

# ANDREW ALLEN'S ORAL INTERVIEW WITH HUGH BAIRNSFATHER ON 31 JULY 2013

**AA** Hugh, I'll start with where and when you were born?

**HB** I was born in 1919 in Adelaide.

**AA** What year did you come to Campbelltown?

**HB** In 1954, when Susan was 10.

**AA** When did you first get interested in photography?

**HB** I got interested in photography when I first went to work. I had a little baby brownie when I was a youngster, but when I went to work as a technician at the Adelaide University Physics Department, they had better things there, they had Leicas. They also had an enlarger there and a dark room. So that is where it started when I was 17. I was self-taught.

At home poor old Nancy used to lose the kitchen several times a week, because I would use that as a dark room. I would black it out and I had the running water. I could do ordinary developing and ordinary enlarging mostly, because I worked with 35mm film. The slides came later of course which were more expensive. Most of the stuff in the Library would be on slides, half frame and full frame. That continued in Carrington because we were in a self-care unit. We moved in there in 1987 and we didn't leave that unit until a couple of years ago. That sort of hobby is not allowed. You can't do things like that here.

**AA** Was photography a hobby or did you do it professionally?

**HB** It was just a hobby really. In the course of my work at the Adelaide University Physics work shop I would have made a lot of prints for them on occasions but that doesn't make me a professional. If anything turned up and you had to produce a print you went down to the dark room and produced a print, that's all. I was self-taught, because really and truly I was a scientific officer. When I was at the CSIRO I didn't have to do any of that because they had a photographic section there. If we needed photographs for a paper we were writing, we would put in an order and they did a professional job. It was very different there.

**5 mins**

So photography became a hobby and in about 1970 in Campbelltown I joined a group of amateur archaeologists who were searching the bush for

Aboriginal affairs and we all had some of our skills brought into being and because I had done so much photography, I was the one who did the photographing. This became a full time hobby really and we used to go out every fortnight into the scrub in East Campbelltown and into the Holsworthy area. We had to get permission from (a) the Water Board and (b) the Army and it was a case of dividing ourselves up into search parties going up creeks and looking into caves and if there was anything worth recording on film; I was the one who did it. We produced two books actually, one was just a general study of the work we had been doing and roughly where we were doing it. I had to be the recorder and find all the 25,000 maps and any photographs that were taken were recorded in the second book. That was the one that stayed out of publication. I think the Museum might have it actually.

### **10 mins**

When I moved over here I had so much stuff I couldn't keep it all. I took them to the Chairman of the Historical Society. I was a member of the Campbelltown Historical Society until I had to move over here. A lot of the slides are in the hands of the Museum and a lot are in the Library. Things like the electrification of the railway and getting the key to the City. They are not the sort of photos that you would bring out for the family to look at.

**AA** We have got photos of the 1970 Bicentennial. There was a celebration and we have got photos that you took and the 1968 electrification of the railway and when Campbelltown became a City, we have got those.

**HB** There were some odd ones. There was Clive Tregear dressed up in his robes.

**AA** Did they ask you to take the photos or did you just take them?

**HB** No, I just decided to wander down. I just took the photos, with the exception of the photographs that I took in the Holsworthy area for the archaeological exploration which was paid for by the National Parks and Wildlife. Those I regret to say are in the hands of the National Parks and Wildlife at Hurstville. At least that's where I took them. They moved from the City and their headquarters are in a building in Hurstville. One day I got a fellow to take me over there and gave them all the negatives and anything that they had paid for so that when something like this occurs, you would know where to go. I have seen boxes of slides thrown on rubbish heaps and this worried me a bit. I saw some little boys one day on a mound of dirt with some boxes of slides and they were flicking slides and they were disappearing into the woods. It's sad in a way.

### **15 mins**

We went out with Dr Carol Liston one day when she was writing a history of Campbelltown showing her the area which was forbidden of course until there

was no firing. We had to sign an indemnity form to say that the Army was absolved for all blame if we got blown up.

There was a small creek that ran into a major creek; I think it was called Williams Creek. There was quite a good charcoal drawing there. We started it but we didn't have time to finish it. The following week we went along and requested permission to go in and we went back to the same overhang. When we got there you wouldn't believe it but a big 4 inch shell was what you would call a blind, it didn't explode had come skimming down low and hit the back of the wall where our drawings were. Normally I suppose we should have just moved on. One or two of the girls said that it was alright. I took a photograph of one of the girls and she is standing with this shell between her legs. She had clear plastic stuck on the wall and was tracing these drawings. That was quite funny, but you never know. In retrospect I can only say that thank Heaven nothing happened. Much later on some little boys went in there exploring and found a number of hand grenades which had been used, but they hadn't gone off. They found these and were hurling them around. They were wounded. Some of the grenades are sensitive to shock, although they have a fuse in them.

**AA** Did you have an interest in trains or railways?

**HB** Oh yes, I was a member of the Historic Society and we used to go on excursions in the steam trains. I went on quite a few of them. The historic loco 3801 was a big steamer. They had it in shipshape condition and they were going to take it from Sydney to Perth. Those who wanted to go paid a lot of money. Those of us in Sydney followed the train in our own cars up through the mountains and went as far as Goulburn. They stopped for special photo stops and all the people off the train would be pouring out with their cameras and tripods.

**20 mins**

**AA** You took some of Pansy too didn't you?

**HB** I went up to Kenny Hill and I only remember one and that was of Herb Lee who was a driver and they stopped on Kenny Hill and I took a slide of him leaning out of the cab.

**AA** Did you have any favourite subjects that you took photos of?

**HB** My wife and I were both members of the Campbelltown Theatre Group and my wife had been a dancing teacher way back in the 60s. I got called in as an electrician to hang lights. The Campbelltown Town Hall at that stage was pretty primitive, not as good as it is now. Unfortunately, I passed on all the photos which were mainly black and white prints to the Group. The committee at the time was a little bit lax I'm afraid. The photos were left in an unlocked

cabinet. So people that were going down to meetings and things there, were pulling out drawers and would see a photo of their family and take them and they went down to zero. They just all went. It was terrible. The roof leaked and did some damage too.

**AA** What sort of camera did you use?

**25 mins**

**HB** In latter years, the best camera that I had was an Olympus which was a single lens reflex and I had a 200mm lens and things like that. I used to photograph the Theatre Group from up in the lighting balcony in the Town Hall. That was nice and easy because I didn't get in the road. Previously, I used to have to see the Director or whoever was running the show to go to the dress rehearsal night before they put the show on so that I could move around in the hall without upsetting anybody. Once they had a paying audience there I had to go upstairs and use a zoom lens. I just did photos for those that were interested.

**AA** Did you prefer black and white or colour?

**HB** The black and white is faster. I did Camelot in colour but there again I did that on the full dress rehearsal. I had field notes but they are in the hands of the Campbelltown Museum.

**AA** The photos that you took of the street parades such as Fishers Ghost, they are good to have now because often they will show what Queen Street looked like then and Railway Street what it looked like back in the 60s and 70s. It's good to have that now, the more time goes on.

**30 mins**

**HB** I did make a lot of tapes. They were taken on a portable reel-to-reel on cassettes which ended up in the Library or the Museum. For instance I did an interview with Mary Barnes. They were living out at Kentlyn and were characters. A lot of them started out there in the 1920s in the days during the depression. A lot of them like the Barnes went out there and just took a tent. They had two children at that stage and they had come from New Zealand. They had come from England originally.

Eventually he built his own house at the end of Kentlyn. He quarried all the stone from the escarpment at the back of his property which went right to the middle of the river in those days. Nowadays the Council is not quite so beneficent with their boundaries and they lost a lot of land because they took the river and about 100 metres up the face of the cliff. While it was his property he cut these big sandstone blocks all on his own with primitive tools

and when he got a load he would hire a truck from one of the local blokes and have it brought up from the quarry.

When he and his wife died, that left Mary their unmarried daughter and there was a son, just the two of them. They reached a stage when they couldn't stay there on their own and they had to move out and went Liverpool way. I went down and got them to talk into the recorder and that tape went into the Museum. An article on that also went into the Museum's historic paper. I often wonder how on earth I found the time to go to work. Nowadays I'm not allowed to do any work that involves overexerting myself.

### **35 mins**

**AA** You took some photos from the Civic Centre when it was first built, when there were no gardens there. I think you went on top of the roof didn't you?

**HB** On the weekend when there were no workmen there, I had to foot it all the way up as the lift wasn't installed then, so I got panoramic views from up there.

I started to write my family history some years ago and it fell into the hands of an English author who made a living out of this. The book has only come out this year. It is called the Bairnsfather boys. There were two brothers. The author was John Ward, he is an Englishman. During the war, my two brothers were in the Air Force and I was in the Army. A lot of photographs were taken, some by me but both my brothers had Leica cameras and they were both in Lancaster squadrons and they took photographs everywhere and they were published, mostly it is a book for the Lancaster Bomber Command. Both of them kept log books so all the photographs are in some sort of order and approximate date.

### **40 mins**

Some photos were taken on board and in action. My brother Ralph was shot down over Germany unfortunately. My parents were performers and travelled the world. This book is precious because it has entries from the author. He and one of my sons did all the real hard work. My brother Bruce was a pilot and he was sitting in the box seat taking the photos as he was right up in the nose. My brother Ralph was a bomber and had the best view of all. He had a special optical glass that he peered through with his instruments right up in the nose. Not a very nice place to be if the plane crashes, which happened with them as they were shot down.

**AA** Where did you serve?

**HB** I was in Darwin and Truscott. I joined up as a Private and I went through a whole lot of stages. It was just at the time when the Japs had made their entry

into the war and they were wanting radar or RDF as it was properly called, to apply to all the gunnery. It was sending out a signal up into the sky and would put a trace on a plane and pick its range. I finished up being attached to an anti-aircraft regiment.

#### **45 mins**

I was in what was called the AEME, Electrical Mechanical Engineers. We were stuck onto the gunners and we had to keep them going. They were pretty rough in those days. We had 3.7inch anti-aircraft guns shooting into the air at a place and hopefully exploding at the plane. Then there were searchlights which had radar mounted on them so that when they turned the switch on there would be the plane illuminated in all its glory waiting for the gunners to open fire and then there were 20mm guns which were used for ground work when they came over you and you followed them with an open sight. They put a strip in at Truscott over in the Kimberley's and we went over there, had a nice trip on a liberty ship. It was a refuelling point.