

Interview with Dr Alan Brissenden, formerly a Reader/Associate Professor in the Department of English at the University of Adelaide recorded 8th February, 2013.

This recording is part of the University of Adelaide Archives program of oral history in which members of staff and former members of staff of the University are interviewed so that a record exists, in their own words, of their own achievements and activities at the University and also to capture their recollections and opinions about the University more generally.

***Interviewer Stephen Beaumont's comments and questions are in bold type.**

Alan was born in Griffith, New South Wales, in 1932. He was educated at the University of Sydney, graduating with an Honours BA and a Diploma of Education, and then with a PhD at the University of London. From London, he was appointed in 1963 to the position of lecturer in the Department of English at the University of Adelaide where he served his entire career. He formally retired from the University in 1994, since when he has been an Honorary Visiting Research Fellow at the University as well as pursuing a number of other interests. Alan's research interests at the University have been broad, ranging from Shakespeare to contemporary Australian fiction, but in more recent years with a particular focus on Shakespeare and the performance of his plays in Australia. A particular passion, pursued both in the academic context and more widely, has been dance, from dance in Shakespeare to dance in Australia more generally, and in 1996 Alan was made a Member of the Order of Australia for his services to the arts. He has an extensive portfolio of publications, including some 15 books and numerous academic and journalistic articles. His reputation extends well beyond the academic community by virtue of his role as a dance critic for a range of journals and newspapers, starting with Honi Soit at the University of Sydney in 1950 and the Sydney Morning Herald in 1952 and including since 1990 The Australian, where I think another review appeared just last week. While at the University of Adelaide Alan served as chair or member of several committees, including the Education Committee, the Faculty of Arts Committee, and the Performing Arts Committee. He has presented papers around the world and had visiting fellowships to the Huntington Library, California, and on two occasions to Wolfson College, Oxford. More widely, and I list only a few of many here, Alan has served on committees of the ABC, the Adelaide Festival of Arts, the Bibliographical Society of Australia and New Zealand, the Australian and New Zealand Shakespeare Association, the International Shakespeare Association and the Australian Dance Council.

So Alan, it's been a long and distinguished career in literature and dance. Can we start by setting the scene, perhaps by you describing your early years and what took you to the University of Sydney more than half a century ago?

Yes, Stephen, certainly. I was a country boy, grew up mainly from the age of about 9, 7 or 8, around then, in Cowra, in central western New South Wales, on the Lachlan River, which is remembered by a great many people as being the scene of the largest POW outbreak in history, which is the Japanese breaking out of Prisoner of War camp over the other side of the hill, which was known as Billy Goat Hill (but its official name was Bellevue Hill, I believe) and, um, in August 1944 I believe it was. So, ah, that was where I grew up. But I went to a small bush school, Neila Creek, as you mentioned, which was about eight miles out of Cowra

because my father was appointed there as the teacher. And he was an extremely good teacher – I owe him an enormous amount and I don't mean simply for being my father, but I mean for being the model for me when I became a teacher myself. So I went to Cowra High School, I then went on to Sydney University and had a very interesting and delightful student life (laughs). I was at St. Andrew's College, which was right on campus, and uh participated, I was a foundation member of the St. Andrew's College Dramatic Society, which still flourishes, for example....

My word (laughter)

And as you said I started writing dance – on dance – for the student newspaper *Honi Soit*. And ah, lots of things were going on on campus, of course; I was mostly in things like university revues. In fact my brother Bob, who was in his final Honours year of English (I went to the University in 1950, we overlapped by one year) but ah in that year, even though he was doing his Honours, he was also co-producing the Sydney University Union Revue. So I was in that, and I was in virtually every other revue for the time I was there. And, uh, I enjoyed the student life, obviously, but, ah, it was terrific to be at Sydney University or any university, Australian university, in those days because there was, (sigh), for a student to have to work to stay at university was very unusual and we really felt very sorry for anybody who had to do that. Err, but, and then I did my Diploma of Education, after my Honours year, at the Teachers' College. That was a very 'recreational' year, let us say (laughter). And then I was appointed to Cessnock High School, and got back to Sydney nearly every weekend, if I could. Ah, I spent a few weeks in Bathurst before I was seconded to the New South Wales Education Department Head Office in Sydney in 1956, then I, I was there for four years working off the Teachers' College bond I had because I was on a Teachers' College scholarship. Ah, when I did – finished – that I went off overseas, not knowing exactly what I was going to do. Ah, my old professor, Wesley Milgate, may God rest his happy soul – he was a great scholar of Donne and the Elizabethans – he really fired my interest and imagination in ah, in that period. He suggested I write to University College London, say I was going over, might do an MA or something. Well, I never heard from them. But anyway I just went over there, just to see, as one did. And uh, I thought "Well, I'll have a look at this place that didn't bother replying to my letter", and uh, I went up to the English Department and someone said "Can I help you?" you see, and I said "Oh no, I thought I'd come up and look at the place", and explained I'd written a letter of interest but didn't get a reply. He said "What's your name?", so I told him, he said "Where have you been? We've been waiting for you to turn up" (laughter)

Whoops (laughs)

So it appears that the secretary had sent the reply with the requisite papers by sea-mail, instead of airmail (laughs)

Right

So anyway I was in and, ah, I had enough money to start me off anyway, and I thought "Well I can always teach if I have to". I didn't know then that if I was a full time student I was not allowed to have a job. Occasionally I did, particularly when I got married, (to) my wife Elizabeth, whom I call Libby – we'd been at Sydney University together but we'd lost touch with each other 'till – she'd been overseas – she came back; we met at a party about three months before I was due to leave. Ah, anyway, I wrote and asked if she'd like to come over and get married, and she said yes. That was very nice (laughs). And our first child Roger was born in London in 1962.

While you were a student

While I was a student. Which sort of necessitated a bit of extra money because Libby had been working, you see, as a secretary. And so, and um, I had to keep that under wraps, but that was fine. And as I had all the necessary requirements – an Honours degree, er, Diploma in Education, and the teaching experience, I got a very good screw in fact, it was really good, it was wonderful in fact. So I did that for about a month, and it kept us for about six.

Very good

So anyway, I came back. I applied for about three positions in Australia, and I was interviewed for one of them by Colin Horne, professor at – Jury Professor in the English Department Adelaide University – at the end of 1962, and um, he apparently cabled back to Vic Edgeloe, the Registrar, saying “Grab him”, which is very nice. He didn’t tell me that (laughter), but anyway I got a cable inviting me to turn up as a lecturer in the English Department of the University of Adelaide on the 23rd of January 1963, and uh, so we did that, thinking “Oh well, we’ll go back to Sydney after two or three years”, and we’ve been here ever since.

Very good, well I...

So that’s how I came to be lecturer in English in the University of Adelaide.

Good, good. We’ll stay at the University of Adelaide, but just in passing I’ll comment that to be interested in dance as a country boy in the 1950s was a bit unusual. But we’ll come to dance later on

Righto.

We’ll stay at the University of Adelaide

It is an interesting story, I think. I’ve been told it’s an interesting story.

First of all can you give a bit of framework for your career at Adelaide, milestones along the way?

Ok, um, I think that ah, I was very fortunate in being appointed in 1963, which was after the Murray Report. The Napier Building was in process at that stage. And ah, we moved into a brand new building in 1964, the Napier Tower. There were plenty on staff, and it was a very interesting Arts faculty at that stage with people like Hugh Stretton, in the History Department, Austin Gough, various people like that. J.G. Cornell in French, Trevaskis in Classics. The English Department had Colin Horne for 18th century, John Colmer, a Coleridge scholar, a variety of other younger lecturers like me, Tim Mares, whom I formed a very close friendship with – and we in fact worked together a great deal on courses on the early English literature period – and, ah with Ralph Eliot and Peter Meredith in medieval studies. Ralph became the foundation professor of English at Flinders University in 1966 when it was founded, and invited a number of us to go and join him. But I decided that the library was too valuable for me at Adelaide. That was one of the things that kept me there, as well as the congeniality of the staff. But a few people went over with him and did well. Um, the – Tim and I collaborated on editing, co-editing a series of Stuart and Tudor texts for the Clarendon Press, for example. Ah, um what were some of the things we did? Oh well, um, we used to run a series of play readings, for example. I’ve always been, my subject being particularly into drama, I was always ah, very concerned that the students should have drama experience, the experience of the dramatic text as theatrical text. So, um, in those days we had three terms and in each term we would do a rehearsed play reading of a play in first year,

second year, third year syllabuses. And these became quite elaborate really, with costume. But people had their play books and...

This was just within the Department

Within the Department, but for the whole University, and the public would come too. We'd put them on in the evening. We'd rehearse for about a fortnight, up in the student common room and block in the moves. We in fact had input into the design of what was known as 'Theatre Five' (I'm not quite sure what it is now – '101'?), the large theatre in Napier Tower. And so we had for example a dais, instead of just a flat floor, a removable desk, so we could use it as a stage, tabs at the back and at the side, a lighting rig, and so we really could do quite good stuff. And uh, we gave flying start to a number of people who became significant in theatre – like Keith Gallasch who became, eventually became, the director of the State Theatre Company here, Chris Westwood was involved (laughs), umm, Richard Morecroft, who was later with the ABC...

Ok, ABC, yep

John Edge, who became a noted person in the Theatre Guild.

Yep

All sorts of – several actresses: Jo Mason, who's a programmer with the ABC these days, uh, lots and lots of people, I feel very pleased at the thought that these people were involved with you know...

And inspired

Yeah. And then later on, among my students I'd like to mention people like Libby Raupach who went on to become the Chair of the Helpmann Academy and is now I think the Chair of State Opera. Um, Rob Brookman...

Yep

He was in that group too, who has of course had a very stellar career as a theatre director and executive. And ah....

It's a roll call of people, the luminaries of Adelaide

(laughs) Yes, it's wonderful to see this sort of thing and realize that they benefited from the kinds of things we used to do, and enjoy doing.

And how long did that continue, the play readings....

The play readings and things like that, that's an interesting point, Stephen. Ah, I suppose it died out, it would have been 'seventies....It probably died out in later 'eighties when money became tighter, and the staff was reduced. I mean, by the time I was chairman in 1984, we were losing staff – if they retired they weren't replaced. I mean that happened for example with George Turner, our Reader in Language. And that happened when I was Chairman. I couldn't do anything about it. And by that time tutorial classes were getting bigger. I mean, when I started Colin Horne had a rule that there should only be six people in a tutorial group.

Oh, my word...

Yes, 6. And if you were going to get more than 5, 6, 7 or 8, but preferably 6, then you hired a part-time tutor, and that would take up the extras. And that, of course, is no longer the case. By the time I left, in 1994, tutorial sizes were really seminar sizes. Like my room couldn't

hold them – I suppose I'd get about 15 or 16. And, ah, I don't know what happens these days, whether they have proper tutorials, or whether they're seminars.

Just going back to this, you put two reasons as to why this sort of thing no longer happens – reduction in staff, and money being tighter. Does that mean that if a young academic burning with enthusiasm came along today, wanting to start that sort of thing, could it happen do you think?

It might. But the other thing is that now, almost all students have jobs. And, I mean we had for example the Literary Society, ran a journal, ran – I think they just produced in those days – a journal just of poetry. We had a madrigal group, for example, and there was time to have rehearsals, and those sorts of things, and you could schedule something from 5 'till 6, or something like that, after classes had finished, but I doubt you could do that sort of thing now.

It's almost inconceivable now, isn't it?

Yes, which is really very sad because I do think that, that the modern student is not able to tap into the kind of interrelationship and social relationships which feed the academic relationships. And just mixing, mixing around. So it's a different sort of atmosphere, a whole different sort of social system in the University now, I'm sure.

So you came to the University in the early sixties, and you climbed the academic ladder didn't you?

Well that's true. I didn't, uh, I was invited to apply for chairs in other places, but I decided not to, I decided to stay here. And, um, a couple of my colleagues – several of my colleagues – went on to do that sort of thing. One or two, well Tom Burton has become a professor, but he's retiring this year, but he was a much younger colleague, of course, he didn't come 'till much after me, but uh, so I very happily stayed there being a Reader, I got to that level.

And you published a great deal

Yes, (laughs), well I suppose I have to agree with you. Compared with a number, I must say, compared to some of my colleagues I certainly did. But, I must say though, that a number of them are editions, I edited two or three anthologies of essays, as a contributing editor. I wrote – my main monograph was on Shakespeare and the dance, and that was in 1983 I think it was published, 1981 maybe? Goodness, I should know. . . . In Shakespeare, my main publication apart from that is the Oxford Shakespeare edition of *As You Like It*, which was published in 1993, and that continues to be in print. Oh, and there's been a few editions of Australian things along the way, particularly Rolf Boldrewood; I made a particular study of Rolf Boldrewood and wrote a small pamph – booklet – on him for the Oxford – Australian Oxford Authors – and their works; that was about 1972 I think I did that.

But going back to those times, was there pressure to publish?

I don't think in Adelaide we ever had that publish or perish syndrome that Americans had. I can remember when I was writing my thesis in London Samuel Schoenbaum, who was a very noted Shakespearean scholar, alas now dead, he was a wonderful man, he said "Which publisher are you going to take your thesis to, Alan?" (laughs). I'd never thought of that! And in fact I never did publish it as a book. But I did use it for articles, and when I did an edition of Thomas Middleton's play *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*, I drew heavily on my thesis for that. So it wasn't wasted.

And you develop this specialism for dance in Shakespeare, and, forgive me, but I don't remember much dance in Shakespeare

Oh? (laughs)

Is it there or...?

Yes, because in at least 30 of his plays there are mentions, I can't remember, I haven't got the figures in my head right now, but dance is an important symbol of harmony and in those days I felt that Shakespeare's plays always worked towards harmonious conclusions of some kind.

Right

Not all of them do, of course. The tragedies don't. This is why, for example, in Macbeth, you've got the witches doing a dance – in the wrong direction.

Oh, ok

And contrary to all the films, and all the productions, Romeo and Juliet do not dance.

Right

He sees her, and she sees him, "Oh she does teach the torches to burn bright", he says, but they meet and their hands touch, but in fact they are called apart, so, um, that's tragedy. Whereas Much Ado About Nothing, you finish up with a dance – "strike up pipers", for instance; As You Like It finishes with a dance. There's lots of dance in Shakespeare.

And did he actually specify the nature of the dance?

Ah, sometimes. "To tread a measure with you on the grass" is one of the lines, for example, from Love's Labour's Lost, and the measure was a stately dance, a pavane. And there are, well I could go on...Go and read the book (laughs).

Back to the University. You were appointed as lecturer, you became senior lecturer, then reader, now a brand of associate professor. You would have been given a chance to be called an associate professor...

Oh yes, that was interesting; the University, when they decided to introduce that as a term, had a ballot to see what readers wanted, whether they wanted to become associate professors or not. It was split absolutely 50/50 down the middle (laughs). So in the English Department Tom Burton had just been made a reader, and was very proud of it, and he and I decided we would remain as readers. But there may have been others who chose to become associate professors. And it was useful if you went to America because they could call you "professor" then.

I was thinking there would probably have been a humanities/science divide there, to some degree

There could well have been, I suppose. Anyway, someone said, "Well I don't want to be an "aspro", you see? (laughs).

But as you climb the tree, inevitably you get drawn into the management aspects of departments and faculties, and you played your role, your part in that?

Oh I think I probably did. As you said I was on the Education Committee as a member, and the Arts Faculty Board. I suppose I was on appointment boards, and all those sorts of things. I eventually became, I can't remember the year, but we began having elected heads of

department. And Tim Mares was the first one, and ah, there was always some – there was friction in the Department as you might say – in those days, and we decided we'd like to have an elected Head and the University Council approved the move and Tim became the first Head. And I succeeded, I think, Kenneth Ruthven, who'd been appointed as a professor to the Department in 1981. And I think I succeeded him, and I always remember him saying to me, "You'll find, Alan, that your days become a mosaic", little bits of this and little bits of that – certainly true (laughs).

Right

And it was certainly true. I think I was only there for two years, '84 and '85, and I, er, I had a few problems, with some postgraduates. Not with the staff, it was a pretty happy Department under my chairmanship, I believe, and have been told so, but I was glad to leave it to the others because I was trying to finish up a book (laughs), and I had an article or two that I wanted to write. And all that just had to be put on hold so I was glad enough to get rid of it. But I must say one of the life savers at the University of Adelaide in those day – and I don't know whether it still applies – was the very good study leave provisions. When I first went we had to take a year, and my first study leave year was 1968, and we went to London. And after that we were allowed to take shorter periods – and I think that was very, very good. And I generally took eight months or less after that. And the provisions were very generous because we were on full pay, we got a living allowance, for family, and we got fares.

My word

So I don't know whether that applies now – I suppose I should have phoned up to find out before I came to this interview (laughs). It would be easy enough to find out if that was true. But that was wonderful. In 1974 we went to Oxford for the first time because I realized the Bodleian Library, great library, and it was close to Stratford, where I could do research and get experience. And so every other study leave, except one, which was when I had my fellowship at the Huntington Library in 1979, my study leave was spent in Oxford. It was terrific, it was very good for my three children, particularly my daughter, who was able to go to a very good school at the times she came with us. And so the study leave provisions of Adelaide University I was very grateful for. And as well as that one could apply for grants, I was fortunate in getting a number of grants over the years I was at the University, they helped me in research. So all those sorts of things....

But just touching back on your role in management at the University, it seems to me to be one of the essential, um, problems for a university is that academics need to manage, but also that there are professional managers in a university, and there are calls increasingly for accountability from government, which need to be professionally managed, and a large administration is called for, for all this sort of thing

They're getting very, very top heavy...

But it's in the nature of beast almost, isn't it?

Yes it is, but it's extraordinary the way the administrative load increased in the last 10 years, I suppose, I was at the University. I remember when Penny Boumelha was appointed professor. It was on the strength of her research record, and I saw maybe her four or five years later, and she just said at one stage, she said "Well", she said, "you know, I came here because of my research, as well as my administrative abilities, and they still want me to do research, and if I'm going to do it – but the way it's going I just don't have time to do any", you know? And by the time I left it was like that with most of us too I think the computer is

partly to blame, Stephen, because we used to have two or three secretaries in the Department. The professor had his secretary, and one other full time, and one part time. Ok. We'd give them work to do, you'd send off a letter that you'd written, or you'd dictate a letter, and it'd come back and you sign it, and off it would go. But then in come computers, and everybody gets a computer, so you do your own letters. Well that takes more time, and so it goes. And then people send emails. And now they have, I notice – you can sign up for a course, how to manage your email.

Right....

Need I say more.

But this is, the world has changed in this, in this way...

Oh absolutely...

I mean, in a sense irresistibly. And the world of universities has changed because of the weight of government intrusion and government control and government calls for accountability, surely, um, the beast has changed....

Yes, yes, undoubtedly. So I feel myself very lucky to have been there when it was not like that (laughs).

Right. And so the modern academic probably needs a different attitude, and different skills, do you think?

Well, I think that's true, particularly when there's online learning, that kind of thing. I mean, I think some of that is very exciting stuff. I still believe that the very best teaching can take place in a face-to-face situation, ideally between a student and a tutor. I think that's the ideal situation, small group teaching of course is terrifically valuable, very, very good. And I was very interested to see in - the new Vice Chancellor Warren Bebbington's Strategic Plan which has just been issued, there's a whole section in which he says one of the aims is to return to small group teaching.

Indeed, in his inaugural lecture he was citing the Humboldt Model, from Berlin...

Yes. Well I wish him good luck (laughter)

It will be interesting. Are there particular identities within the University whom you'd care to recall and reflect on?

Oh my goodness...(laughs)

We can pass over, we can elide over that...

No I must say, that of all the Vice Chancellors of the University when I was there, I think Geoffrey Badger was the finest. Um, he had a certain humaneness about him, and he was very, I thought, excellent with students. I mean at one stage there was a student occupation going on in the Vice Chancellor's office and he cooled the whole thing down magnificently. Also, um, on a personal level (laughs), when I was producing Richard II in 1969 for the Theatre Guild, I heard about some costumes the Elizabethan Theatre Trust had had, in their production of a Henry IV play, I think, and for some reason I was in his office, and that came up, and he said, "Well, do you want them?", and I said "Well I'd really like to, but I don't know, Geoff" (because I did call him "Geoff") and he said, "Well, there's a phone, ring 'em up!" (laughs)

Right

I don't know whether that would happen these day, it might, but he was that sort of person, and on a personal level he was very good. Not that there weren't other great – Noel Flentje and Don Stranks for example were wonderful people. So, um, I think that those sorts of things uh....

Well it was under Geoffrey Badger that enormous growth was taking place – the Whitlam years, and so on, and the University probably, and this is a question, probably had to become a little less personal, once it became so much larger?

Well, I think that that's inevitably true. And I guess that that may have been when the sorts of things I was talking about earlier had to slow down. For example I can remember, sometime before 1970, I organized a concert – the Elder Hall had free lunchtime concerts every Thursday – and I organized one performed entirely by the English Department staff and students. Except for one, a piano duet which was performed by Rosemary Sweetapple, who became Rosemary Moore, who was a lecturer, ah, she play the piano duet, the Italian Concerto, Bach, with Philip Britten, who was on the Conservatorium staff. But maybe that could happen today, I don't know, maybe it could?

One would like to think so.... Well maybe we could move to your wider persona. Because you've certainly had a very rich life outside the walls of the University, or maybe some of these areas within the University that were not strictly curricula, but associated with it. You had the Early Imprints Project, and students had the Literary Society...

I think perhaps I could mention, ah, what if I talked about the dance and drama in the Department, uh, in the University. Have I got time to do that? Well there was a feeling – particularly Tim and I in the English Department – but there were other people around the University who felt that there was a place for a drama discipline, in the Department, in the University. So we set up a Committee for the Performing Arts, which I chaired. And we did in fact appoint a drama lecturer, and there was a Drama Department. Jim Vilé was the first senior lecturer in Drama. I interviewed him [in Oxford] in 1974, and he was, uh, a member of that Department, he was the head of it, until 1986, and um, it produced a number of people. And I think it was around, perhaps it was 1986...no it was 1991 when the South Australian College of Advanced Education merged with the University, and the Drama Department from that organization came over with Frank Ford in charge. Well, um, they produced a number of people – I mean Chris Drummond who is the Director of Brink Production, for example, and [playwright] Michael Hill, Andy Packer, who's the head of a children's company, [Slingsby], which is internationally famous, people like that. Uh, and then in 1996, under Vice Chancellor Mary O'Kane, it was dissolved. So that was the end of Drama in the University of Adelaide. Now in 1981 I was also instrumental in setting up the Dance Department in the University of Adelaide, and that, er, was the first Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Performing Arts (Dance), in an Australian University. There were dance departments in other tertiary institutions like Kelvin Grove, for example, in Melbourne, which eventually became part of Monash University, and others, and...

So Dance was most closely associated with the English Department was it? Or the Conservatorium?

Not really, no, it was independent, but it did have - later on, a Faculty of Performing Arts was in fact formed and there was a collaboration between them. I noticed the other day that Steve Whittington, for example, one of the Conservatorium staff, composed the music for one of

David Roche's ballets, his dance pieces. Ah, but the Dance Department was really very successful. I think that virtually every graduate found a place somewhere. And they're still around, I mean Ade Suharto is really going great guns.

And the cause for the closures?

Ah, well, cost cutting I suppose... Well, performing arts are labour intensive, and you don't get such a big bang for your buck, but you get a more valuable bang for your buck, because it is more intensive, than you do in larger departments. And, ah, lots of individual teaching. And I understand that the Vice Chancellor of the time got rid of these two, had her eyes on the Conservatorium next, and there were a number of protests about that, and other things.... Perhaps you could talk to other people about that particular Vice Chancellor.

Yes, the conservatorium is held very dear in all of Adelaide's heart, isn't it?

Yes indeed. So other things concerned with the arts at the University, was, one of the more enjoyable committees I was on was the Works of Art Fund Committee which first had the idea that Buddy Rogers in Biology – Microbiology I think, Professor – and some of his other scientific confreres, um, had the idea about 1961 or '62; I think it came into being in 1965. And I found it very enjoyable to be on because I was with a number of people from different disciplines. I mean Tom Browning from Etymology, professor at the Waite, David Saunders from Architecture, at one stage Rosemary Brook, the Principal of St Anne's College was on it, and we had Kym Bonython as an adviser. We gained funds from various places, some donations; I mean, Max Harris presented the Barr Smith Library, though us, with a set of Arthur Boyd paintings and his poems to go with them. You'd know about that.

Angry Penguins

Yes, Angry Penguins stuff. And then we also have a very fine set of Arthur Boyd oils, ah, the Judge series, which we bought for the University, through – and the Union collaborated with that. The Henry Moore sculpture which is there, that's through the Works of Art Fund. And eventually the University employed a curator. Now I must point out that the Works of Art Fund put out a – the University said they couldn't afford it – so an invitation was sent out to staff to contribute part of their salary. And it was really wonderful that this was done, and we got a great deal of money from that. But gradually it faded away, understandably. But that was how it really got going. Now the University has a curator, and I have here somewhere...

[Inaudible 47:05]

Terrific book on the University of Adelaide Art Collections.

Well, was the University of Adelaide Works of Art Committee, I guess the Works of Art Committee would still have existed when the South Australian College merged with the University. Because they brought a lot with them

They brought a lot with them.

Because they had the War Memorial Collection

That's right, yep. The Hartley Collection.

The Hartley Collection

That's right. And this was a book published, or written by Paula Furby and Betty Snowden, and, er, John Perkins I think was the first University of Adelaide Art Curator. And next was probably..., never mind. Anyway, it's certainly there, and it's a good...

The University did have the funds to buy works of art in those days and also attract them. I don't think those things happen now, do they?

Well maybe not. I really don't know. Of course the other big donation that did a great deal for the University was – I don't know how much it was – which funded the foundation of 5UV/Radio Adelaide. And that was in the late sixties perhaps, I can't remember. But, er, and it started off underneath the, er, what was it called, the Hughes Plaza – yes, under the Hughes Plaza.

Yes, next to the new part of the Barr Smith Library

That's right. And Keith Conlon was one of the first people involved.

Indeed. So that was built on the back of donated funds?

Oh, a magnificent donation from a man who was an engineer I think. I don't know the details of that, but it's grown into the premier community radio station in Australia. It's got more awards than any other community radio station in Australia, and it's been a breeding ground for lots and lots and lots of radio and television people, and, you know, still is. And I, I think I gave a series of talks on poetry or something in those early days, so I've been connected with that for a long time because I still do reviews, and interviews for it.

It was very much a university radio station to start with. But now it's become much more broadly based in the community

Well that's true but it is still the University station...

But drawing much more widely...

Yes indeed. It's not just a voice for the University.

And the Theatre Guild. You were active with the Theatre Guild

Ah, well, only to a certain extent. I was never on the committee of that, but I did produce a play, which was Richard II.

Is there any dancing in Richard II?

No dancing, there's one of the lines...

Horses but no dancing...

No, no, that's Richard III, there's no horses (laughter). No, when Richard's in dire straits and his poor wife's concerned about it all, and one of her ladies is trying to cheer her up: "Shall we have music, my lady, shall we dance?", she says, "No, no dancing girl".

Right

It's a tragedy.

Right. But moving on to dance, you become a dance critic very early on, as an undergraduate student. And here we are sixty years later, and you're still doing it

Yes that's right. Well very briefly, um, before we went to Cowra, a couple of schools before, we were at a school in the Riverina of NSW and my parent got a journal called the Sydney Mail, and in 1938 the Ballet Russes came to Sydney, to Australia, and the Sydney Mail ran a series of articles with rather fuzzy photographs. They were among the first action photographs that had been taken of dance in Australia, I imagine. And for some reason I was

captivated by them. I was always skipping around – my parents were both musical – they put on school concerts and, uh, I always wanted to get involved with those. I never learned dancing but I had six tap dancing lessons once in Cowra (laughs). But my brother encouraged it. He sent me a book, Arnold Haskell's book on ballet, just called "Ballet", the Penguin book, when he went to University. And I read it and so I was always interested in it, and when I got to the University in Sydney I started writing and fortunately Borovansky's Ballet had started again in 1950 and it was a very exciting time to be around. And so out of that came the book that was finally published last year, 2010 actually, called "Australia Dances" which I wrote back in the 1950s and '60s with a friend, Keith Glennon, who died, but it was published. When he died, all the papers were brought over to the Barr Smith Library, and I finally got it into shape and it was published by the Wakefield Press. But yes, I just have kept it as an interest and there it is.

And added greatly to the cultural life of the country, not just South Australia...

Well thank you, thank you.

Well as I said in the introduction it has been a long and distinguished career. Before we wrap this up are there any other reflections you'd like to make?

Oh my goodness me. Well Adelaide was a great place to bring up children. And my wife Elizabeth also was able to finish her BA in Adelaide which she had to stop in Sydney when her father moved to Perth. And later she went on and did a Theology degree, so she's got two degrees. And let me add the three children who have all done, I have to say, very well.

All graduates from the University of Adelaide?

No, two. The second one, Piers, was not academic but he got a job in the Microbiology Department as a laboratory technician, went on to become eventually after 20 years the resources manager in the Department of Environmental Biology, and now works in the Environment Department of the State Government, as the manager of the Native Vegetation and Biodiversity Management Unit I think it is.

The University of Adelaide is definitely in the Brissenden blood

Oh it is. Well, Roger is an astrophysicist; he graduated here, he's now with the Smithsonian Harvard Astrophysical Observatory in Boston. Ah, Celia did English Honours. She once said "I won't let you down, Dad", (laughs), and in fact she has not. She is now with the er, Primary Industries and Regions South Australia, she's in that Department as a media officer after a very interesting career in the Arts. So um, yes, I've had a wonderful time being involved with the Adelaide Festival and the Arts Council of South Australia, and writing about all these things and talking to you this afternoon.

Well it's been very enjoyable, Alan. Thank you very much for this. My name is Stephen Beaumont and let me just again thank you Alan and wish you well for the future

Thank you very much, Stephen, it's been a great pleasure (laughs).

Supplementary Notes

- The Early Imprints Project

The Early Imprints Project, which aimed to list books and other materials printed before 1801 held in Australia and New Zealand, had its beginnings in 1976 following a conversation

between Alan Brissenden and Wilfrid Prest, of the Adelaide University History Department. Branches were established in each state and territory and New Zealand, and relevant information was contributed to the Eighteenth Century Short Title Catalogue then being compiled in England and America. From 1976 to 1987 Alan chaired the South Australian Committee of the project, and was also a member of the Executive of the combined Early Imprints Project in Australia and New Zealand 1977-87. Funding for the South Australian project was obtained from the Humanities Research Centre (ANU, Canberra), the University of Adelaide, the University of Adelaide Foundation, the Friends of the State Library of South Australia and the Australian Research Grants Committee and work began in 1979. Indispensable to its success were two research assistants, Frank Carlton, briefly, but principally and essentially Cheryl Hoskin, who subsequently became special Collections Librarian at the Barr Smith Library. Uniquely, the South Australian project included privately held material as well as institutional holdings. The data was initially entered on cards, then on computer files which eventually contributed to the National Library's Australian Bibliographic Network. The project attracted \$90,103 in funding and reached completion in 1987, by which time some 19,000 items had been recorded.

- The Australian and New Zealand Shakespeare Association

The Australian and New Zealand Shakespeare Association was founded at a week-end conference beginning on 1 June 1990 at Monash University. Dennis Bartholomeusz of the Monash English Department was elected President, and Alan was honoured to become Vice President. He subsequently became President (1992-94), a member of Executive (1994-2002) and the Association's first Honorary Life Member (1998). In February 1992 he and Tim Mares convened in Adelaide the second ANZSA conference. This was the first international Shakespeare conference held in Australia or New Zealand, setting a standard which has been maintained biennially up to the present, apart from 2006, when the International Shakespeare Association's World Congress was held in Brisbane. Of the 42 speakers, 14 were from overseas countries, including America, Canada, the Czech Republic, England, Germany, Hungary, Pakistan, Singapore and Sweden. Sponsorship in both money and kind was an important element in funding, and the conference is still remembered for the excellence of its speakers and for the authentic Elizabethan food of the conference dinner held in the Tudor mansion of Carrick Hill, which is filled with original 16th- and 17th-century furniture.

Alan was a member of the International Shakespeare Association's World Congress Subcommittee (1992-2006), and presented papers on Shakespearian topics at several ANZSA conferences and ISA congresses as well as international conferences at Stratford Upon Avon and elsewhere.