

Pride History Group Oral History Interview with Trevor Parkin

Interviewer: John Witte

Date: 9 August 2005

Location of interview: Enmore, Sydney

Reason for interview: Early gay venues

Restrictions: N/A



| Time | Summary | Keywords |
|--------|---|-------------------------------|
| 000045 | Trevor was born in Corowa NSW. His father was largely absent working in family business and T. was close to mother | Corowa |
| 000247 | Family business was a grocery/haberdashery and garage. Rest of family worked in the business. | |
| 000351 | T. got a job in the Post Office and left for training in Sydney. | Post Office |
| 000400 | T. found there was nothing to do in country town. | |
| 000450 | Homosexuality was spoken in a derogatory manner. T. speaks about town's attitude to a young Dutch man. | |
| 000531 | Always felt different and didn't fit in. | |
| 000610 | First job was with the Post Master General (PMG) as a telegram boy working the exchange on night shift. | PMG |
| 000657 | 1961 T. came to Sydney to train at PMG college in Strathfield as Postal Clerk. | Postal Clerk |
| 000757 | Met a straight guy and moved to Flamingo Court Burwood. | Burwood |
| 000757 | T. realised he was gay but couldn't do anything about it. There was not an overt scene. | |
| 000818 | T. worked at Crow's Nest Post Office. A customer chatted him up they went to Kandy's in Enmore. Customer had a boyfriend. | Crow's Nest Kandy's |
| 000945 | T. recalls Kandy's as a small place. Men danced together and kissed. He had not seen this before and hadn't thought about that before. | |
| 001030 | His flat mate at Burwood was very homophobic. | |
| 001118 | T. first gay experience was that night at Kandy's. | |
| 001155 | Then he moved to Cronulla with the customer and his boyfriend, and then Woolooware. | Woolooware |
| 001217 | After holidays in Corowa, he came back to find the 2 flatmates had skipped with the rent owing. This was a wakeup call. | |
| 001251 | He had been going to the Purple Onion. Had met a Eurasian guy in Woolooware who wanted to become a drag queen. They became close friends. This was Black Leslie, who started doing guest spots at the Onion. Kandy Johnson offered free accommodation above the Onion and he moved in. | Black Leslie Kandy Johnson |
| 001415 | The Purple Onion operated Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays. It was a late night club. The original building was a Terrace House. The dressing room was in the front room facing the street, hallway led into the club, the stage was built into the second room. Wall had been demolished to hold all the seats. Kitchen at the back to | Purple Onion |

| | | |
|--------|---|---|
| | serve food, perhaps an obligation. There was a small stage with a hole cut above. It came out with seats around it. Held 150 perhaps. | |
| 001621 | It was very underground because that's the way the scene was like. | |
| 001640 | Performers included Rose Jackson, Karen Chant, Robyn Lee, Tracey, Dareel, Judy, Corinne, Black Lesley and Red Lesley. | Rose Jackson, Karen Chant, Robyn Lee, Tracey, Dareel, Judy, Corinne, Black Lesley and Red Lesley. |
| 001745 | Lived there for a period of 6 years. Beatrice Williams bought it while T. worked there. | Beatrice Williams |
| 001805 | Still working at PMG during the day. Was a dresser 3 or 4 nights a week. | Dresser |
| 001840 | T. was sprung when some straight men from work turned up. | |
| 001903 | The dresser changed the costumes between routines, 4-5 people to be changed in a minute and a half. Costumes lined up on rack. | Dresser |
| 001940 | T. was called on to do character roles and on the odd occasion did a spot on his own. It freaked him out. | |
| 002015 | Character roles – being the male dancer in routines. | |
| 002038 | In the “Sound of Mucus” played the part of a Jewish Madame escaping the Nazis. Had a fur coat with jewelry sewn into it. And also a nun. | “Sound of Mucus” |
| 002125 | Kandy's style of performance was more a review, people doing different spots and comedy. | Kandy |
| 002145 | David Williams came up with shows with a story such as emulating the Sound of Music. Probably not happened before. | David Williams (Beatrice) |
| 002217 | Kandy was more like Les Girls with stars doing their spot plus comedy. | |
| 002329 | Ivy Richter opened the Birdcage. T. worked there for a couple of years. It was at 191 Oxford Street at Taylor Square the top or second floor. T. was the dresser and did spots. | |
| 002416 | Ivy used to run Ivys in Oxford Street and after would go to the Onion. When David Williams closed the Onion, she opened the birdcage. | |
| 002530 | T. and the performers went out after the show to a café in Kings Cross in Orwell Street | Orwell Street |
| 002624 | Didn't go out much. Saved to go to London. | |
| 002700 | Used to go out to Chameleons at Petersham – it was like a barn dance. Lots of grog. Mad night, live music. On Parramatta Road Stanmore. Also went to the Trolley Car, Enzos and Chez Ivys. | Chameleons Trolley Car Enzos Chez Ivy |
| 002848 | The shows and rehearsals were all consuming. | |
| 002929 | After the Birdcage worked in Capriccios for 9 months. Met a couple of guys through Lyn Lovett (who worked at desk at Onion) Met people from Newcastle. | Lyn Lovett |

| | | |
|--------|--|---|
| 003000 | Travelled the hippy route to London – Bali, India, Afghanistan, Iran, Turkey in 1971. | |
| 003030 | Did not have a partner. Wanted one. Men’s perception of men of him working in drag. | |
| 003131 | Caps in early days. Two guys owned Caps. It was more glamorous – more money for costumes. Bar downstairs – very big. They sold alcohol. Not so underground. | Capriccios |
| 003311 | Onion was a place for international artists – Francis Faye, Shirley Bassey. | Francis Faye, Shirley Bassey |
| 003340 | Daceyville detectives would come to the Onion and sit in the audience. T. believes they came for their pay off. | Daceyville detectives |
| 003415 | No harassment of customers – it was in a suburban setting. | |
| 003452 | T. talks about his trip through Bali, Calcutta, Northern India. Propositioned but males were not on offer. At Taj Mahal on birthday. | Bali, Calcutta, Taj Mahal |
| 003743 | Amritsar, then to Kabul. T. describes what he saw there and the beautiful men in Iran. Life under the Shah and his secret police. Contrast with comfortable life in Australia. | Amritsar, Kabul |
| 003949 | Became besotted with geometric design, and the Islamic architecture of Turkey. In Istanbul, lots of sex with men in hotels. | Turkey |
| 004200 | Falling out with friends in Greece and he went to London. | |
| 004240 | T. worked as a telex operator in London for 18 months, then First Boston Bank in Bond Street for second 18 months. | London |
| 004330 | Left when his partner James didn’t want to stay in London. | |
| 004352 | Went to the Colherne and a club (T. remembers this was the Catacombs). 3 or 4 times a week went to theatre, opera, ballet, Old Vic, Peter Brooks Midsummer Night’s Dream. David Bowie concert. | Colherne Peter Brook David Bowie Old Vic |
| 004555 | Other venues pub in Shaftesbury Ave, the Black Cap in Camden Town. He saw Mrs Shufflewick a little old lady. In London drags would use their own voices. “My Way” in drag and a male voice. | Black Cap Mrs Shufflewick |
| 004751 | Met James his future partner. James was the lover of one of men he travelled with and another George went to university in Newcastle with him. | James |
| 004823 | T. was sharing with George and John and his boyfriend went to Europe. James ran into John and Mark in Paris. James contacted George when he got back. James met Trevor and T. was besotted. | George, John, Mark |
| 004947 | They left London and came back to Sydney. | |
| 005150 | Roger Kim who had been a stripper at the Onion told them about getting jobs as Telephonists. T. stayed 30 years. | Roger Kim Telephonists |
| 005256 | The job as telephonist had previously been a women’s only domain until 1973, then employed more men – who were mostly gay. | |
| 005337 | Worked at Dalley Street. Had to count money from telephone boxes, and connecting everything up manually and price all the tickets. | Dalley Street |

| | | |
|--------|---|---------------|
| 005420 | Then T. wanted to work at International – it was an elite section. He worked all night shift, a job women couldn't do. | |
| 005534 | Worked at International. High turnover of gay men. They stayed from 2 weeks to 10 years. There were 300-400 people there. | International |
| 005605 | In other jobs he had been subject of homophobia and ridicule. The job was a challenge until it became computerised. | |
| 005723 | Developed lots of friendships and still sees people everywhere who worked there. | |
| 005800 | Story of Danny on all night shift. The boss was a no nonsense "bloke". Danny had been out and turned up for work in a frock. Told to go home and change, but came back in another frock. | Danny |
| 010000 | Changes in technology. Originally a set of 10 cords to connect. If the calls went on for a while you would just sit there. "10C" connected a lot more, less staff were needed and it became more boring. | 10C |
| 010104 | Had a bay of consols facing away from each other, so you couldn't talk. Calls were monitored by supervisors. Some became despots. People resisted snooping. | |
| 010252 | Next stage was ISD and staff numbers declined over time. | ISD |
| 010340 | Exchange closed in 1997. | |
| 010400 | T. left in 1997 to become a conference administrator until 2000 and was made redundant. Loved that job. Did a good job. | |
| | TAPE 2 | |
| 010610 | Many who worked at telephone exchange died of AIDS. First person who died, died of "liver failure". 30 -50 guys died and were commemorated in foyer on World AIDS day. | AIDS |
| 010727 | Vivian Walker died of AIDS. Worked with him at the Birdcage. Met up in London. Then V. went to live in LA with a sugar daddy. | Vivian Walker |
| 010838 | George with whom he travelled to London died in 1994. | |
| 010930 | Recalls the fear mongering, negative press. One felt besieged by it. Some of the women at work felt threatened by working with so many gay men. T. recalls one woman who was particularly vicious behind his back. | |
| 011122 | In retirement, T. goes swimming and exercises, does volunteer work with the Sydney Film Festival. Is a fan of Bollywood movies. Designs tapestries. | |
| 011315 | Comparing young people today to those of his youth. Flamboyant, like himself, realisation of being different, self confident. Don't have to be closeted. Upside of the AIDS thing – wrenched the closet door off and defused a lot of idiotic ideas people had about being gay. | |
| 011555 | Is it still difficult coming out to parents? Probably because parents have their expectations for their kids. | |