

Oral History Interview with Dennis Fisher

Interviewer John Witte. Dennis was born in 1933. The interview took place on 23rd September 2005, at Dennis's house in Omaha Street, Belfield. The interview is one in a series of performers, owners, managers, workers and patrons of early commercial lesbian, gay and transgender venues in Sydney. (Corrected by Dennis 20 November 2005)



000000	Dennis was born in Coventry UK. His real mother was not married and he was sent to foster homes. He was adopted and when his adopted mother died, her daughter and her husband raised D.	Coventry
000150	His family came to Australia in 1949 and stayed with his adopted mother's brother and wife in Lakemba, until moving to Granville.	Lakemba Granville
000235	D. was 16. He spent 2 ½ years in Sydney, then went to Adelaide, where he did his National Service.	Adelaide National Service
000320	His nickname during National Service was "beautiful". He refused propositions from men and he believed he was innocent then in many ways.	
000350	Gradually found out the places for meeting men in Adelaide. Returned to UK for a working holiday in 1954 and returned in 1956.	
000405	D. realized he was gay when he was 12 or 13. Frustration of being attracted to males and not knowing what to do at that age.	
000441	Met people in Sydney who told him of places to go. The Rex was one of the biggest bars to go to at night. The Back Bar was always full. D. describes his horror of seeing some of the characters there, but gradually he got used to it. It was also a tourist attraction for straights who would watch the queens coming out at 10pm. 2-300 people would gather outside to find out where the parties were to go to on Saturday nights.	Rex Hotel, back bar
000626	D. moved into a flat in a mansion in Kirribilli facing Circular Quay. £3/10/- a week.	Kirribilli
000738	Describes throwing a party at the flat on a Saturday night.	
000800	First job was as an estimating clerk at a stationery manufacturer. D. describes what an estimating clerk was expected to do. He progressed to purchasing officer. When the company was taken over by another manufacturer he was promised a large rise which did not eventuate and he resigned.	
001015	Next job was going around the South Pacific with Colonel Penfold selling stationery and other products to shops.	Colonel Penfold
001108	Next job was with Wormald International as purchasing officer.	Wormald
001118	Again he got retrenched.	
001128	Then with Nestle at Abbotsford, LJ Hookers Meat Exporting company and then back at Wormald International in the Chairman's suite, assisting the Superannuation Manager. In 1987 he got a job at Wormald Security and worked until he was 71.	Nestle, LJ Hooker, Wormald
001300	D. believes that the great variety of jobs helped develop a great variety of skills. In 1949, D. recalls the job opportunities available.	

	Most jobs were commonsense.	
001434	There some gays on the job. 2 or 3 at the stationery company. They would go out together at weekends. One was outrageous. Management probably knew he was gay but tolerated him as long as he didn't flaunt it.	Gays at work
001530	D. says that in the early days, homosexuality was underground, but there was a lot going on. He describes picking up sailors at the Rock and Roll Hotel in Woolloomooloo.	Rock and Roll Hotel, Woolloomooloo
001631	The law was against gays, but there was so much going on.	The law
	The Kiwis were a group of female impersonators originally from Changi Prison Camp. Johnny Hunter did the balcony scene from Private Lives dressed as half man and half woman in a male voiced and a female voice. Phil Jay played Cleopatra. Phil lived in a block of flats called Santa Fe in Kings Cross. This is where Stuart Wagstaff eventually came to stay. Neil Brophy, Ron Frazer,	Kiwis, Changi Prison of War Camp, Johnny Hunter, Phil Jay, Santa Fe, Stuart Wagstaff, Neil Brophy, Ron Frazer
001820	D. mentions "Elsie Prince" in the Rock and Roll. He was rough and had success galore. (Every gay person was given a female name. D.F.)	Elsie Prince
001844	Other pubs were the Tatler, Kings Head cnr of Park and Castlereagh. People would talk to you, as then you could actually have a conversation, without earsplitting music.	Tatler, Kings Head
001935	It was safer to bring people back to your home in those days.	
001955	Long term relationships depended on the person. One night stands were like a disease, or addiction. The more you had, the more you wanted.	One night stands
002028	The Montgomery Pub at Pymont was a blood and guts place. Pianists and queens doing the "palais glide" up and down the aisles. Guys from the ships. Great pick up place.	Montgomery Pub, Pymont
002055	D. went to the Carlton Rex on Friday nights. Was a businessmen's pub. As a rule you wore a suit, collar and tie to go out.	Carlton Rex
002126	Another place to go was the Chevron at the Cross. He met Phil Jay through a friend (Maurice) who was a male impersonator. He had met Maurice on board ship to Australia. Phil was doing "Wedding in Paris" (DF) a musical, with Evelyn Laye in the lead role in London when Maurice had met him. D. met other entertainers through this friend (Maurice). Maurice had left the ship in Melbourne to become a tram conductor.	Chevron, Phil Jay, Morris, Evelyn Leigh
002234	D. had a ticket for the Olympic Games in Melbourne in 1956. He met up with Maurice at Young and Jacksons. They picked up two English marines and went back to Maurice's flat and D. never made it to the Olympic Games.	Olympic Games, Young and Jacksons, Morris
002311	D. said that there were lots of places to meet men. D. was shy. Others could walk up to people at the Cross and invite them back to their place. For D. it was difficult to chat up a stranger.	

002341	D. said that there was a point where he didn't have to pursue men. By being with these other people, men would be after him.	
002404	Just the initial approach was difficult. But once you started a conversation it was easy.	
002442	D. describes one approach by a man called Joe which made him angry. Joe was a very closeted person working for the Church of England Cathedral near Town Hall.	Joe, Church of England
002605	D. describes the day of the first Mardi Gras near Paddington Town Hall, and cops chasing marchers away.	Mardi Gras, Paddington Town Hall
002632	He remembers how the Kings Cross cops dealt with New Years revelers as soon as the clock turned midnight. Attacked with truncheons. "Police were obnoxious in those days"	Kings Cross cops
002710	D. met a police nark who was gay. He would get off with people then dob them in. Met him at parties. Saw him once talk to a policeman on point duty. He told D. that he was a policeman.	Police nark
002750	Hyde Park was an important beat. Pick up was around the fountain. You would keep walking because the police were active there, and you had to be careful who spoke to.	Hyde Park
002922	Maurice lived in a block called Santa Fe where Phil Jay lived. D. tells the story of Maurice and how he was charged for attacking a youth. He was let off. Police lied in court. Judge did not cite the police for lying.	Santa Fe, Morris, Court case
003047	Cathedral Street was a well known beat. D. describes a close experience with an unnamed future Prime Minister.	Cathedral Street
003200	First time he wore drag was at a party in Rozelle. He was surprised how glamorous he looked and nobody recognized him.	Drag party, Rozelle
003434	After that he did occasional shows at Isadora's in Day Street.	Isadora's
003444	An Anzac Night show called "Something about a Soldier", then a 1920's show with New Zealanders at the Maccabean Hall.	Maccabean Hall
003524	Two guys ran Isadora's. One was nick named Isadora. A function every Saturday night. Lots of lesbians went.	Isadora
003554	D. talks about run in with an aggressive lesbian.	Lesbian
003617	John Farnham was a guest artist, before he was well known, with his fiancée.	John Farnham
003720	D. started doing amateur theatre in 1958, with a group called the Newton Players which put on plays at Anzac House. Ida Newton ran the group. D. began by working backstage. Leading lady was Norma O'Hare. (Norma O'Hare was then the wife of Chatswood Musical Society President Frank Darcy – DF). Later did shows at Chatswood Musical Society 12-13 years, then went to Rockdale Musical Society, Hurstville Light Opera, Canterbury Guild Theatre, Rockdale Guild Theatre, Rockdale Opera Company. Got to know many people. Now member of the Bennelong Club which supports NIDA students.	Newton Players, Ida Newton, Norma O'Hare, Chatswood Musical Society, Rockdale Musical Society, Hurstville Light Opera, Canterbury Guild Theatre, Rockdale Guild Theatre,

		Rockdale Opera Company, Bennelong Club
003928	Went to meetings of Cronulla Gay Group with Norbert who he had met through Genesians Theatre Group. Norbert was outrageously gay looking and had known him 50 years.	Norbert, Genesians, Cronulla Gay Group
004124	Was a member of Cronulla Gay Group for 18 years. It was a social get together. First went on float on 60 th birthday. (As a fairy on a Christmas Tree DF)	Cronulla Gay Group float
004128	Mother was concerned that someone from work would recognize him.	
004157	Family has been very supportive. Came out to them when working at the Stationery Manufacturer. D. describes the events leading up to him coming out and his parents positive reactions. His father was broad minded, being aware of homosexuality in the territorial army.	Family's support. Coming out.
004322	A friend, Gordon has cancer and D. keeps in touch with Gordon's nephew in NZ. Gordon's story. His parents were anti-gay. He lived in London and had an affair with one of the Kray brothers, and was involved in Chelsea Arts Ball, gay outings to Glyndebourne.	Gordon, Kray Brothers, Chelsea Arts Ball, Glynbourne
004511	Sugar daddy? There was an Army Officer with whom he stayed at the Wentworth Hotel when the Officer was in town. The officer's mother was on Katoomba Council –DF.	Wentworth Hotel
004541	The love of his life was a German officer on a passenger/cargo ship. They met after the Rex had closed.	German sailor
004630	Everytime he came to Sydney or Wollongong, they'd meet. D. was 29.	
004713	D. tells the story of auditioning for a show for Rowe Street Musical Society. He had been doing plays at the Stage Club in Cleveland Street, when the manager brought back Stuart Wagstaff and a woman back to the Stage Club, and D. was invited to meet "mother" – Adele Alldritt.	Rowe Street Musical Society, Stuart Wagstaff, Adele Alldritt
004824	D. describes Mrs Alldritt or Aldridge as Carlotta calls her.	Carlotta
004925	D. describes his first play with the Rowe Street M.S. "Sweeney Todd".	Sweeney Todd
005141	A few years later auditioned for "Bye Bye Birdie" but couldn't read music. This was with Rowe Street Musical Society.	Bye Bye Birdie
005307	He took roles with singing parts. Musical director Arete Zantiotis chose D. for a role in "Merry Widow", and was asked to audition for Rockdale Opera Company.	Arete Zantiotis, Merry Widow, Rockdale Opera Company
005558	Musical societies. There were only a few lesbians but quite a few gay guys. Outlet for artistic temperament.	Musical societies
005632	When D. was working in an office he could spare the time to go to musical societies, but when he began work as a security guard	Shift work

	while he was rehearsing “Brigadoon” for the Hurstville Light Opera Company, he had to give them up.	
005740	Coffee shops. The Kashmir was a popular venue. Rosalyn Norton paintings there. You’d go across to the Kashmir from the Rex. There was always some you knew there. Small place, but always packed. Mainly a gay crowd that went there.	Kashmir, Rosalyn Norton
005820	Repins, and a lot of the coffee shops in town where gays would meet., but D. was not a coffee person.	Repins
005935	Got involved with Helix. Norbert and D. volunteered to put on a show – a sketch that Kandy had done at the Purple Onion. The producer wanted them to do “Sisters” in their own voices. D. says “what’s the point of getting into drag and using male voices”. The producer had no idea how to entertain gay people.	Helix, Norbert, “Sisters”
010110	D. recalls the Garden of Eden. Kandy’s mother on the till. He describes the night when the till was robbed.	Garden of Eden, Kandy
010137	Mentions Rital – a Greek Egyptian like Gina Lollabrigida. Lived in the flat above the Garden of Eden.	Rital
010237	D. recalls the missing records. Ritale moved to London and had his own club.	
010346	Met Peter Moselle when D. lived in Balmain. He lived with his mother opp. Balmain High School. D. did an act with him and met Peter’s family. Peter knew many people in entertainment in London – Frankie Howard. Frankie’s ex lives in Woolloomooloo.	Peter Moselle, Frankie Howard
010520	Peter Moselle started as compere at Les Girls. They didn’t think it was going to last, that’s why Peter got D. to audition another act for Latin Quarter. D. was there the night 4 corners came to film. D. tells an anecdote about Carlotta’s interview. After the screening Les Girls took off. Peter Moselle had a copy of the film.	Les Girls, Latin Quarter
010725	Also introduced to a lot of theatre people through Phil Jay – Tony Sheldon’s mum (Toni Lamond). Often saw Noel Brophy and Ron Frazer at the Rock and Roll.	Phil Jay, Tony Sheldon, Noel Brophy, Ron Frazer, Rock and Roll
010907	Through Maurice met Joes Latona Grand. (International act Latona, Graham and Chadell) Joe Latona later formed the Latona dancers who appeared on the Tonight Show. He would see Joe at the Chevron every Saturday night.	Morris, Latona Graham and Chadell, Joe Latona, Chevron
011140	If you were a female impersonator you had to take your wig off at the end of the act.	
011220	D. reflects on changes in 50 years. In the Garden of Eden, Patches, Purple Onion, the variety was wonderful. Capriccio’s doing “By a Waterfall” with violins. And one he saw in Paddington, with a film of Fred Astair and Ginger Rogers and two performers in front doing the same routine. The combined shows were great. It was an underground scene but there was a lot going on sexually.	Capriccios, Fred Astair and Ginger Rogers,