

**Pride History Group Oral History Interview with Bill Bland**

Interviewer: John Witte

Date: 10<sup>th</sup> January 2007

Location of interview: Anzac Parade, Kensington

Reason for interview: Early Social Groups

Restrictions: None

Call no.:



Time	Summary	Keywords
File 1 0000	Bill was born 12 <sup>th</sup> January 1934 in Brisbane. The family moved to the Darling Downs after he was born and spent his childhood there. When he was 18 he did his army training (National Service) at Wacol out of Brisbane and this took him to Brisbane. His father was a shearing contractor and he organised men to work in shearing sheds. Bill pursued a career in wool classing for about 20 years. He went to school in Goondiwindi and Gunnedah and then went into the shearing industry.	Brisbane Darling Downs National Service Wacol Goondiwindi Gunnedah
0248	Bill says that life was rough and tough in those days. "We used to have girlfriends and eventually you'd meet someone who would interest you but nothing happened, and that is as far as it went".	
0313	Then moved to Brisbane for army training. He woke up to other things in life other than "marrying your school girl sweet heart and living in the bush for the rest of your life" and eventually came to Sydney via Yass (where his family lived) and he saw the bright lights.	Yass
0355	Bill describes a restrictive life in the bush and "this didn't suit my style of life". "I think I was a bit different to other people. I realized that eventually". "You've only have one life and you've got to do what you want to do in life and if other people dictate to you what you should do, well it doesn't always work that way".	
0451	His parents had struggled through the depression.	
0505	When he moved to Sydney he was still working in the wool industry. He met Kevin at the Tatler hotel. Bill had been to a Randwick Race Meeting. "I had the big hat on and the sports jacket and the riding boots". He describes the Tatler. Kevin offered him a chair and that night they got on well together. When Kevin followed him out onto the street Bill invited him for a milkshake. They remained friends for 38 years.	Kevin (Molly) Fuller Tatler Randwick Races
0620	He had been living in a guest house in Bondi and Kevin lived in Leichhardt and Kevin visited Bill. They remained friends. Then he met Kevin's friends and "I sorted out what was what. 'Cause I wasn't used to that type of life". He liked the style. They gathered more friends through parties.	Leichhardt Bondi
0659	Describes being asked at a party "Are you bitch or butch?" "What are you talking about".... "I found out later".	

0737	Kevin worked at Prouds, in King Street in the City. Bill was working in the bush and returning to Sydney. He describes the incident when Kevin showed him the paper "30 bejeweled women put in gaol." And told him "I was one of them". Police had raided a party which had poker machines. Mandy Smith, Ivy Richter, Polly ...	Prouds
0914	Bill worked in the retail business, for Woolworths, Sargents, Grace Brothers,	Woolworths, Sargents, Grace Brothers
0949	People would collect at the old Rex Bar, buy bottles of DA (Dinner Ale) and stand out the front and be invited to a party. Then the big events began to roll in – the Chameleons etc.	Old Rex Bar Chameleons
1015	Bill first went to the Kashmir. They go after for coffee, "and meet all the identities. You'd have to fight to get in there. You'd have to be someone to get in there. You'd meet a lot of interesting people."	Kashmir
1045	Then meet in the Carlton Rex in Castlereagh Street for cocktails on a Friday night.	Carlton Rex
1058	"We'd have to be very discreet in the earliest days, because the police weren't tolerant at all. ... "	
1108	They'd also meet at the Pfahlerts Hotel, the Australia Bar.	Pfahlerts Hotel, the Australia Bar
1118	Being discrete was "not being flamboyant out on the streets. But you'd find people who can't help themselves ... they enjoy themselves better than others I suppose."	
1235	He knew a few people involved in the Chameleons – Dawn O'Donnell and Mandy Smith and Flo Fuller. Molly got involved in it because he was a good organiser. He was the cellar man for the night at the Digger's Hall. "You'd get up the staircase, a very narrow staircase ... and you'd have to get down. Well that night Molly didn't a drink now and again, so at the top of the stairs she rolled down. Got down the stairs, "Oh, where's my beer" – never missed a beat."	Chameleons Dawn O'Donnell Mandy Smith Flo Fuller
1352	Donnie Smith was very popular. He had parties at his place at Cammeray. Was involved with Yoos Myers a florist at Double Bay. She was "Queen Juliana". Bill tells the story of a Queen's Birthday weekend party where Yoos arrives in full regal drag and everyone received their order that night.	Donnie Smith Cammeray Yoos Myers Double Bay Queen Juliana
1518	Describes meeting up with this circle of friends. A roof top party at Yoos Myers. "then we went on to the Keiron to have the parties there ... We'd have 3 a year there. A Fancy Dress, A Formal Ball – a Gown of the year and New Year's Eve, and there'd be 3 or 400 people, and silver service and ....it was \$8.50 ... a 3 course dinner, an open bar, champagne, beer, wine, spirits before you went to sit down. Then you'd have a band and silver service with the waiters with white gloves on ... We had if	Yoos Myers Keiron Fancy Dress Ball Formal Ball New Year's Eve Ron Jones Keith and Ron

	for 10 years or more. We had a huge following there, very up market ... You'd walk in and there's be 2 floors and you'd walk into the big reception room and there'd be chandeliers look out to a big back garden and upstairs you'd have a huge big stair case with the big chandelier, big foyer then the big ball room, the big reception room." "It used to be an old fire station ... and Ron Jones's father he renovated it and when he passed on he handed it over to Ron's brother, Keith and Ron and they turned it into a Reception Centre. There used to be a lot of big Jewish, Greek, Italian weddings there."	
1747	Mandy was on the look out for a new venue and took Bill out to the Keiron. "Mandy said 'we're having a big gay function' and Kay (Ron's partner) said 'oh yes, no worries'. Mandy looked at me and I looked at her." Eventually Kei Ron was sold to the wife of Ron's brother and their son. Ron still does functions for Bill.	Donnie Mandy Smith Kay ? Jones
1920	The money for these functions barely covered costs. You'd also pay for the advertising, prizes, decorations. Some charities got something.	
2010	"The reason we used to have these is to get people together, and meet people, congregate. Have a good time, enjoy themselves, otherwise some people they'd not get out very much. When you get a bit older, they are inclined to stay at home ... but you've got to get out to see what's going on out in the world, because things change over the years."	
2100	The Kei Ron attracted both young and older people, 40 – 60 groups. They'd book their tables. Molly would collect the money for the tables while working at Prouds.	
2209	Bill was involved in doing things for the Chameleons, but not on the Committee. Molly and Mandy would do a lot of the organising at places like the Sky Lounge.	Sky Lounge
2303	Mentions Mandy and Wally Dowling organising dances at Petersham. Molly was involved.	Petersham
2451	All walks of life would go to Chameleon dances. Lawyers, solicitors, judges, police sergeants.	Chameleons
2522	Ian McLean would play a bit of disco and they'd be a band and all the big production numbers at the Kei Ron. Not many floor shows at the Keiron. More dancing and drinking and eating. They had an artist Jimmy Parkinson he'd be the singer and MC. Floss (Ian McLean) would take over and have her say, announcing people and then there'd be prizes.	Ian Floss McLean Kei Ron Jimmy Parkinson
2700	The Debutante Ball was staged at the Hilton. Once a year. Bill , Molly and Mandy knew the food manager there. They had to take the whole floor, with the big ball room entrance there. Up to 500 people. It was the debut of young men in frocks. They were very serious. They were presented to people like Dawn Fraser. It was like the Kei Ron but on a bigger scale.	Debutante Ball Dawn Fraser

2909	They'd arrive in big limousines along a narrow drive way up to the top and the stretched limousines would have difficulty negotiating the corners.	
2939	Remembers going to the Trocadero. We went as Snow White and the 7 dwarfs. He was in his 20s. "We had this red hot mama, Leah Bailey. She was a jewish lady, lovely woman, short 5'5" and she used to sing these songs at the big club in Cleveland Street ... She was happy to do it (to get dressed up as snow white). We went as different dwarfs. And we all arrived and got out of the big (pantehnicon) and we all went out as a group and said 'I'm happy', 'I'm grumpy' whatever."	Trocadero Leah Bailey Snow White and the 7 dwarfs
3053	Remembers another time, with "Sue King/Irene Fenton and she arrived it was an incredible night and of course Claudia arrive one night with a bird in the cage ... she had this bird attached in a cage".	Sue King/Irene Fenton Claudia
31:36	Talks about Wallace Simpson. "She was an usherette at the State Theatre in the city, lovely person, lived out at Bondi, think she shared a flat with Karen (Chant) and a couple of others. But she used to live down at Singleton."	Wallace Simpson Singleton
3214	Bill talks about the times (50s). "The westerners would get around and congregate call them names and you couldn't do much about it, because you had the monopoly whereas we had the minority, but it changed over the years".	
3251	Bill can't recall any agro. People enjoyed the costumes and the extravaganza the queens put on. "It was incredible the effort that they used to do." "You'd always get the odd one".	
3320	The balls ended with the conversion of the Trocadero into the Union theatre.	Trocadero
3350	Agrees that there was a link between the Kei Ron and the demise of the Trocadero. "It (Trocadero or Keiron??) instigated the degree to which people could dress up and enjoy themselves at these different type so of functions." But there were private parties where young ones went and got dressed up.	Trocadero
3436	Mentions Bumper Farrell as having a notorious reputation among camp society. "Wouldn't tolerate anything. He was a bad man" (in relation to men in drag on the streets).	Bumper Farrell
3514	Memories of Karen's Castle. Karen was the hostess. Dawn was an owner. Mentions the business relationship of Dawn and Marj Hathaway. They would buy old terraces and do them up such as the old Palmers Lane brothels. They would have a table there and it was very nice. Karen used to do a few songs. It was a good night.	Karen's Castle Dawn O'Donnell Marj Hathaway Palmers Lane
3634	They socialized with Dawn and Julia. Dawn had a party at Waverton at her place – large with a pool. Leon Paul was a couturier and made Molly's first frock for this – a red kapoor (?) lace. Paul Clark from Curzon's lent Molly a fur stole.	Dawn and Julia Waverton Leon Paul Paul Clark

3731	Molly and Bill had about 6 terraces in Paddington, did them up and sold them. First was in Cambridge Street Paddington and lived there for 12 years. Had his 50 <sup>th</sup> there. Dawn and Anieke were there and Hazel Hughes who had a shirt shop opposite the Rex and Laurie Ducket/Lady Alice “a cargo queen” i.e. a steward, Hank Drummond Forbes who dressed immaculately. Hank used to do up (?renovations/interior decoration) for society ladies. His mother was Lady Susan Drummond Forbes and she had an extravagant 75 <sup>th</sup> birthday party in Petersham.	Cambridge Street Paddington Dawn and Anieke Hazel Hughes Laurie Ducket/“Lady Alice” Hank Drummond Forbes Lady Susan Drummond Forbes
4000	His first impressions of Dawn was that she was a very domineering woman, straight forward – you knew where you stood with Dawn. Her famous saying was, “I’ve just got to look after the boys, I’ve got to consider the boys”. The boys were all her clients, and that created all the business. Got involved with her through her businesses. And then she invited them over to her house in Beauty Point, Mosman, where she had some fabulous parties. Would not spare any expense.	Dawn O’Donnell Beauty Point
4122	Julia Farmer (Dawn’s partner) went up to Qld and opened up a restaurant out of Surfers Paradise with Annie who used to have “La Catalan” in Oxford St. They bought a farm.	Julia Farmer Surfers Paradise “La Catalan”
4215	Dawn had her women friends, but didn’t mix with them to the degree she mixed with the men. At Bill’s 50 <sup>th</sup> at the Keiron they had some good wines left over after the party. They went back to Red Rubys, which was one of Bill’s first encounters of a lesbian bar.	Ruby Reds
4324	There were lesbians on the Chameleons Committee. Barbara Cohen. Ray Easy (?). They were Dawn’s friends. “But they weren’t on the scene like they are now.”	Barbara Cohen
4455	The other social groups. He went to a surf carnival near Cronulla. “What a day that was... we on the beach, having races, I think that was the Karingals ... The Boomerangs was very good. They used to have a lot of outdoor events. The North Sydney Oval they had I think, when Donnie Smith was around. The Chelsea Players was more of a social group, like shows ...” Stan Goodwin (deceased) was involved and Dawn would have memories of the Chelsea Players.	Cronulla Karingals Boomerangs North Sydney Oval Stan Goodwin Chelsea Players
4710	The rise and fall of the groups. “It had to start from somewhere. The parties at home, then you branched out, more people would come along, you couldn’t fit everyone into your house. Then you’d have groups, the Mountains started – the big parties on the Queens Birthday weekend at the Mountains – they started everything off I think to a degree of more of the party events ... The other groups sort of followed ... they go a certain following and it lended a lot of enthusiasm and charisma and mixing	

	around with people those days to get people out from 4 walls type of thing you know, which was very good. It took just a few people to do that but by the same token those few people copped a lot of hard work so I think eventually after 2 or 3 years they just got sick of it. They didn't want to do everything without any help. A lot of people arrive with a bottle and they expect everything ... After a while they just folded up. I don't think they just wanted the hard work" He compares it with the Pollys where there are a lot of people involved who dictate what people will do.	
5025	Bill talks about the Recovery Parties at the Beresford Hotel. He was involved with the Beresford Hotel for a few years, and people would come in after the showground activities at 6, 7 o'clock in the morning. They would open up the laneway up between the Flinders and the Beresford, and have 5,000 people there. 20 security. Pallets and pallets of grog. They'd have a ball and enjoy themselves.	Beresford Hotel Recovery Parties
5115	Bill agrees the demise was perhaps due to a generational change. The older generation weren't wanting so much, didn't know about these extras. Whereas the younger group want these things to happen.	Generational change
5135	Bill qualifies this and mentions going to the Silver Spade at the Chevron Hotel. There were artists from overseas. "We knew there was something better on the horizon". Also mentions Chequers and seeing Francis Faye in a group. They knew the manager, Joseph and his friend Jimmy, a hairdresser. He was working at Prouds and it was mothers day. He woke up on the floor the next day in his suit with all these liqueurs in his pocket. He rang up at "5 to 12 – they used to close at 1200 – and said "I'm sorry I can't make it" and they said "I'm pleased you rang up". I had the biggest hangover".	Silver Spade at the Chevron Chequers Francis Faye
5300	Weekends away. Laurie/Queen Victoria she was the queen of the mountains and she started the weekends in the mountains. After a few years they got involved with it. There'd be parties on a Friday, Saturday and Sunday and Monday recover. Molly was one of the hostesses and they'd have a Sunday Party. Up to 200 people in a house. Until it got out of hand. People would drive up just for that night. They'd provide all the food, they'd bring their own grog. But they were slaves. The houses up in Leura and Katoomba were enormous.	Laurie/Queen Victoria Leura Katoomba
5428	Thinks they started around 1970, possibly the 60s. Half a dozen would rent a house out for the weekend, do all the shopping. They'd go to the opportunity shops on a Saturday morning and get all the shoes. The women (in the shops) would probably put out all the old big shoes that weekend. They would take their	Yoos Myers Barry Geary Bill Holmes Molly

	own drag or buy dresses there. Yoos Myers and Barry Geary, Bill Holmes and Molly were involved in the latter years.	
5700	They would also go down to Melbourne a lot. Billy Brookes would have a Cup Eve Party. They'd have a huge marquee at Camp Hill and have 300 people. It was invitation only. They also knew the Boilers. Charlie Brown is still in contact with Bill, and was President of the Boilers. They'd have lots of dances. The Melbourne groups would come up to the Sydney Balls and big parties – Lottie, Samantha Shields, Alan Lonsdale, Violet Cameron.	Melbourne Billy Brookes Camp Hill Boilers Charlie Brown Lottie Samantha Shields Alan Lonsdale Violet Cameron
5904	Before Melbourne they would go up to Surfers Paradise. Would spend a month in Surfers Paradise. You wouldn't travel overseas in those days. They'd provide parties, get big units in the old Chevron Hotel, Surfers Paradise Hotel. There was a bar on the corner and everyone would congregate there on the afternoon. Jimmy Fishburn, Nonnie (?) – they had a restaurant up there. Les Girls was going then.	Surfers Paradise Chevron Hotel Surfers Paradise Hotel Jimmy Fishburn Nonnie Les Girls
10000	He spent about 20 years in retail eventually, when he decided to settle in Sydney. He worked as manager in Grace Brothers Wine and Spirits Department (Broadway), then transferred to Bondi Junction. He loved the job. It was interesting and they used to be the No.1 in wine and spirits in NSW. Recalls a strike of the Breweries and Dawn wanted grog for perhaps the Exchange Hotel. So "the girls" came around and loaded up a truck with 3 pallets.	Grace Brothers Dawn O'Donnell Exchange Hotel
10235	There were a lot of gays working at Grace Brothers in Bondi. Can't recall the name of the manageress of display who used to come to the Keiron Balls.	Grace Brothers Bondi Junction
10340	Molly and he lived in a flat at Elizabeth Bay House for \$15 a week rent and the National Trust wanted take it over. They a big wake with 100 people and it was catered for. Di Arthur wrote it up in her social column.	Elizabeth House National Trust Di Arthur
<b>File 2</b>		
0000	Di Arthur was a social columnist and knew Ivy and used to come to the parties with Bernard King. Bernard has a mixed scene up in the Mountains.	Ivy Richter Bernard King
0155	Met Dita Cobb with Ted Jobbins (?) he used to be with Channel 10. And they would be invited over to (Ted's) when Dita was around. Dita had some beautiful earrings on, and she gave them to Bill. She was very likeable and straightforward.	Dita Cobb Ted Jobbins
0340	The world of camp. It is more open these days, but back in the early days it was called camp, "but we were more in the category of "high camp", with the functions we used to have, the up market you know." "in those days when you dressed up you put a lot of effort into it, just for instance Molly's gowns, Leon Paul	Camp Leon Paul

	used to make Molly's gowns" Leon went on to establish a career in Hollywood creating gowns for the wealthy and famous.	
0540	Even in the Kei Ron days you could see things getting a bit more trendy – spikey hair, cross dressing (frock up with moustache). People did what they wanted to do, dressed they way they wanted to. People were more open. More tolerant society these days.	Kei Ron Changes
0625	The rise of AIDS. His first encounter was in San Francisco and in it was very bad – they closed all the bath houses that year. Hotels were almost empty. People were suffering and scared. He has lost a lot of friends through AIDS and managed to keep on with the help of the Bobby Goldsmith Foundation. It has taken a while for governments to acknowledge AIDS does exist and they have to deal with it. Straight society doesn't see it as a gay disease as much as they did in the past. When he came back from San Francisco, AIDS was becoming very evident.	AIDS San Francisco Bobby Goldsmith Foundation
0955	Early gay venues – impressions. Went to the Purple Onion when Kandy was there. "They would have a floor show and people would mime to the big production numbers. It was a good entertaining night. It was something to do – there wasn't much to do in those days. You had to make your own entertainment. And when Beatrice came ... it was very crowded ... she has done some magnificent shows and it brought people out, different mixture of people and got people out of their houses."	Purple Onion Kandy Johnson Beatrice Williams
1113	Darreal, was Molly's cousin. She used to do the Eartha Kitt number.	Darreal Eartha Kitt
1224	Les Girls was his first big show. They were hard working girls and they weren't paid a great deal by Abe. Pepper Stephens told Bill some stories about when they were sick they still had to come into work. They would have someone at your doorstep.	Les Girls Abe Saffron Pepper Stephens
1332	It was something different for Sydney. There wasn't much interaction between the professionals at Les Girls and the social drag entertainments.	
1440	On a long weekend they would do the Good Ship Lollipop. Sylvia Sitaway (?) used to have the African Queen, go out on the Harbour on a Sunday night. Sylvia resigned and Molly took it over. She had no trouble getting 200 on a small ferry. The waterline would drop 2 feet, but Molly would insist "Oh, I can get one more on". They'd have a band on it. Today Pollys have a huge boat. Progress. "We made our own fun in those days and we had lots of fun".	Good Ship Lollipop Sylvia Sitaway African Queen
1615	Donnie Smith. He was a loveable, generous, kind person. He would anything for everybody. He was very sincere. He like to organise things. He would take command of a ship like a captain. The trouble was that he was very headstrong and wouldn't involve anyone else until it was on. He loved to have functions –	Donnie Smith Diggers Hall Petersham Dawn O'Donnell Union Theatre



	<p>he organised the Diggers Hall, and Petersham dances. He got on well very well with Dawn. He was in the theatre. He took over the management of the Union Theatre in George Street. He was very religious and would go to the big Church St Andrews in George Street near the railway. He knew the priest there. Both came from SA. Donnie was in the navy and he thinks he got in the barrel too many times. Then he left that and went to the P &amp; O line and was doing very well there. He tells the story about the calendar Donnie sent out and one was returned to sender opened up and he didn't remain there too much longer. Used to slip into drag a few times at the Keiron Hall. He was a very good organiser. Molly and him got on very well. Everyone misses him. He and Donnie went to see Liberace at the Hilton and met Liberace. (Bill shows John the signed photo)</p>	<p>St Andrews P &amp; O Line Kei Ron Hall Liberace</p>
2041	<p>Bill moved in with Molly. "This would have been our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary and I was about 23 when I met Molly ... met Molly at the Tatler Hotel. We got on very well together and we moved in together into a little flat in Kings Cross. People used to call it the broom closet. It was like one room and you had to share the bathroom, you had your own kitchen, sun room kind of thing. But we decorated it. Wilton carpet, chandeliers and all that." They moved on the invitation of Billy Chalmers to Elizabeth Bay House. He was still traveling from the country to the city. They had a lot of parties there over the years. Then they got into real estate. They bought their first house in Cambridge Street Paddington in their 40s. They made a lot of money out of buying and selling. One big house in Paddington Street they lived opposite Jeannie Little. They put their wages into one and that's how you got ahead. Molly used to work at Prouds National Jewelry for 32 years. Used to be called Mrs Eileen Proud. She loved being there and a large circle of friends. She used to design diamond rings. Ivy used to bring her rings in and clean them for her. "She was an identity Molly. She had a magnetism to friends and we had a good existence and we shared a good bond because over those years it was incredible to have a good mate that you could live with."</p>	<p>Kevin (Molly) Fuller Tatler Hotel Kings Cross Billy Chalmers Elizabeth Bay House Cambridge Street Paddington Street Jeannie Little Prouds Ivy Richter</p>
2550	<p>"For the people coming on now days enjoy your life as much as possible, but do the right thing by others and treat your friend as a friend because it's very hard to get a good friend you can count them on your fingers."</p>	