

John Witte interview with David Williams on 8th September 2005, East Sydney for Pride History Group Early Venues Project.



Recording on Mini-disk		
Time	Subjects	Proper Names
	Group 2 item 1	
000035	Born in 1935. Father a Methodist Minister who was studying at London University. They lived in Beckenham, a London Suburb.	Beckenham
000225	1941 were evacuated to Melbourne.	Melbourne
000230	Father joined them in 1944 and he worked at Ballarat Mental Hospital	Ballarat
000247	1947 family moved to Melbourne and father died of a brain tumour when he was 11 or 12.	
000300	Wesley College	
000325	At 13 David had his first sexual experience and he had an active sex life at school.	
000349	Wesley masters seduced students	Wesley College
000405	A 3 year sexual relationship with a fellow student.	
000425	Was certain that he was interested in boys	
000445	Difficult to identify as gay in those days. Besides the others at Wesley he felt like the only gay in the world.	
000510	Came out as "camp" when he went to university.	
000520	Left home and shared with a couple other gays. There were lots of pubs where you could meet, but there was no scene.	
000550	He described the Australia Hotel. The 6 o'clock swill.	
000635	If you heard about a party, you took this as a personal invitation. You would buy some alcohol and turned up.	
	Group 2 Item 2	
000011	Private parties were closeted and there was lots of sex. When you arrived you check out an exit in case of a police raid.	
000115	Police raided half the parties. Neighbours complained about groups of men.	
000136	People were prosecuted and fined. Details would be published in the "Truth"	Truth
000150	"Truth" like to report on police raids on beats	
000300	David met an older (29) man when he was 18, who looked after him socially and introduced him to things he had only hear about.	

000350	After the relationship ended, he decided he did not want to finish university. Probably because he went there when he was too young.	
	Group 2 Item 3	
000015	His father had left him money in trust and using a bit of that money he went to England to visit relatives for 3 months	
000051	Came back to Australia and bought a decorating business with his father's money in Toorak Road South Yarra from Bee Taplin. He bought the retail side and Bee went into the manufacturing side.	South Yarra Bee Taplin
000140	The business was a success. Spent 2-3 years there and bought a house.	
000150	In 1956 was offered a lot of money for business. Took that and went to London.	
000210	Spent 3 years sharing a flat in Paddington and going to theatre and opera and to Rockingham Club in Archer Street, Soho – a “pussy” private club where older men in suits took young men away for weekends.	Rockingham Club
000241	In 1956, when 21 and desirable had a good time.	
000300	Organising to get cheap tickets for shows, with Ian and Charles in long queues. A place to meet for sex.	
000341	Every night of the week they went out. 10 shows a week.	
000400	There were a lot more interesting shows in those days.	
000431	After 3 years came back to Melbourne.	
000445	David recalls a visit with his older friend to Sydney and staying at a B & B operated by Chica Lowe.	Chica Lowe
000520	She came into the bedroom with breakfast and wanted to know what they got up to the night before. David felt embarrassed.	
000600	He went to Sydney after returning to Melbourne and he became a partner in business to Leslie Walford. Leslie had a successful business in Double Bay and wanted to explore the North Shore market. David ran the Killara store for 2-3 years.	Leslie Walford
000640	This was 1961. Bought a house in Paddington and drove everyday to Killara.	
000800	Leslie Walford was a social person and David met a broad social scene. There was an emerging gay social scene. Pfahlerts Hotel was a place people went to and parties at Palm	

	Beach.	
000845	David remembers Kandy's Garden of Eden which was a converted Greek milkbar. It was long and narrow and at the end was a cardboard proscenium arch with the names of Kandy, Rose (Jackson) and Nola and a little stage. There were tables and chairs and late comers stood at the back and watched the shows. Miming to numbers. Everyone had their favourite voice which nobody could poach.	Garden of Eden Kandy Rose Jackson Nola
001000	It was not original but fun and there was a like minded audience and that was part of the fun.	
001020	Also private parties in Sydney. Neville Marsh had a large house in Paddington and gave parties, which were raided by police. 8 people put on a fashion parade in drag – "daywear", "beachwear", "racewear".	Neville Marsh
001100	Frankie (Margaret) Mitchell was compere.	Frankie (Margaret) Mitchell
001125	Ray (Fay) Seedy was a window dresser and a wiz with staple gun and pot of paint.	Ray (Fay) Seedy
001220	Fashion shows were a parody of the overblown fashion shows of the day.	
001225	Police arrived at 2 or 3 in the morning. Because of this they decided to hire the Purple Onion. PO was originally owned by Rose Jackson and Dormie McIver in Kensington and is now KKK.	Purple Onion Rose Jackson Dormie McIver
001300	There were performances at the PO Friday, Saturday and Sunday nights. About this time Kandy Johnson had taken it over.	Kandy Johnson
001420	3 of the group gave a party at the PO on a Good Friday and was described in the press as the social event of the year.	
001500	About 1965, David decided that relationship with Leslie Walford was not making money because clients wanted to deal with LW personally.	Leslie Walford
001535	At PO bumped into a lawyer Gordon Stewart who suggested he buy the place. Kandy wanted to become the publican and he couldn't have another business. Convenient – pub closed at 10 and Kandy would come out to do the shows at 10:30/11:30. David would be the front man.	Gordon Stewart
001625	Saw Kandy in his house at Marrickville and concluded a deal to buy PO for \$1,500 which was to be paid in \$500 instalments.	
001735	The pub was more difficult than KJ thought. DW could pay off each instalment from profits from PO. By the second instalment he could pay from the money stashed around his house. Had no	

	idea what to with all the cash. PO paid in 3 months.	
001830	KJ was stressed from running the pub and could not continue with the shows. The shows were derived from the Garden of Eden shows, plus comedy skits. At that time there was no videos. Kandy would record from "Around the Horn". The show numbers were from performers like Lena Horne, Roberta Flack.	Around the Horn
002000	For show songs they relied on Qantas queens bringing back the latest show on LP.	
002043	There was a parting of the ways with KJ when Kandy could not put on the next series of shows.	
002100	David's first appearance in drag was in Kandy's Lil' Abner.	
002215	David describes how he came up with the idea of putting on a show based on "Hallelujah Baby" starring Leslie Uggins.	"Hallelujah Baby" Leslie Uggins
002330	After considering closing down PO he thought of Black Leslie in the role Leslie Uggins.	Black Leslie
002425	Next morning a show was in his head. He rang Maggie Martin who had previously done the choreography. They cut and put together the songs for the show on tape. Rose Jackson made David something large and showy for the finale.	Maggie Martin Rose Jackson
002547	PO was a success and he made a lot of money.	
002610	PO had a "Refreshment Room" licence. It sat 86 but 500 people attended.	
002648	John (Fay) Francis ran the floor. Premises were appalling but people didn't mind – they were with their own kind. Those standing cruised.	John (Fay) Francis
002754	"How to be Beatrice" was the first show, then "Mostly Beatrice", "Little of what you fancy", "Totally Beatrice".	"How to be Beatrice" "Little of what you fancy"; "Totally Beatrice"
002842	Also put on a comedy show in collaboration with Maggie Martin.	Maggie Martin
002942	Other venues were Chez Ivy at Bondi Jct and Enzos cnr Oxford and Alman Streets Paddington. Both closed at 10pm and people went to PO. Les Girls was the other drag venue, but it was for tourists.	Chez Ivy Enzos Les Girls
003020	"Cinderella" a Christmas pantomime. Rose Jackson as Fairy Godmother; Robyn Lee, Honey West as Ugly Sisters. Rose Jackson did the costumes. Black Leslie was the prince. 2 acts in one	"Cinderella" Rose Jackson Robyn Lee Honey West Black Leslie

003305	"Sound of Mucus". D. played Mother Superior, Baroness and Maria became a chorus girl. Audience participation as nuns in nuns chorus.	"Sound of Mucus"
003631	"Street Car named Beatrice". D. was Blanche, Robyn as Stella. Press picked it up. Catherine Brisbane gave it an award in the Australian.	"Street Car named Beatrice" Robyn Lee Catherine Brisbane
003838	Very busy. Money poured in. Bought 20 houses on one side of Bennett Street Surry Hills, later called "Vaseline Alley". Regulars couldn't get in.	Bennett Street Vaseline Alley
004005	Performed a version of "Carmen"	Carmen
004025	Decision to turn Purple Onion into a gay discotheque, but people wanted the drag and a band playing wasn't enough.	Discotheque
004130	The disco was also BYO. \$2.50 entry was for coffee. Soft drinks were 10c each.	
004253	D. said he was concerned with being busted for dope smoking at the Purple Onion. Any booze had to have a person's name on it.	Dope smoking
004323	Purple Onion has little trouble with the police. It was located in Daceyville and Neville and George would come by occasionally. D. explained his rationale for helping police by keeping gays out of the beats. The Cross was homophobe Bumper Farrell's territory.	
004405	Once the police came in to ask for cash to leave him alone. They did this when D. was with Grant MacIntyre the Prime Minister's private secretary (Harold Holt). The police left D. alone. D. ended up doing a function for the Policeman's Ball.	Grant MacIntyre Harold Holt
004509	D. thinks that he was doing his best to run a business and provide a social service.	
004539	D. describes precautions you would need to take if you wore drag in public. If found wearing female underwear you would be arrested for an offence against public decency, and worse if you were arrested by the KX police.	Offence against public decency.
004654	D. describes the ambience of the Taxi Club "a bloodbath" with a steep staircase many were thrown down. It was a licensing anomaly. There was a mix of bohemians, criminals, drag queens, plumbers.	Taxi Club
004900	D. describes men who want to be fucked by drag queens.	Drag queens
005007	The Discotheque wasn't a success. He did a series of revival shows with a straight cast. Louise Ramsay as the fairy godmother and Maggie Grey as the Prince.	Louise Ramsay Maggie Grey

005110	“Sunset Beatrice – the story of a woman destroyed” was next planned in collaboration with Maggie Martin. Angela Lansbury songs from “Real World”. D. describes the changes in costume during the show black and white to colour and lavender to deep purple.	Sunset Beatrice Maggie Martin Angela Lansbury
005300	Deborah Allard and D. became emotionally involved	Deborah Allard
005345	Nicolaides, landlord of the Purple Onion negotiated a higher rent with a new tenant who wanted to put on contemporary satirical review. (in 1969). The new tenant lasted 5 weeks.	
005515	Others had a go at the Purple Onion – Sylvia and the Synthetics. Some time in the 70’s Kandy bought the building.	Sylvia and Synthetics. Kandy Johnson
005540	Left Australia in late 69/early70 for overseas with Deborah for 14 years.(see 005740)	
005610	Returned to do a revival of Cinderella for Eric Dare at the Comedy Theatre in Oxford Street.	Eric Dare Comedy Theatre
005715	Then off to London to do a revival of “Sound of Mucus” at a Club in Kensington.	
005740	Came back for visits. After 9 years, 14 years and then early 90’s. D. expresses views about current drag scene – a career choice rather than for fun. He doesn’t understand it.	Current drag scene
005833	D. sums up his contribution to the time before Gay Pride and Mardi Gras to the gay scene. The Purple Onion was a place where straights could see gays at play. D. then speculates on what could have happened if he had expanded to the Doncaster Theatre Restaurant on Anzac Pde and describes how the Purple had become too much to manage.	Gay Pride Mardi Gras Doncaster Theatre Restaurant
010120	D. describes Les Girls as similar to the Folies Berger and the Lido and the Tropicana in Havana. Tourist traps.	Les Girls, Follies Berger, and Lido (Paris), Tropicana in Havana
010340	D. thinks Purple Onion did a lot to de-mystify gays to the straight community.	
010435	International stars came like Shirley Bassey and she loved Black Lesley. Sydney was a grey and dreary place then, and D. hopes that Purple Onion help liberalise the scene.	Shirley Bassey Black Lesley
010551	D. remembers fantasy nights and Lionel in a Waratah princess pink crinoline, covered with pet doves. When he raised his arms during “When I’m Calling You”, they would raise their tails.	Lionel
010700	When he came back in the 80’s AIDS had struck. Neville (see 001020) was one of the first	Neville Marsh AZT

	sufferers and he was treated with AZT	
010758	D. was doing project management overseas and when he came back was asked to help with Community Service Network. He had heard of AIDS in 1982 in New York in the Village when he went to a meeting to hear about GRID – Gay Related Immuno Deficiency.	Community Service Network Gay Related Immuno Deficiency (GRID)
010905	D. describes what was required for a CSN worker – double bag a dead body.	
010930	Deaths were disguised. Keith (Hazel) Hughes died of “cancer”.	Keith (Hazel) Hughes
011000	Describes a sauna in Seville in late 80’s.	
011211	D. thinks that the “Grim Reaper” ads were damaging to gay community by promoting guilt. Today young are ignoring safe sex advice.	
011500	He now lives on an old age pension and does volunteer work at Kingsford Legal Centre, Queerscreen and has an active social life.	
011957	D. reflects on young gays growing up in his day and today, and in the city and the country.	
012145	It is useful for young gays to have a sense of earlier achievements. D. sees himself as a pioneer.	
012322	D. talks about monogamous relationships and speculates that gays are by nature promiscuous. Gay marriage is a furphy. Gay relationships should have the same rights as any other. Nothing less.	