laurie Gravino	(Cane cutter)
Ross Fludder	(Train cleaner)
Vince Paterson	(Qantas officer)
Bill Haesler	(Lawyer)
Nevil Sherburn	(Butcher & record producer)
Andrew Smith	(Schoolteacher)
Ross Laird	(Librarian)
Alan Heinecke	(Forestry officer)
Ian Manfred	(Shipping clerk)
Chris Long	(Audio technician)
David Riddell	(Electrician)
Harold Dooley	(Bus conductor)
Barry Badham	(Musical comedy authority)
Sister Marie Bernarde	(Joan Sutherland curator)
Bob Derons	(Accountant)
Dr. Peter Fullagher	(Wildlife researcher)
David Hinrichsen	(Television writer/producer)
Geoffery J. Orr	(Record producer)
Michael Quinn	(Nurse)
Bruce Skilton	(Industrial chemist)
Pat Ware	(Musician & journalist)
Frank Van Straten	(Advertising executive)

Each one of these record collectors is also a sound recording historian, many a specialist in their chosen field of interest.

It is worth noting that whilst there are many female performing arts historians there are almost no serious female sound recording collectors. It should also be noted that the major fault or defect in most biographies and autobiographies of musicians is an absence or very restricted reference to their recording careers. There are about a dozen books about Dame Nellie Melba whose career was enormously influenced by her recordings. Sadly, most of the books about her pay little attention to this part of her career (I exclude the writings of William R. Moran in this criticism).

## **Starting a National Collection**

The forerunner of the NLA was the Commonwealth National Library and the Commonwealth Parliamentary Library, launched in 1923. The current NLA premises were opened in August 1968. I found that after about 50 years of operation the library held about 500 sound recordings. At first glance this is not particularly impressive but fortunately the collection included a large number of historically important discs, including speeches by aviators and politicians. Within a few years I was playing many of these recordings to Phil Noyce to select material for his 1978 movie "Newsfront" and to Peter Luck for his 1979 TV series "This Fabulous Century". We listened to PM Menzies announce we were at war with Germany and Ben Chifley announce hostilities had concluded. We also heard King O'Malley and Lady Denman re-read their Canberra Foundation Day speeches. Aviators Kingsford-Smith, Francis Chichester, Amy Johnson, Charles Ulm, Alan Cobham, and Bert Hinkler discussed their flying exploits (all in 3 minutes). There was a talk by Don Bradman on "How to Play Cricket" and many other gems. These recordings are now well known and readily available on CD and YouTube. However, in the late 1970s they were buried in the NLA waiting to be discovered.

The challenge we faced in 1974 was to establish a national collection which should have started in the 1890s when gramophone and phonograph recordings first started to influence Australian society. We had to catch up on 40 years of cylinder sales, some 60 plus years of 78s, and just over 20 years of LP discs. On top of this there was a hidden goldmine in terms of radio transcriptions which started appearing in the mid-1930s.

The initial selection policy we employed was to concentrate on (1) Australian Musicians (2) Australian composers (3) Australian spoken word.



Within these categories we sought recordings made both in Australia and made overseas. (4) Recordings of overseas artists where the performer or content was considered to have had an influence on Australia. An example would be Harry Lauder who toured Australia regularly and whose recordings were very popular. We were also conscious of the importance of indigenous recordings and the sounds of wildlife. In establishing our acquisition policy, I tried to think like a library user in deciding what we should hold. I reasoned that anyone investigating the importance of wartime songs on Australian public morale would want to listen as all the recordings of such material which influenced the nation and not be restricted to only those patriotic songs recorded in Sydney.

We also considered it important to document the history of sound recording manufacture in Australia, starting with cylinder production just after Federation, followed by local disc manufacture in the mid-1920s. We also were aware that many 78rpm discs were made overseas but only sold in Australia. We also regarded pianola rolls to be sound recordings and sought to preserve the full output of the two major roll makers, namely Mastertouch in Sydney and Broadway in Melbourne. These sound documents were an enormously important part of Australia's musical life for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, irrespective of where the composers were born.

## **Building up the Collection**

My first priority was to establish a good relationship with established collectors and convince them we were not in competition with them. We also needed to get the support of both the record and radio industries to preserve not only their past products but to capture their current output.

To preserve Australia's sound recording history we also had to build up a substantial collection of print documents, including record catalogues, discographies, publicity posters, biographies, photographs, and personal papers and scrap books of musicians. Our brief included any print documents considered related to the history, including 78rpm disc record sleeves which are often a rich source of gramophone advertising and promotion.

Australia had about 100 commercial radio stations with about three-quarters of them in the bush. These stations had often accidentally retained old recordings, stored in a variety of locations, including both 78s, LPs, and radio transcriptions. I undertook regular field trips to encourage radio station managers to donate unwanted recordings to the national collection. The industry was extremely supportive and gave generously. A typical field trip of seven days might include visits to three radio stations, radio interviews, visits to any known collectors, visiting the local newspaper, and conducting an oral history interview. When a large collection of recordings was offered for acquisition, I did not have the luxury of conducting a disc-by-disc inspection. The whole collection would be moved to the NLA, with the intention of selection and rejection to be carried out when staff resources permitted. The ideal archival standard is to preserve up to three copies of each recording. The grading of records requires an ability to assess the physical condition of the record (how it is likely to play) and an extensive discographical knowledge (to recognise pseudonyms and any historical importance of the contents). In his auction catalogues top American dealer Kurt Nauck lists eleven grades for 78rpm records, from M- (near mint) to P (Poor, possibly unplayable). In an Abbreviation Key he then provides 290 matters of interest in describing and grading records, such as warp, dig, scuff, spindle flake, lamination crack, take number, matrix, etc. These everyday discographical terms were a foreign language to most librarians. Suffice to say that grading records requires experience (looking and playing). I am told that this task was undertaken at the NFSA (against my advice) by a group of staff who were surplus from parliament catering, without interview. Not good news.

I was always believed that we had the opportunity to create in Australia a world class sound archive which could compare favourably with any overseas institution. We had available an impressive range of recordings made in Australia coupled with an equally impressive catalogue of overseas recordings which had influenced our culture and society. It never entered my mind to adopt an insular approach to limiting ourselves to "Australian only". If that insular policy were followed then the National Library would throw out Shakespeare and The Bible, and the National Gallery could put Blue Poles on a pallet and sell it.

## **Who's That Knocking at my Door?**

Or to put it another way, who were our clients? In most cases public access was either restricted or non-existent. This was caused by the priority to get out and save what sound history survived, coupled with a lack of cataloguing. Whenever possible we helped where we could. The opening of attractive new premises and unavoidable media publicity increased our public exposure resulting in a steady stream of visitors. Many were pursuing important projects. Amongst such visitors I recall trying to assist broadcaster John Laws; recording engineer John R. T. Davies; tenor Fred Williamson; linguist Professor Arthur Delbridge; WA Poet John Clements; bird call collectors John N. Hutchinson & Norman Robinson; composer George Dreyfus; film maker Phil Noyce; folk singer Lionel Long; Q'ld folk music scholar Bob Michell; sheet music researcher Kenneth Snell; performing arts historian John Whiteoak; writer Peter Pinne; and historian Geoffrey Blainey. This short list gives an idea of the diversity of sound recording clients and their interests.

## **A New Location**

In January 1980 the NLA opened new premises for the Music & Sound Recording Section. The new location was on Lower Ground Floor One. The modern office space was open space with an up-to-date recording studio and a comfortable listening room. A large and hidden storage area allowed a small portion of the sound recording collection to be conveniently housed. The new area was well designed and a vast improvement on our previous location. A press release stated that the music library held 65,000 opera scores and copies of sheet music plus 350,000 recordings ranging from wax cylinders to Long Play discs. No one questioned as to how many staff would be needed to sail such a ship.

## **A Family Split**

Shortly after our move to LG1 both Prue and I were summoned to a meeting with Bill Thorn, Deputy National Librarian, who with no preamble rather bluntly announced that Music & Sound Recordings was to be split in to two sections with Prue remaining in charge of music with myself heading the new sound recording section. Neither of us had any inkling that this was being planned and whilst I was not unhappy with the outcome, I was compelled to reassure Prue that I had not been seeking to create a division. Sadly, the new

arrangement did not enjoy an injection of staff. The Sound Recording section always operated with only three staff which prevented any form of organizing the collection for finding and retrieval. The mainstay of our staff was Jean Wein who became a very reliable administrator and problem solver. Lily May and Sue Cullen also were dedicated staff despite having no previous experience with sound recordings. Limited access to the collection was obtained by (where possible) storing recordings under label and catalogue number and referring to manufacturers record catalogues and printed discographies. This was using the same means of storage and access as record companies and retailers, where such a system had to work, or they could not function.

## **The Old Government Printing Office**

The sound recording collection grew rapidly, acquiring an average of about 70,000 sound carriers a year. By 1984 the collection was estimated to be over 700,000 recordings. The library decided to house most of this collection at OGPO, a sprawling single story dingy warehouse in the suburb of Kingston. The building interior was spacious (maybe 50 metres by 50 metres) with poor lighting, an abundance of dust, no temperature control, vermin, and a leaking roof. There was a single entrance and very little security. Sound recordings shared the building with part of the film collection. I recall when one day a staff member visiting OGPO noted a fuse box sizzling and about to burst into flame. His intervention prevented a fire and the destruction of many unique and irreplaceable Australian historical documents. Fire is a worldwide enemy of archives. In March 1985 a huge fire broke out at night on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor of the National Library. The building was saved but there was water and smoke damage. Fortunately, I had organized for about 12,000 twelve-inch LP records stored on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor (awaiting transfer to NFSA) to be placed in protective plastic sleeves to keep them free of dust and finger grease. These new LPs were a gift from the major record publishers, like EMI, CBS, Festival, & RCA. We were relieved that they only suffered some light smoke damage to these outer covers.

## **The Centenary of Recorded Sound**

Edison perfected his talking machine in 1877 and the centenary of this invention was celebrated around the world in 1977. As a member of the

Association of Recorded Sound Collections (established 1966) I was aware that this would be a very fruitful time to visit sound archives in the United States to attend functions and exhibitions. I approached the NLA to see if I was eligible for any assistance to undertake a six-week study tour. I was advised that the library was not willing to approve the project and that if I decided to proceed, I would need to pay all expenses and use all my holiday leave and long service leave (of which I had about 40 days). I was ready to abandon the idea when I met an officer of the United States embassy who advised me that I qualified to be Study Tour Support candidate, a scheme under which the embassy arranged internal travel arrangements and provided accommodation by billeting with American families. With this help I arranged my itinerary and eventually flew to Los Angeles. First stop on my study tour was Stanford Archive of Recorded Sound, the home (at that time) of the John Edwards Country Music Collection, founded by Sydney collector and discographer John Edwards (1932-1960). This unique collection specialized in Australian & American folk and hillbilly music. It had been acquired by Stanford following the death of Edwards in a motor accident. History has recently repeated itself when the bulk of the David Leo Crisp country music collection was bought by an American collector following his passing last year. The Crisp collection was a magnificent archive in which as far as I am aware no Australian institutions expressed any interest. A highlight of my visit to Stanford University was meeting Melbourne blues authority Garry Le Gallant, who was visiting on the same day I was visiting.

Apart from Stanford University the main archives I visited in the United States were:

- Rodgers & Hammerstein Archive of Recorded Sound (New York Public Library)
- Columbia University Oral History Archive (NYC)
- Thomas Edison National Historic Site (New Jersey)
- Rutgers University Institute of Jazz Studies (New Jersey)
- Tulane University, Hogan Archive of New Orleans Music

- Midwest Phonograph Museum, Martinsville, Indiana (over 700 machines, founded by Dr. Ellery T. Drake).
- Library of Congress Audio Archives, Washington, D.C., which now holds over 3.5 million sound recordings.

At all institutions I was warmly welcomed and given every assistance. I suspect the connection with the United States foreign office helped opened doors. My tour also enabled me to make personal contact with curators with whom I had been corresponding with for years. I was particularly pleased to spend time with leading discographers William R. Moran and Ted Fagan (authors of “The Encyclopedic Discography of Victor Recordings”; Orin Blackstone, compiler of “Index to Jazz”; and Walter L. Welch, author of the groundbreaking “From Tin Foil To Stereo.” Mr. Welch kindly provided me with a copy of his book, inscribed “To Peter Burgis – with admiration for his high objectives and best wishes for success, July 23, 1977.” Something to treasure. Upon my return home I spent time in Hawaii where I studied the sound recording section of the Bishop Museum, which specialized in Hawaiian music (much of it recorded in Los Angeles and some in Sydney. (I also visited Mrs Kathleen Marshall-Hall, the widow of George William Louis Marshall-Hall (1862-1915), a controversial composer and music professor, considered very influential in our musical history. Mrs. Marshall-Hall revealed to me she had held a large collection of unpublished novels written by her husband and wanted to know “If Australia would be interested in them”. I do not remember the exact number but think it was about 100 manuscripts. On getting back to Canberra I made the NLA aware of the collection which they followed up and acquired.

The library had a procedure whereby all correspondence and reports generated by lower and middle level staff were regularly circulated to management in order to keep them abreast of what was happening. When I returned to duty, I thought it a good idea to write a report on my American adventure documenting what I had observed and learnt. When the report was completed, I took a copy to the Principal Librarian in charge of sound recordings and offered her the chance to read it. She asked if the trip was an approved library venture to which I had to answer “No”. She then told me “Well, I have no need to read it”. Despite her response I smiled, put the report on her desk, and added “Just In case you change your mind” and left. I would not like it thought that this negativity was widespread in the NLA. I believe we

enjoyed a very warm and friendly relationship with Ray Edmondson and his film team as well as with Mark Cranfield, head of oral history. Amongst senior staff both Rod Wallace and Catherine Santamaria were always encouraging and supportive. However, I do believe a few senior librarians did not share my enthusiasm for sound recordings (or films) and tended to view audio-visual documents as a threat to the supremacy of the printed word. These librarians were also influential decision makers and in the end their prejudice led to unrest and criticism of the library policies and priorities.

## **Public Awareness of Sound Recording Archiving**

The story of the gramophone has always had media appeal. It is therefore not surprising that the library activities in preserving sound recording history attracted generous attention. We were fortunate to enjoy the literary skill of Ian Healy, a senior journalist who readily prepared and promoted any worthwhile news story we fed him. Ian and I were both Novacastrians and enjoyed chatting about our old hometown. Another journalist who seemed to enjoy writing about our exploits was Ian Warden, a feature writer for “The Canberra Times”. His style was a combination of humorous observation and satire, best described as lampooning. An investigative journalist in a more serious vein was local writer Brian Jeffrey who wrote many splendid articles about the turmoil within the NLA which led to the creation of the NFSA. Our story was also a feature article in the April 1977 issue of “Electronics Australia”, including a staff member and phonograph on the cover.

We occasionally gained television exposure, including appearances on the Mike Walsh Show. Radio was a prime means of communicating, with interviews on many stations during field trips. Announcers like Mike Carlton, Len London, and Howard Craven gave us airtime. A rather unique radio venture was an ABC Canberra program called “Nostalgia From The National Library”, on which I played historical sounds, mainly from the collection, exchanging light banter with my co-host Edith Thompson, who was a well known personality on local ABC radio. The one-hour program was produced by Ken Ricketts and ran on a weekly basis for five or six years. I think the show was quite popular and found out one day that the Governor-Generals Secretary was a regular listener. Don’t know about the G-G himself.

1982 was the centenary of the birth of baritone Peter Dawson, one of Australia's best-known singers. Under the guidance of designer Arthur Robinson, the National Library mounted a very impressive display to celebrate the occasion. Working with a good friend, Bill Robertson, Artist & Repertoire Manager, EMI Sydney, I produced a 10 LP commemorative HMV boxed set for the occasion, which included 181 tracks, covering 1904-1958. The set was well received worldwide and sold out.

## **Publishing Records**

During the 1970s I produced a number of LP box sets for EMI which celebrated the music of pioneer Australian singers, including Gladys Moncrieff and Malcolm McEachern. Over a lifetime I have produced or contributed to over 300 historic LPs, CDs, & cassettes including labels like HMV, Columbia, Regal-Zonophone, Lyric, Festival, Jazz Museum, RCA, and Larrikin. Both the NLA and NFSA have failed to seriously pursue a historic sounds reissue program, tending to issue occasional reissues on an ad hoc basis. What was needed was a planned program of say 100 reissues to be made over a 10-year timetable. Such a venture would have made money, provided goodwill and publicity, and helped reduce the number of individual copying requests. I was always unhappy with the prohibitive "Fees for Service" access policy introduced at the NFSA which simply meant that most members of the public could not afford to use the collection. I had no worry in charging access for commercial ventures such as radio advertising and film soundtracks but believed high charges were unwarranted for personal study and research. As one wag told me he believed the NFSA was established to make sure the public could not hear old sounds.

## **IASA (1979-1985) & ASRA (1986- )**

These acronyms stand for the International Association of Sound Archives and the Australasian Sound Recordings Association. There is an excellent history of these organisations written by Mary Miliano published in a 2011 issue of "Australasian Sound Archive", which gives credit to the many hard-working members of these societies. I can add one story. In the early years of my working at the National Library Prue Neidorf started to encourage me to establish a local branch of IASA. I reckoned I had more than enough on my plate and resisted the suggestion. Prue persisted and eventually I caved in and



decided to organize an inaugural meeting which took place in 1979. My plan was to gather together a blend of private collectors/historians with professionals working in institutions, which I think we achieved. I should add that the National Library management were always supportive, and we were blessed to have Dr. Alice Moyle from the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies at the helm. The most enduring feature of IASA/ASRA was that it fostered many friendships and validated the scholarly legitimacy of sound archiving and discographical study. I recommend Mary's article.

## **Nancye Bridges Old Time Shows**

Nancye and Babe Bridges were New Zealand vaudevillians who worked in many countries prior to finally settling in Australia in the 1950s. Nancye played the vibraphone whilst Babe played the Irish harp. Nancye was also an entrepreneur, oral historian, and author ("Curtain Call" & "Radio Days"). The sisters regularly attended the annual sound archiving conferences. I first met Nancye in April 1972 when she invited me to demonstrate an Edison phonograph at a concert, she was staging at the Argyle Centre located in the historic Sydney The Rocks area. When I got there, I asked her when I would be playing and she advised "you follow The Great Levante", who was probably Australia's best known magician. Quite an intro to show business. Nancye operated her old-time music shows during the 1970s-1980s, playing nursing homes, RSL clubs and major venues. During the 1970s she invited me to appear at such concerts playing pre-recorded sounds of pioneer Australian entertainers. Each musical example was about 20 to 30 seconds, and I would link them with "entertaining dialogue". My "Act" would last about 10-15 minutes. I never considered myself an entertainer, but Nancye always seemed happy with the results. I was included on about a dozen of her major shows (about one a year). The most memorable venues included the Sydney Town Hall (1989 Centenary concert); Canberra Theatre; Queensland Performing Arts Centre (Tribute to Evie Hayes 1988) and the Sydney Opera House (1985). I was quite excited to be able to announce to the audience of 2,000 patrons of the main concert hall of the Sydney Opera House that that night Dame Nellie Melba was going to sing for the first time in that magical venue – which she did. It was quite chilling (almost eerie) and she got a wonderful ovation. It was also a privilege to introduce Evie Hayes to a Queensland audience where she and her husband Will Mahoney operated the Cremorne Theatre during World

War 2. I worked into my intro a portion of Evie's very first recording "If You Love Me" recorded for HMV in London in 1936.

Nancye's shows were quite spectacular with a cast of the best veteran performers she could engage, all beautifully attired and the stage tastefully decorated. I enjoyed the opportunity of observing close-up their stage skills and presentation. Amongst the artists with whom I shared the stage were Marie Tysoe, Werner Baer, Buster Noble, Queenie Ashton, Robert Bickerstaff, Jenny Howard, Queenie Paul, Rosalind Keene, Slim De Grey, Prince Chung Doo, Martin Cooke, Angela Arena, Evie Hayes, Ronald Dowd, Babs Mackinnon, John Brosnan, Jeannie Little and Smoky Dawson. Nancye always introduced me as "The Man From The National Library". Carolyn and I became firm friends with Nancye and Babe and spent many happy hours with them.

## **Research & Writing**

I have always enjoyed improving my knowledge of the performing arts, with a special interest in the recording careers of pioneer Australian entertainers. The science of discography is the study and documentation of sound recordings. Serious research in this field started in the 1930s and today a wealth of information has been compiled. One must remember that sound recordings embrace much more than music. Other important fields include spoken word (plays & poetry), mechanical music (fairground organs), nature sounds (locusts), marine sounds (whales), transport sounds (trains), sound effects (footsteps in the snow), motion picture soundtracks, radio and television broadcasts, educational & instructional (how to play golf). All these forms of sound are a challenge for the discographer. Over the years I have contributed articles and comments to a variety of discographical journals, especially "Australian Record & Music Review", "Opera Australia", "On Stage", & "Ajazz" (to name a few).

The biggest problem facing archivists and discographers is determining the nationality of performers, especially those who worked the majority of their career overseas. At present I am aware of 458 Australians who recorded overseas between 1890 and 1960. There are well over 500 recordings of Australian compositions recorded in the same time frame. Research is also further complicated by the use of pseudonyms by record companies to hide

the identity of both singers and composers (e.g., George Saunders is Browning Mummery and Snuffy Garrett is Johnny O’Keefe).

Whilst the internet is a wonderful source of information it should be treated with some caution as misinformation does exist. As an example, I would nominate the “Waltzing Matilda” information provided by both the NLA and NFSA which has the wrong recording year, wrong accompanist, and incorrect recording system (electric not acoustic). The notes also suggest that John Collinson did not record for any other company, when he did. The Matilda entry also describes the 1930 recording by Colin Crane as one “which did not sell many copies”. In fact, it stayed in the EMI catalogue from 1931 to 1949 and sold 2,781 copies which for a local recording in the depression/World War 2 period would be considered quite a success. A simple case of researcher beware!

## **Overseas Studies**

From 1981 to 1987 I served as vice-president on the Board of the International Association of Sound Archives and attended and gave papers at international conferences held in England (1980); Belgium (1982); USA (1983); Italy (1984); Australia (1992). These visits permitted visits to many overseas archives including the British Institute of Recorded Sound; Phonotheque Nationale (France); and the BBC Sound Archive. I also acted as Chairman of the Australian Branch of IASA from 1979-1984.

## **Awards and Honours**

- 1997**      **IASA (Australia)** Lifetime Membership for outstanding contribution to sound archiving in Australia.
- 1984**      **ARIA** 1984 inaugural Pater Award for professional excellence in the broadcasting arts and sciences (in presence of Prime Minister Mr. Robert Hawke and Mrs. Hawke).
- 1991**      **ARIA** Presenter for induction of Peter Dawson to ARIA Hall of Fame. M.C. Bob Geldorf.

## Significant Collections

It is important to remember that despite the difficulties which existed at the National Library we were still able to establish the basis of a very impressive national collection. From about 500 disc recordings in 1974 a collection of about 600,000 sound carriers was handed over to the NFSA in 1984. Listed here are a few of the significant collections to illustrate the variety of our acquisitions:

- i. One day a young couple from Queanbeyan wandered into our section to present us with half a dozen acetate (unpublished) discs they had found in the bottom of a sideboard they had bought at auction that day. The discs had no labels but written in pencil on the covers were the words “Chifley” and “Menzies”. The recordings were excerpts of radio speeches from the 1949 Federal election and proved to be the only known copies. This illustrates the haphazard way in which history is quite often documented. History is quite often what documents survive rather than what does or does not happen.
- ii. The Wilfrid Thomas Collection. Wilfrid was an ABC and BBC broadcaster and journalist who specialized in exotic interviews and music. He had also had a successful singing career. His weekly program “The Wilfrid Thomas Show” ran from 1950-1980. I met Wilfrid in London and arranged for his extensive personal collection of audio tapes and print materials to be bought by the NLA.
- iii. The Hector Crawford Collection. This was a very large collection of several thousand 16-inch radio discs of music and drama produced by the Crawford Company, mainly on the 3DB label. All shows recorded in 1940s/1950s, featuring a roster of our best actors and singers (including the first known recordings of June Bronhill and Joan Sutherland).
- iv. The EMI Columbia Radio disc collection. Sourced from a number of radio stations, many thousands of 16-inch discs featuring a host of radio drama, comedy, and music which entertained the nation from the 1930s to the 1960s, including classic shows like “Dad & Dave”; “Yes! What?”;

“Mrs. Obbs”, “Lux Radio Theatre” and hundreds more. Radio drama was the training ground for some of our most famous actors, such as Peter Finch, Ron Randell, Chips Rafferty, Rod Taylor, Lyndall Barbour, Neva Carr Glyn, Michael Pate, Bud Tingwell, Ray Barrett, John Ewart, Muriel Steinbeck, Dick Bentley, Joy Nichols, Allan Cuthbertson, Kitty Bluett and John Meillon, to name a few.

- v. Peter Anderson Mechanical Music Collection. Peter was an unusual private historian who lived at Gosford. He offered the library three collections, (1) About 1,500 LP recordings of mechanical music” (2) A Wunderlich photographs archive, and (3) A transport archive of hundreds of bus photographs, timetables, and unsold bus tickets. I could not have imagined that so many LPs had been published of merry-go-rounds, polyphons fairground organs, and music boxes. Most discs made overseas, but many of the machines well known in Australia.
  
- vi. The Wunderlich collection was a collection of top quality photos of historic buildings (like banks and historic homes} renovated by the Wunderlich Company with before and after views (rescued by PA when Wunderllch moved premises in the 1960s). The comprehensive bus transport collection provided valuable documentation of NSW rural transport dating back to Federation. I convinced the library to purchase the LPs and the Wunderlich archive, but a ran into a roadblock with the transport where the library missed the bus.
  
- vii. J. C. Williamson Collection. Early in 1979 I spotted a small news item in “The Sydney Morning Herald” announcing either the closing or demolition of “Her Majesty’s” theatre. I contacted Dick Beaman, a friend at JCW to discover what was happening and after talking to the theatre manager found that their archival library was in danger of being dumped. I made arrangements for the library to be preserved by the NLA. The library consisted of operetta and musical comedy librettos, stage plans, musical arrangements, stage layouts, costume designs, sheet music, and publicity photographs. A library box contained everything you needed to put on a show and for decades JCW had rented these

materials to anyone wishing to stage a musical, whether it be an opera company or a primary school. The gift was described in "The Canberra Times" of 14 June 1979 as massive and occupying 14 large wooden crates, including stage musicals dating back to 1873. Dick Beaman told me the only other person to view the collection before I did was Richard Bonyngé, who picked out a couple of long forgotten operas which might suit Joan.

viii. Gospel Recordings I first encountered Gospel Recordings in 1973 when I was working at Macquarie University at North Ryde in Sydney. GR were located next door to the university. Gospel Recordings (now known as Global Recordings) was founded in Los Angeles in 1938. An Australian branch was created in 1958. The purpose of GR was to promote Christian evangelism by audio-visual means in order to reach communities who were not familiar with the bible. GR arranged for missionaries to visit such communities (often in remote locations) and introduce the message of Christ. They would then record a tribal elder or leader speaking a Christian message in the local language. The audio tape would be sent to Los Angeles where a number of 8-inch 78rpm discs would be pressed and returned to the missionary who would distribute copies to the community. The discs would be provided with a simple and ingenious cardboard record player operated by turning the disc manually. The purpose of the exercise was to allow listeners to hear the Christian message in their own language, spoken by someone they new and respected. The technical procedures of GR have improved and expanded considerably since I first made contact in 1973. Today Global Recordings have recorded the gospel worldwide in 6,500 languages. The Australian branch has recorded these messages in 104 Aboriginal languages, all listed on their website. I made arrangements for a representative sample of their catalogue to be deposited with the library.

ix. Stanford (USA) University Gift. In June 1978 David Mercer visited the NLA to present a collection of operatic 78rpm discs from Stanford University Archive of Recorded Sound, which included 14 original American recordings by Dame Nellie Melba made between 1907-1910. I

had met David when I visited Stanford the previous year. Mr. Mercer was on his way to join the staff of Hobart Conservatorium of Music.

## **A Few Afterthoughts**

Some overlooked random thoughts and observations:

- Early in my record collecting hobby I accepted that you could learn something of interest from almost everybody and that there was much to learn. There were no formal study courses.
- I discovered that you could never predict what users might request. Enquiries covered every topic you could imagine (and more).
- I found the further away you were from Canberra the less was known about the National Library, which emphasized the need to travel in order to ensure a balanced collection.

## **Support for Print Documents**

The Sound Recording section made a valuable contribution to a number of performing arts reference books. Some examples include:

- a. “Black Roots, White Flowers” (A History of Australian Jazz”, by Andrew Bisset, 1979.
- b. “A Band In A Waistcoat Pocket” (The story of the harmonica) by Ray Grieve, 1995.
- c. “The Golden Age of Australian Radio Drama” (1923-1960, by Richard Lane, 1994.
- d. “This Fabulous Century”, by Peter Luck, 1980.

- e. "Australian Jazz On Record" 1925-1980, by Jack Mitchell, 1988.
- f. "Alex F. Lithgow, March Music King", 1870-1929, by Pat Ward, 1990.
- g. "Australian Popular Music" by Kenneth R. Snell, 1990.
- h. "Yes, What?", Australia's funniest radio show, by Vern Sundfors and Bob Hawker, 1996.
- i. "Out Of The Bakelite Box", the heyday of Australian Radio, by Jacqueline Kent, 1983.
- j. "Wonderful Wireless" by Nancye Bridges, 1983.

All these examples relied heavily on discographical information and recorded sound history.

### **Trouble in Paradise**

Whilst the library sound recording services were initially housed in the upper floors of the building, we were somewhat isolated from the public which restricted access demands. When the new modern premises were opened in early 1980, we suddenly found we were much more visible and as a consequence, requests for access increased considerably. We also had many more visitors, ranging from casual enquiries to demanding enquiries from record producers, film makers, and authors. The launch of the new premises (reported in the "Canberra Times", 27 January 1980) advised that "One of the first major tasks will be to compile current and retrospective bibliographies and discographies of the contents". A worthy objective but where were the staff? We did acquire our first and only sound technician, but there was no backup when he was on holidays, or was on sick leave, or at lunch.

Our situation was further complicated by the bulk of the sound collection being stored at the Old Government Printing Office, a few miles away. A building completely unsuitable to house national treasures. No cataloguing had been attempted and when "sound" was soon separated from "music" we were asked to function with a staff of three and occasionally four people. It was mission impossible, and I regularly made unsuccessful submissions to management for more resources. The plight of the sound recording section was impossible to hide and the creation of IASA in 1979 also brought this situation to the attention of many prominent archivists and historians.



## Newspaper Criticism

Just before I left on my 1977 overseas study tour two very positive and comprehensive articles appeared in the press on the NLA sound archive. The first was a splendid and positive article by local journalist Brian Jeffrey, entitled "Sounds From Our Past", published in "The Canberra Times" on 5 March 1977. The article outlined the urgency of saving recordings whilst we still could and mentioned that the library already had collected 210,000 discs. Brian Jeffrey took a great interest in the collection and was to write many more stories about the sound archive.

The second article on the library sound collection appeared the following month in the April issue of "Electronics Australia", when the editor Jamieson Rowe presented a major story entitled "Saving Our Musical & Recording Heritage", which included a cover photo of the library, myself, and an Opera phonograph. Another well written and complimentary article with lots of photographs.

The first cracks in the image of the library's sound archiving came in May 1978 when "Canberra Times" published an article by Brian Jeffrey headed "Staff Blames Federal Cuts", in which unnamed staff claimed that irreplaceable sound recordings were deteriorating rapidly due to lack of funds to preserve them properly. Amongst the endangered species was King O'Malley re-reading his Canberra Day foundation speech of 1913. There was also a "disturbing revelation" that "valuable recordings were stored in insecure, sub-standard conditions at Kingston, where they are subject to water from a leaking roof and extremes of temperature". Brian was careful not to name his sources.

The opening of the new music and sound premises at the start of 1980 was well received and well publicized. The mood changed quickly however with another revealing Brian Jeffrey CT article in February 1980 with a headline "Sounds of History Fading Into Silence", and an introduction which read "The National Library's music and sound recordings archives has an impressive new shopfront, but the illusion of improvement is likely to be short-lived when potential users discover the confusion behind the façade". Prophetic words. A letter from Mr Ron Jubb, appeared in the 22 March CT in which he asked the Minister for Home Affairs, Mr. Ellicott, if the Government was responsible for this "atrocious situation".

Reporting of the 1982 IASA Conference in Canberra included a statement by Mr. Harrison Bryan, NLA Director-General, who criticized the resources made available to the library and added he could not see any improvement to resources in the near future. As chairman of the conference, I warned that I had fears that “Australian history was threatened by the country’s failure to preserve its audio-documents”. At the same conference rock music historian Glenn A. Baker gave a paper stressing the need for public access and stating, “There is a screaming, absolutely desperate need for a sound archivist body that can go to the people, radio stations, and other music outlets to look for rare recordings.”

A further deterioration in the fortunes of the national sound archive became apparent in the following year when the International Association of Sound Archives held their 4<sup>th</sup> annual conference in Canberra. “The Canberra Times” of 25 June 1983 referred to “The Sounds of Silence: Little Heard From National Library’s Records Archive”. Brian Jeffrey reported that “The recorded sound collection is among the 12 largest of its kind in the world. It comprises 425,000 discs, 6,000 phonograph cylinders, 16,000 tape recordings, and 1,000 piano rolls, a tally of about 2,500,000 titles”. To criticism that the sound archive was being neglected the Director-General Harrison Bryan stated bluntly “We are strapped for resources, and I am unable to predict when or if things are likely to improve”. These were bleak days with considerable frustration affecting the morale of both staff and archive supporters. The NLA sound archive had officially been created in 1968 and despite some success with collection building it was apparent the National Library was not prepared or not able to provide the financial or staff resources to allow the archive to function effectively. I decided a new approach was required.

## **Appeal to the Prime Minister**

As the National Library claimed all our problems were a result of lack of finance, I decided it could do no harm to wear my chairman of IASA hat and make a direct approach to Prime Minister Robert Hawke for improved financial support. On October 4 I typed a letter outlining to the PM the difficulties we were facing and describing the consequences of not correcting the situation. I was careful not to criticize any individuals. My appeal was primarily a request for adequate staff and funding. Before delivering the letter, I made 227 copies to allow me to provide copies to the 151 members of the House of

Representatives and the 76 members of the Senate. Their envelopes were marked "Courtesy Copy – For Your Information". I carried the letters in a pillowcase from the National Library to the Post Office in Parliament House and asked the Postmaster to place a copy in each member's pigeonhole, which he agreed to do. The issue must have created some discussion because on Thursday 6 October the "Canberra Times" included a summary of my letter under the heading "Sound Archive Criticised". The report included my view that both the NLA film and sound archive should become autonomous.

"The Canberra Times" of 7 October contained an article entitled "Library to consider Disciplining Archivist" in which the Director-General Mr. Bryan said "Mr. Burgis would be aware, of course, of the code of conduct applicable to public servants but, that apart, his actions seemed to reflect a strange sense of propriety, a remarkable lack of loyalty to his employers, and a disturbing confusion of means and ends." Not a good school report! Mr. Bryan also added that "it would be ludicrous for the sound collection and the film archive to be set up as independent authorities". Mr. Bryan indicated he was considering taking disciplinary action against me, a matter he would discuss with the library council which was meeting that day.

I think it was the following Monday morning that an instruction was issued for me to report to the Director-General's office. Unfortunately, I could not attend as I was on recreational leave with my family (Carolyn, David, Kylie and Catherine) in Fiji. A fortnight later on my return to work I was once again invited to meet with Mr. Bryan. On this occasion the meeting was also attended by a number of branch heads, no doubt curious to see what would happen. I was possibly blessed by the fortnight "cooling-off" period for Mr. Bryan delivered what I would call a very polite and moderate lecture, which alternated from criticism to hints of praise. He was concerned about damage to the library image but at the same time realized I had achieved a lot and was motivated by enthusiasm. He did emphasise the need for loyalty. I did appreciate the way he handled the situation and after about ten minutes he simply said something along the lines of "Well let's have no more of this, thank you for coming, back now to your offices." End of disciplinary action. I gather a lot of behind the scenes discussion would have set the tone for our meeting, especially from politicians like ACT senator Margaret Reid, with whom I had had meetings. Our cause would also have been helped by the support of journalists like Brian Jeffrey who on October 10 wrote glowingly about the efforts of a handful of "dedicated and far-sighted sound recording staff".

## **The National Film and Sound Archive**

It would be fair to say that 1983 and early 1984 were dominated by debate about the future of both the NLA film and sound collections. Pressure groups were active and many meetings of interested parties were held, some official, some clandestine. It was a time of great stress for many and a field day for rumours and strife. The National Library was strongly resisting any move to lose either film or sound. Eventually, on 6 March, 1984 a press statement announced "A National Film and Sound Archive would be established as a national entity from the National Library, the Minister for Home Affairs and Environment, Mr. Cohen said yesterday." For both film and sound archive campaigners it was a time of both relief and satisfaction.

A press release dated April 1, 1984 announced that representatives of the Department of Home Affairs have begun negotiations with senior staff of the National Library to work out the separation of the Film and Sound Recording sections from the library. I well recall that event when one morning at the NLA a group of about six men in dark suits, some wearing sunglasses, swept unannounced into the sound recording area. Their leader was Home Affairs secretary Pat Galvin who revealed the new arrangement and reassured all that their jobs were safe. It was all very much like an invasion by the Blues Brothers. Another indication of how government sometimes works came at a meeting with minister Barry Cohen when someone asked where the NFSA would be located. Mr. Cohen said he had a building in mind and picked up the phone and called an official and told him he believed the mushroom shaped building on the hill was not being used and was to be handed over to the NFSA. Pat Galvin almost had a fit and interrupted the minister to suggest he possibly meant an adjoining building, namely the Institute of Anatomy, rather than the dome-shaped Academy of Science. Without missing a beat, Cohen continued "Change of plan ... give them the Institute of Anatomy". Real Yes Minister stuff.

Mike Lynskey, a senior film staffer, also told me a story. He said one evening at home he received a call from Bob Hogg, who was a senior adviser to the Prime Minister. who informed him that the government had decided to remove film from the NLA and create a new institution. Just before the conversation ended Hogg asked Mike "I understand there are also problems with sound recordings. Do you think we should remove it too? Mike said it would be a good idea and Bob Hogg said "right, I'll fix it".

A detailed account of the politics and intrigue leading up to the creation of the National Film and Sound Archive was published in the November 1, 1983, issue of "Filmnews".

## **Rod Wallace**

When I joined the NLA as a consultant on sound recordings in 1972 my point of contact was Rod Wallace, a senior librarian with much experience with film archiving. For about 18 months we were in regular contact by letter and telephone. Upon starting work in Canberra in early 1974 Rod proved a wonderful tutor and supporter. He was a regular visitor to the Section and would bring us up to date on what was happening and how to handle any problems. All our staff looked on Rod as a friend rather than a senior officer. His warm personality and positive approach was a real blessing when times were difficult. I met Rod at a NFSA function about a year after we had both retired and whilst chatting, I recalled how the National Library had a system whereby all copies of reports and correspondence by middle management were circulated each month to senior staff to allow them to keep abreast of things. In my early days my reports must have occasionally been a trifle strident, so Rod suggested that after I had written them, I put them in a draw and tone them down a little the next day before submitting them. A policy which I adopted. On hearing the story Rod smiled and told me that even then half my reports ended up in his wastepaper bin. We both had a good laugh. Rod also helped the passage of quite a few purchases of sound recording collections. I recall finding a large collection of vintage 78s in a rambling Steptoe style junk shop in Bendigo called Tom, Dick and Harrys. The records were fine, but the shop was a real shambles. With Rod's help the order was quickly approved, payment to Thomas, Richards, & Harrolds, Antiquarian Record Dealer, Bendigo.

I also remember Rod telling me that once you had left the service, no matter how much knowledge and experience you had, your advice would seldom be sought. I know he felt that, and it is my own experience.

## **Twilight Time**

I was proud to be a staff member of the National Library and enjoyed the challenge of helping create a national sound archive. My career allowed me to make many friends who shared my interest in sound scholarship and discography. Upon retiring from the NFSA more than 30 years ago, Carolyn and I retired to Port Macquarie where I have continued to document sound recording history and carry out performing arts research. During the 1990s I was inaugural Chairman of the Australian Country Music Foundation (ACMF) at Tamworth which helped create a very important national country music archive. I was also on the panel selecting inductees for the Roll of Renown. Nearer to home I was chairman of a committee which helped get a public broadcasting licence for Wauchope (2WAY-FM) and I provided some consultancy to the Slim Dusty Museum at Kempsey. Part of my performing arts collection is preserved in the Music Department of University of Western Australia, organized by a good friend, the late Sir Frank Callaway, a man of great vision.

One major “achievement” from my retirement years was the creation of an archive, documenting the story of “Waltzing Matilda”, which included more than a thousand recorded versions of this national song, together with an extensive print library. About five years ago this collection was transferred to the care of the Winton Waltzing Matilda Museum in Queensland.

I have produced about 300 reissues of historic Australian sounds, including LPs, CDs, and cassettes, mainly on my own label Kingfisher and for Warren Fahey’s Larrikin. I continue to carry out this work which is a publishing endeavour neglected by major institutions. In 2001 I co-authored with Dr. Russell Smith, “Peter Dawson: The World’s Most Popular Baritone”, published by Currency Press. This year saw the publishing of “Tex Morton: From Australian Yodeler to International Showman” which I co-authored with Andrew Smith. The publisher was The University of Tennessee Press. I continue to work on producing an Australian National Discography.

I have been fortunate to have had my wife and companion Carolyn by my side to support and guide me for more than 60 years. Her advice and opinions have been invaluable.

Peter Burgis

July 2023