

Oral History Interview with Ron Quilter

Interviewer: John Witte

Date: 14th December 2006

Place of interview: Nimrod Street Kings Cross

Reason for interview: Social Groups



File 1		
0000	Ron was born in Waverley, Sydney, in 1930.	Waverley
0057	Grew up in Bondi/Waverley until he was 20. He then went overseas. He hitch hiked and stayed at youth hostels. Not long after WW2 and things were pretty bombed out. London was still on rations. (Early 1950s)	Bondi London
0203	Prior to this he knew what he was on about. Used to hang around the Cross a bit. But there wasn't much. Except the Rex Hotel which was 6 o'clock closing. (late 40s) When he got back in 1955, he found himself introduced to various gay people and they used to hang out together. Every Friday night at Ushers, the Carlton Bar, sometimes the Hotel Australia. On Fridays went to the Cahill Restaurant opposite which was next to the then Theatre Royal. Word would go around sometimes of a party and it was always "open house". Never private invitations. Friday or Saturday nights. Grog was not easily available. Beer was in large bottles.	Rex Hotel Ushers Carlton Bar Hotel Australia Cahills Restaurant
0423	A woman lived over near Centennial Park and she would hold a dance for queens in her house. "She charged us 10/- entry which included a large bottle of beer and that was a lot of money then". They danced to a record. If you were lucky you would find a screw for the night. It was more jive than rock and roll.	Centennial Park
0542	Went to work for Caltex Oil when he came back and stayed for a few years. He had then started an accountancy degree. A few years later he met a man with a florist shop in Hunter Street – Amy Anderson. Had lots of big corporate accounts. Other big florists in the city were Searles (in King Street) and Reynolds near Wynyard. They did such things as huge arrangements for Town Hall Stage. He then moved in with him and his mother. They had a large weekender in Whale Beach. Mother was a hard woman to get on with. She was a devout Catholic who tolerated her son's sexuality. Rex Kern (?) was his partner's name. The relationship lasted 8-9 years.	Caltex Oil Amy Anderson Searles Reynolds Whale Beach Rex Kern
0845	At Whale Beach had a couple of well to do gay guys	Whale Beach

	lived next door. They had haute couture business in Double Bay. Hal Herzberg was one of them and the other was Mawson Clift. An array of gay people on the coast.	Hal Herzberg Mawson Clift
File 2		
0005	The dances at Centennial Park were near Patrick White's house. She was gay friendly and making money from it. He was taken by a man who already knew about it. No more than 20 people and most of them knew each other. Even in the bars, no more than 50 gay guys in one corner of Ushers or the Carlton.	Centennial Park
0220	In the bars there a bit of girly talk. Ron remembers Karen and her best friend, Max Taylor who "were the girliest creatures on earth at the time, and they would float down the street with chiffon scarves in the wind". Karen worked for June Millinery.	Karen Max Taylor June Millinery
0348	Rex had to move out of Hunter Street and bought a florist shop in Her Majesty's Arcade. They were in the same block as Karen. Opposite there was an department store, very chic, called "Curzons" and that is where Rose Jackson worked.	Hunter Street Karen Curzons Rose Jackson
0440	The occupations of these people. Mostly collar and ties and suits. Memories of the social scene are from before he met Rex – 54-56.	Rex
File 3		
0000	The recorder was turned on briefly and caught some details of the Kashmir Coffee Shop. It was owned by Mrs Smith and it was opposite the old Rex which hadn't been rebuilt.	Kashmir Mrs Smith
File 4		
0000	Before Ron went to Europe, there were still a lot of Americans around the Cross. He was very gooey around them. He mentions Rose who had a stall at Martin Place and made orchid corsages and stood out in front of what became the Bourbon and Beef – Gleneagles. It was a private hotel and would sell the corsages for £1 each. "Rose was a great gay advocate friend. I went in later years to a number of parties when she lived in Wildfeld Gardens. She had 2 or 3 white grand pianos, and she'd sing away. Dressed. She had jewels, she was a very wealthy woman.	Americans Rose Martin Place Gleneagles Wildfeld Gardens
0330	"We were called "camp" – gay wasn't in – or we were queens. You were very much marked as active or passive and most everybody didn't matter whether you were active or passive had a camp name. Even the guy had a camp name ... It usually rhymed with your	Camp name

	first name or your family name.” Ron was dobbed or dabbed “Mary”. Would have been called Mary after he got back from Europe around 54 or 55.	
0535	Originally on the site of the Rex Hotel, was the Orient Hotel. This was a private hotel with a coffee shop to one side and that’s where Rowie Norton hung out. She painted all the walls of that. He went there before he went to Europe (1950). When he got back it had become the Rex and then had another reincarnation after that. The Bottoms Up Bar was at the front at one stage and at the back at another stage. Gavin believes in 68 it was at the front. Ron is skeptical it was that late. “It was one side at the front and the bottle shop was its opposite mate at the front”.	Orient Hotel Rowie Norton Rex Hotel Bottoms Up Bar
0720	The Bottoms Up bar was more or less camp, with a few rent boys. The Wall was in it’s hey day and has been operating in the 50 years he can remember. It has always been a rent boy area. In the mid 70s, the top rent boy in Sydney was called Dollar Bill. Very handsome, used to dye his hair blonde. He went out of it with hundreds of thousands of dollars, because he wasn’t servicing a habit.	Bottoms Up Bar Dollar Bill
0936	The sailor aspect at the Cross only happened at the Chevron. In the 60s in what was called the Snakepit, which was under the Chevron.	Chevron Snakepit
1045	In Ultimo at the Montgomery Hotel. They were merchant seaman. Ron had a couple of flings at the Montgomery. In the 50s or 60s he and friends would go down to the Rocks. The next along from the Orient, the Mercantile is where you could pick up.	Montgomery Hotel Mercantile
1250	Pfahlerts was a lovely hotel. “It was just that it was down there and not up the centre of town where most of the queens and campies would like to congregate, but we did go to Pfahlerts, possibly more on a Saturday night rather than a Friday night. It that much more elegant, let’s put it that way.”	Pfahlerts
1449	“Nothing untoward really went on in these bars like some of the bars today. They get off their heads and give each other blow jobs and all sorts of things, so I’m told.”	
1515	Social changes. “10 o’clock closing came in from 6 – 10. I think we were probably getting a back wash from America for a bit more freedom. I think perhaps, we were hearing more about San Francisco, the West Coast.” Hearing about it mostly from Qantas queens. They were 99% gay in those days. The shows at the	Social changes American influence Qantas Queen San Francisco Purple Onion

	Purple Onion in the late 60s – “I know that every show that went on at the Onion was on 331/3 (records) brought back by Qantas queens when not never available in Australia”. Dormie Mclvor would pay someone, Qantas queens. “Information, little by little penetrated our small local scene and probably we were getting braver.”	Dormie Mclvor
1718	Also had advent of first major bar – Capriccios in the social scene.	Capriccios
1819	Ivy had her wine bar in Bondi Junction before she moved to the Birdcage. One of the first steam baths was in Bondi Junction.	Birdcage Steam Baths Bondi Junction
1900	Early social clubs. Ron’s first venture was the Polynesians, “although I had put my toe into Tiffanys, through Donnie Smith. But because it was in the western suburbs (Petersham) ... We never crossed the Bridge or went past Newtown. I don’t think I knew anyone who lived in Newtown. We were wholly and solely Easter Suburbs although a couple of guys did live in Hurstville ... We would very rarely go out to their place.”	Polynesians Tiffanys Donnie Smith
2027	Had met his second partner, Cammie (Cameron) who was one of the leading drags in about 1967, he was about 19. Ron was 37. “But it was one of those things, not like today. I don’t think it was mercenary. Well it wasn’t with him. Probably you would hear a lot of younger guys going for older men, back then in the 40s, 50s whereas today they have their own age group and both earning good money and all that sort of thing.”	Cameron
2154	When Ron worked for Rex, he was earning very little money. He was staying rent free in Hunter Street and Whale Beach. “I can tell you there were a couple of weekends that I was in tears because I didn’t have a shilling in my pocket. I would always take a few cakes for the weekend. I can tell you I have been broke in my life – stone motherless broke.”	Hunter Street Whale Beach
2323	When he arrived back from Europe he was young and attractive. “Yes, we were wined and dined by older men. Expected to give out. Sometimes we did and sometimes we didn’t. It depends. And that’s when we as a small group of friends one of them being Bill (Blossom) Blake. There was another, Bill Baker ... myself a couple of others. We would arrange to meet at the Kashmir Coffee Shop and wait until that person’s date was over to find out the gossip first	Bill (Blossom) Blake Bill Baker

	hand.”	
2425	Theatre promoter. He lived in the T & G Building a beautiful old building on the corner of Park and Castlereagh. 1920's. Ron met him through a family thing. Ron was dewy eyed and got up to his apartment. “had to give out that night, chased around the room.” (see Michael Flynn’s taped interview for name).	Theatre promoter in T & G Bldg
2550	Broke up with Rex around 1965 and lived on his own in a flattette called “Tiara” in Kirribilli. Moved and shared a 2 bedroom flat in Woollahra with a boy called Peter Hilton. He had a friend who worked for Grace Brothers as a window dresser who was in a relationship with a twin who was of Greek parentage. Ron met the other twin at a dinnerparty and they started an affair. Cameron had come down from Brisbane and was working as an apprentice hair dresser and met Ron at a dinner party in Crows Nest at a mutual friend of theirs in 1967. He died in 1987.	Tiara in Kirribilli Woollahra Peter Hilton Grace Bros Crows Nest
3000	Before he met Cameron he had met Debbie and Frank and Reg Ward (still at Luncheon Club) and his friend John Potter. Frank was called Mr Debbie – the “man” partner was given this name. Remembers being at Mal Daveron’s place near Christian Brother College in Waverley. Sure he was in the Boomerangs at the time. On that particular day Rose Jackson was there. She was having an affair and a row with Donnie Freedwell. Rose had been having it off with Jimmy Fishburn. This was at Mal Daveron’s place and it was before he met Cameron. There were Boomerang members there and Mal was in that before Karingals was formed.	Debbie Frank Reg Ward Mal Daveron Boomerangs Rose Jackson Donnie Freedwell Jimmy Fishburn Karingals
3400	“(The Regents) became the specialists in drag. And all the incoming monies from the show before on hiring drag. We virtually didn’t make a penny.” It all went out in lighting and music ... (Ian McLean) and the hall and drag. It was sumptuous. Debbie hired it from a woman in Rockdale. Some drag was embellished or adjusted. It was glamour drag. Some numbers were comic drag. They did show tunes “that weren’t available on sale ... there were things like that were on Broadway that never came here that were famous ... “ For example Mack and Mable.	Regents Ian McLean Mack and Mable
3715	There was Follies and it was very new at the time. They should have been paying copyright. They did a series of numbers - a review basically. “We’d pick a few tunes the queens would know and love and the	Follies Coronation Hall

	more glamour the drag the more they liked it because it gave little miss average a chance to throw on a frock and come to Coronation Hall ... there no where else to go in drag in those days” A few would come as audience in drag.	
3900	They would put on a full stage, proscenium, dressing room, hire the lighting, the music (Ian), they'd be a hole in the wall kitchenette selling icecream.	
3926	During that period the Coronation Hall was re-furnished to its present state.	Coronation Hall
3950	The difference between this and the professional drag was the choreography. The Regents were very repetitious. Debbie the choreography. The professional drags could afford a better wig etc. The Regents did one Sunday night at the Onion while the cast took a break. “We did a good job all the same”.	Regents Debbie The Onion
4120	The shows were for one night and rehearsals were in the lounge room at different people's places. They did a show every 3 months. A couple of weeks rehearsals. Debbie chose most of the frocks and the tunes. The drag kids in the show had a bit of a say, but Debbie would put the nucleus together. The boys wore white shirts black pants, a red tie in one scene a waistcoat in another.	Debbie
4241	300 – 400 would come. “We were sold out always”. People found out about it by word of mouth. Flyers would advertise coming attractions. \$2.50 it was a cheap night out.	Attendance
4347	Pollys started around 1967 – 68. At the “first meeting of the Polynesians was in Bourke Street Bondi Junction and that's where Polly, Dallas Perkins, and his boyfriend Les Easton – a very straight type man in those days – a worker builder straighty – he was alright with his sexuality. That was our first meeting”. Ron has no idea how it came about.	Pollys first meeting Polly Dallas Perkins Les Easton
4505	“There was Reg and John, Malcolm and Frank, Camm and I, Dallas and Les really I think that was about all, I think we might have been to somewhere and seen a show and decided we'd do our own thing. And it was in his house, that someone came up with the idea that we would call it the Pollys. We were in Pollys House.” Ron adds that there was another Polly who was around at the time – not the Polly (Craig) from Chez Ivy – before that there was a drag queen, biggish in the 50s and 60s.	Reg and John Malcolm and Frank Camm and Ron Dallas and Les Polly (Craig)
4634	Ron recalls Polly (Craig) at the Albury on a Sunday	Polly (Craig)

	afternoon – Pollys Follies. It was he and another boy called Terry Mabou who were the two male dancers at Capriccios.	Albury Hotel Terry Mabou
4720	The aim of the Polynesians was self gratification more than anything. “We wanted to show them that we could do a great drag show (the public)” “Our first show was at Randwick Town Hall ... the curtain wouldn’t work”. The originals seem to drop out. Amber came over and stayed with the Polynesians for years.	Pollys aims Randwick Town Hall
4856	Can’t recall the break away. The Pollys had the Pol – limpics (photo of Ron winning a hand bag race). Maybe Debbie (Malcolm) wanted more that the Polynesians were interested in doing.	Pol-limpics Debbie (Malcolm)
5040	Thinks that the length of the group was from 1971 - 1973.	
5106	The group stopped due to disinterest. Remembers, one of the Regents who wasn’t a member of the original Pollys. (Connie)	Connie
5200	Michael Flynn suggests that buying a place might have influenced the break up, Ron says that they’d bought in Randwick before that in 1969. They had rehearsals Surry Hills when they moved there in 1973. Can’t recall where the Pollys rehearsed.	Randwick Surry Hills
5230	They were with the Pollys for a little while before they broke away.	
5300	The art work for the flyers was pinched and they were roneoed.	Roneoed
5330	When gay lib started, the group gave much a damn. “All we cared about was not getting raided by the cops and to make sure that we had our certificate from the Chief Secretary’s department for each event. You had to pay a minimal (fee) ... and if the cops came you just showed them and they were as right as rain.” The license was for having a group (function) and to have alcohol on the premises.	Gay Lib Chief Secretary
5448	Remembers a function in the mid 50s at Glebe Town Hall and they got raided, and they didn’t have a certificate “there were screams and skirts flying everywhere”. Possibly a private party.	Glebe Town Hall
5517	They did their own accounts (Ron). They had a charter and a treasurer and a secretary and thinks they had a Chairperson (Debbie). Accounts kept for themselves – no tax to worry about. Their main outlay was the drag - \$500 - \$600 per show. It was theatre stuff, which the owner had bought up old stuff from the Tivoli or the Opera.	Ron Debbie Tivoli Opera

5840	After the Artists Ball finished at the Trocadero, they moved to the old fire station in Waverley. The Keiron. The Artists Ball continued. Connie was the name Ron had forgotten. He was a good friend of Cammie's.	Artists Ball Trocadero Keiron
10010	The name of the Regents was thought up by Debbie.	
10200	Ron names Donnie Smith, Dawn O'Donnell as being involved in setting up the Artists Ball.	Donnie Smith Dawn O'Donnell
10427	Ron was enamored of Donnie Smith. "He was very knowledgeable and had gay liberation at heart or helping to provide. If he liked you, he would let Cameron and I into the movies for nothing, always went to his Christmas party."	Donnie Smith
File 5		
0000	Ron thinks "that in the full run of events they were looked up to ... because of Dawn and Donnie and different people who were identities." They had the old dispensary hall as their club rooms. Got to know Donnie through the Capriccios days. Got to know the drags there and Terry Mabou. Terry and Ron traveled to England together in 1989. He was doing the costumes for Big River with Cameron Daddo.	Dawn and Donnie Dispensary Hall Capriccios Terry Mabou Cameron Daddo
0634	Remembers Dawn as young woman as being very masculine and fairly brusque. She was with Frances when Ron first met her. She used to rent vacant blocks of land around Broadway and rent it for day parking. Ron knew 2 lesbians who worked for her. She had a farm at Wiseman's Ferry.	Dawn Frances Wisemans Ferry
0844	Ron knew Roger Claude before the early 50s. He had a florist shop on Macleay Street opposite the fountain. His boyfriend was a South African Johnny Boks. Probably the first person Ron fell in love with.	Roger Claude Macleay Street Johnny Boks
1030	Can't remember seeing Dawn fraternise with large groups of lesbians. At Caps she had a little guy Tommy managed it for years and who bought it from her. Allen was very masculine.	Allen Tommy Dawn
1212	Went to Kandy's Garden of Eden before he met Cameron. Simone was the loveliest 16 yo, 17 yo singing Della Reese. Used to think she was the ants pants. Ron was the only queen with a bit of money in those days and had a car. He would run the drags between the Garden of Eden and Capriccios and Onion in his car so that they could appear at two locations.	Kandy's Garden of Eden Simone Della Reese
1414	Was working full time. Was working for David Jones and then head hunted to Myers as a department manager for the first suburban store in Gordon.	David Jones Myers, Gordon

1526	Cameron had worked his way through college. In the mid 70s bought the Salon, and made friends with well heeled clients. They'd would get invited to smart dinner parties at Darling Point, go to the Opera, the theatre, go to Caps or Purple Onion on Sundays.	
1713	At Caps they would have a pretty awful amateur hour downstairs and the show upstairs.	
1730	After the Regents closed, Cammie and the others didn't do drag again. "There was nothing feminine in their way of thinking, other than ... they didn't want to be girls." They didn't dress up to go out in drag "It was never in their minds, it was purely showtime on Broadway".	
1900	Talks about a book he is reading and that Shirley Bassey was this generation's Judy Garland.	Shirley Bassey Judy Garland
1930	The issue of class was raised. For Ron it didn't mean a thing on their scale of things – the disparity in wealth among gays. He reflects that people who had money did mix with people who had money. Hugh Jamieson. Ron had an affair with him when he was young. Hugh mixed with a group who had money. "Money stuck to money". Most of the people he knew were working.	Hugh Jamieson
2340	The level of ownership of cars was discussed. Garry Wotherspoon's notion of cars being a way for men to get out, go to beats etc didn't seem to apply to Ron's circle of friends, who were car poor in the mid to late 60s. Perhaps, those who did beats were not happy with their sexuality and forced into marriage and so they had cars. "Open gays weren't particularly interested in cars ... (other ways to spend your money) ... on frocks and jewels."	Car ownership
2455	Ron's career path. Before they split up Rex loaned him some money and bought a florist shop opposite the station. But it never did any good. Then the David Jones and Myers jobs came up and then for a few years he worked in an illegal casino. In the Kingsgate on the 9 th floor. Money from that took him off to Europe in 1977, for 4 ½ months and in 1982 worked for a rug and carpet importer, and did some accounts, selling, helped on design, foyers for hotels that were being built – the Shangri La etc. There until 1995. Now works one day a week.	Rex David Jones Myers Kingsgate Carpet Importer Shangri La
2830	Was the past President of the Bobby Goldsmith Foundation, past committee member of drop in centre called Myrtle Place. Does a lot of volunteer work for ACON through the Positive Living Centre.	Bobby Goldsmith Myrtle Place Positive Living

		Centre
3000	People who joined the clubs. A big percentage lived in the suburbs who came to the shows. Not a large number of people living together. Maybe still living at home. There was not that money around. It was not of great importance for his group of who did what in the 50s and 60s. Ron supported Cameron who was an apprentice on \$5 a week when living in Woollhara. Both worked two jobs – he did his hairdressing, Ron did what he did and both worked as waiters at the Royal Automobile Club. Saved up money and with that bought the a 2 bedroom unit in Randwick in 1969. Cost \$13,600.	Woollhara Royal Automobile Club Randwick
3350	When he got back from Europe, he met again an aspiring actor who was older than him, and through him he went to drama school in the city. Two lesbians ran it, were English women – Judy Rathbone-Lawless and Winifred Hindell was the other and it was in the Royal Arcade, between Pitt and George. June Salter, Wendy Blacklock came out of it. He went on to do a couple of years of radio work, some ghost writing for the ABC – children’s serials. He mentions a man, Bill from Sydney who he met in London and went on to do great things – producer director of <i>Upstairs, Downstairs, the Duchess of Duke Street</i> , Bill Bane. He died of leukemia, but possibly died of AIDS. Saw him in 1977 in New York and met all the cast. Mentions the work at Artransa studios at Pagewood. <i>Treasure Island</i> – John Newton came out to play Long John Silver. Played pirates, bewigged servants etc. The made 10 episodes for English TV. Then in amateur theatre companies – the Metropolitan Theatre Company from Christ Church St Lawrence Hall on the Pitt Street Side. Another in Reiby Place, and all hand to mouth.	Judy Rathbone- Lawless Winifred Hindell Royal Arcade June Salter Wendy Blacklock ABC Bill Bane AIDS Artransa Pagewood Treasure Island John Newton Christ Church St Lawrence Reiby Place
4100	Coming back to Sydney in the mid 50s, what was missing here that was in London? Found his way in London. He knew of the Salisbury and picked up from there and was told about clubs in theatre land. Rockinghams, the A and B – they were lovely piano bars. Older gentlemen. The White Bear Bar and Restaurant – near the Royal Court Theatre. It was huge. It was so elegant and Ron was overwhelmed. They were missing from London. Correction RQ	Salisbury Hotel Rockinghams The A and B The White Bear
4410	Only noticed the young ones at the White Bear.	
4620	When he came back he got a little involved with Borovanski’s classes down at the Quay. Got friendly	Borovanski Australian

	with some of the Boro kids who then went on to become the Australian Ballet.	Ballet
4720	Tries to recall the name of another ballet company before Peggy Van Prague.	Peggy van Prague
4745	Ron remembers working for Warren Marx around that time. Warren had left David Jones and set up a fashion agency. Had a number fashion labels. He had loads of money. His partner was Glen Lehmann and he had worked in advertising for the ballet company and the opera company. He got to know all the Peggy van Prague dancers at functions and parties.	Warren Marx David Jones Glen Lehmann Peggy van Prague