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Interview with Hugh Stretton recorded by Rob Linn on Tuesday, 14th November 2006 at North Adelaide.

DISK 1

This is an interview for the University of Adelaide Oral History Program with Hugh Stretton on Tuesday, 14th November 2006 at North Adelaide, South Australia, interviewer Rob Linn.

Hugh, I wonder if we could begin just with a little bit of background on your family, please? I know that that's been recorded elsewhere, but tell me a little bit about your parents.

Well, my father was the son of a remarkable immigrant. In 1862, a woman was suffering in an English village from a cruel husband when she had a child aged two, and she had a sister in Australia who rescued her and brought her out, and that child grew up to be a remarkable man – tough and competent, and dreadful in all sorts (laughs) of ways to the people around him. He was a teetotaler who made his living first as a brewery clerk and then managing a hotel, a small hotel, about twelve miles north of Essendon at the very far fringes of Melbourne, called The Cyclist's Arms. And he had a proper pub sign painted for it of two cyclists, except each of them had both their feet at the top of the pedal cycle. And it was said that he had bribed the Mayor of Essendon to get the Mayor to terminate a cycle track at this hotel, because this was the very first decade of enthusiastic bicycling, and the number of people who came in to tell him this funny thing about the painting he had outside, and he would go out and look at it. He said, 'Good gracious! I never knew that. You must have a drink.' And the next ten drinks, of course, (laughs) other people would be paying for. That sort of rogue.

The story about him that I like the best was that they lived a lot of the time in rented cottages; they weren't living at the hotel. And Grandfather was a dreadful gambler on horses and other things and that meant that they constantly ran into debt and couldn't pay the rent of their cottages and they would do midnight flits. And they were doing one one day. My father was there with his father, with a little cart and horse, just to take their own belongings out of the house and go away to wherever they'd found another one, when along comes the angry estate agents and

SOHC/OH 760/4

said, ‘Are you Stretton?’ And Grandfather pointed west and said, ‘Stretton went away west that way, four hours ago, the bastard.’ Off went the estate agent.

So, Hugh, your father – – –?

And father turned to son and said, ‘Don’t you ever forget: whenever you’re doing this, never back the cart into the front door, they know you’re leaving. Always park it with the pony’s nose to the door.’ That was one element of my father’s education and a good deal more like it, I expect. But in the end he remembered most vividly – he loved horses and he liked being driven round the plain country north of Essendon, outside Melbourne. And he remembers a day being driven around there in a jinker with his father behind their horse, came home, put the horse away, father went upstairs and presently shouted and came crashing down the stairs and broke a limb, because this was 1902 and he’d just opened his mail upstairs and found that he’d won the Tattersall’s lottery. And all the education of two generations of his family (laughs) was financed by that thereafter. It transformed – never complain about chronic gamblers; it always might come true.

I’m sorry about all that. But what he did with the money was to buy a respectable house in Brunswick, Melbourne suburb, not far from the university. The money financed my father’s law course at the university, which is where he met my mother doing a BA¹ and they married in 1919.

He made a living first as a solicitor, then as a barrister; then he was appointed to the Workers’ Compensation Board, which consisted of one County Court judge and one member each from the Trade Union Movement and from the insurance companies who insured employers against injury to their workers. And a lot of my education was having him talk in a lovely unguarded, often satirical, way about his two comrades there. But it meant that he had some very good acquaintance in the Trade Union Movement because in Melbourne, which was at that time and where it is now the headquarters of the ACTU,² and high officers of it were placed into payable jobs wherever possible to save the unions money. And so he’s known a

¹ BA – Bachelor of Arts.

² ACTU – Australian Council of Trade Unions.

SOHC/OH 760/4

series of Presidents of the ACTU because, just before they were President, they were the trade union appointment to the Workers' Compensation Board.

I say this because my father, just like myself, I think was born at a time and place where you got a remarkable mix of upper-class and lower-class experience and education. I'll come to my (laughs) lower-class bits later on. So he married the daughter of [a] clergyman, doing a BA course, with all sorts of capacities to improve the world around her, inside and outside the family, and they bought a house in Beaumaris, eighteen miles down the bay from Melbourne. That time it was nearly all tea tree still, not much farming, tracks through the tea tree, all dirt roads except the one main road going through it, and a pleasant, cliffy, rocky, coastline with a bit of beach to swim on not far away, and I greatly enjoyed living there.

In terms of your own schooling, Hugh, did that begin at Beaumaris?

It did. I went to Beaumaris State School for three years. That was a two-teacher school, a two-room school. It was about a mile walk through the tea tree by tracks, was on an old dirt road, and it had three teachers, actually, in its two rooms: the headmaster was in the job by virtue of returned soldiers' preferences, and he was a badly injured returned soldier with a visible steel plate as part of his skull and a bad temper. But my experience was in the other room, the junior room, with a lovely young woman. I learnt to read and write insofar as I hadn't already done that at home.

Did your parents encourage you in reading and all that?

Oh, yes. They didn't have to do much. It sort of came naturally. That young lady – God knows why – the vivid memory I have was of her describing the battle of Thermopylae when the Persian kingdom invaded Greece in I forget what date now, and came to the point where a steep ridge of mountain comes down steeply to the seaside with a flat rock pass at the bottom, and that's the only way past. And as the Persian armies approached, the Greeks set up an effective defence there; but villainous locals sold out to the Persians and showed them the back track across the mountains and round to the other side, where they slaughtered the defenders. And I've been there and read in Greek the message that's still there in the memorial saying, 'Stranger, go tell the Spartans that we lie here in obedience to their orders.'

SOHC/OH 760/4

Well, from Beaumaris – – –.

Just – – –.

Was it to do with the young teacher again, Hugh?

Oh, partly, perhaps. The teacher went off and eventually was manager of an early Central Australian airline, and I went off and eventually was passing Greek I in Melbourne University by having to read that bit of Herodotus which tells the story of that battle at Thermopylae.

Is that the teacher who worked for Connellan Airways in Alice Springs?

Yes.

Well, I'll be darned.

Very good she was, too. We knew her personally as well; she lived nearby. I won't but I could go through many other odd experiences in that funny town, which was a mixture of a few learned people, professional people, and a few locals and a few crooks, and a few pederasts about the place exposing themselves on the bush tracks and that sort of thing. It was a good preparation (laughs) for real life. But we moved – for the sake of the kids' education, I think – when I was twelve, up into a suburb of Melbourne, and went to Scotch College. I'm sorry, can we scrub that out? I've left out – – –.

Okay; just repeat what you need to repeat.

I left the State School eventually and went two miles every day to Mentone Grammar School, which was privately owned by its headmaster and had sometimes one, sometimes two, assistant teachers operating in a very small way. But he was a most remarkable teacher, partly because he was an Oxford-educated, intelligent man; partly because he had war experience and that sort of thing; sympathetic, intelligent, critical, every good thing. I'm most grateful for it. And he was there and owned the school because, as an emigrant from England after the War, he'd had the presence of mind to marry the daughter of a stockbroker. So I was a lucky boy. And used to walk to and from Mentone Grammar about two miles each way, along clifftops, paths, tea tree. It was a lovely pattern of life.

SOHC/OH 760/4

But eventually for the sake of the kids they moved up to town and I went to Scotch College, where some most remarkable education was going on. Its headmaster hadn't been there long when I got there. It had been run by a bearded Victorian eminence who got to be a rather tedious kind and ran the school till a great old age; but he was replaced by Colin Gilray[?], who had ---.

He was a New Zealander, am I correct, Keith?

No, he wasn't. I know why you say that and you're right, he came to us from New Zealand. Colin Gilray was an English immigrant to New Zealand, I think, who had been a lawyer and worked at other business and only been a couple of years in education when he took over Scotch College. He'd had experience in New Zealand and it was from there that he came to Melbourne. He was a war hero, medal from World War I. Every conservative thing you could say about him made it astonishing that he moved into the school, he removed all the ancestral portraits around the walls of the assembly hall where we all met – a thousand of us met – every morning, and replaced them with the then current set of prints of the Museum of Modern Art, and he hired a couple of excellent artists, one a sane teacher (laughs) and one a very eccentric non-teacher, to acquaint us with painting and drawing.

And one of my memories that most South Australians will have sympathy with was the morning when, at the end of the religious bit of the morning assembly, he introduced a new music teacher. Up till then we didn't have a music teacher; one of the French teachers could hit the piano well enough to accompany the hymns in assembly. But here he introduced John Bishop, to give us a new musical life. And I can remember Bishop coming forward, having been introduced, to respond to the introduction and throwing both hands in the air and saying, 'Music is a wonderful thing!' And I, like nearly a thousand other boys, waited for the shouts of derision you would expect from the people that we kids were, but not a word. He got away with it. And he then made marvellous transformations to the musical life. I'm able to say that I've sung the Pilgrim's Chorus from some great opera in the Melbourne Town Hall to an audience of fifteen hundred. Thank God eight hundred other boys were singing at the same time.

SOHC/OH 760/4

Hugh, was one of the art teachers Murray Griffin[?]? He became a very famous war artist in the Second World War. I had a feeling he was at Scotch at about that time.

I should know that; I don't think it's right.

Sorry for interrupting you.

No, and I'm sorry because I've forgotten the names of the two. One was Francis Roy Thompson, he was a funny, muddly little man. He could paint a bit. And the other was a better painter – they were not as remarkable as Bishop was, but we got plenty of active painting done if we wanted to. Can I scrub all that bit? I'm so sorry.

No, that's not a problem.

Is this going all right?

Is it okay for you?

Yes. Just give us a thing to recall.

Colin Gilray – – –.

Yes. Then the next stroke of luck for my generation was to be the age we were when World War II started. All the men of military age were suddenly occupied: if they weren't in necessary civilian occupations they enlisted; and those that didn't enlist were suddenly conscripted – I think it was in 1941. Not for overseas service, but for home defence. But lots and lots of eighteen year-olds – by lottery, they had a lottery of your birth dates because they didn't have room for them all; but many thousands of eighteen year-olds were conscripted into the Army with nobody really to train them. The small permanent army was either already fighting in Africa or busily training the volunteers for foreign service, which was a much more important branch of the Army, and so they looked round for others and the Scotch College, like the other public schools, had a cadet corps. I was a cadet lieutenant, and so I spent a large slab of my seventeenth year with another star on my shoulder to make me an acting lieutenant in the Australian Military Forces. I got a driving licence at age seventeen. This wasn't unique; lots of kids were doing this sort of service. And I spent a long Christmas holiday in camp round Seymour aged seventeen, being saluted by the eighteen year-olds who I'd given immediate training to, and among other things became quite a competent machine-gun instructor.

SOHC/OH 760/4

I didn't instruct in Bren guns but I did meet one of the first ones that came out here. And I did one year at Melbourne University, then was of an age for military service and joined the Navy, and was found to be colour blind in their opinion. My chief objection to the Japanese is not that we fought a war against them but that they had a nasty little book full of coloured dots which told the authorities that I was colour blind and had confusion between red and green. You can imagine how dangerous that would be, keeping watch at night from a ship. So I wasn't allowed to be in that branch at all. I became a supply rating and looked after the naval stores – tools and bits and pieces – on my first ship and stood night watches every night at sea; and (laughs) never confused red with green. But I look back gratefully again – that, and in the succeeding two years in other jobs in the Navy and in another ship, I had three years' card-carrying membership of the working class of my country, which is as valuable as any other experience I've had.

You served on corvettes, is that correct?

Yes. The first one, as I said, I was looking after what they called the naval stores. Then I had a year running the food store on Darwin wharf for the various small boats and ships working there. And it left me, incidentally – this with the equivalent rank of a corporal in the Army – fifteen or twenty ships to service, big frozen food stores and so on. I wasn't doing all the frozen food storing but I was the retailer on the dock. And there was a time when the frozen food supplies, which had to come off merchant ships, ran out and I arranged to go to a sheep station about forty miles south, where I hoped we could get a couple of carcasses and get them frozen so that we could keep up the meat supplies. I went down there in a big truck with deliberately two big blokes, one driving, because we might have to carry carcass about, and we went down the main road then off onto a dirt road into the station, and it ran over a little bridge in a bush bit of the track, and the two big blokes saw that the creek opened out into a kind of lagoon. It was a hot day; might have a dip. So they pulled up and there were two Aborigines, young men, working at the bridge at something, and so one of the big heavies says in an appalling way, 'Ay, Jackie, any crocs in this creek?' And got the response that said, and I'm not imitating, it said: 'Crocodiles are saltwater creatures, you have to go down the sea and the estuaries for them; in this creek it would be alligators but I don't think there are any; and anyway,

SOHC/OH 760/4

if you want a dip we'll look after you.' Now, I'm not making that up. It was a perfect exchange of language between two classes of society. Never forgotten it. Anyway, lots of experience like that.

Then in the second of my corvettes I was responsible for feeding them. There were cooks, but I had to – I composed the menus, which I was not too bad at by then from various camping experiences, and stored the ship with the necessary food. And that was also rich and unusual experience for a kid that age. Very grateful for it all.

War ended when we were in Darwin, and I had a bit of luck. I saw on the ship's noticeboard, which is a squalid little thing in a corvette, a dim little notice after a while in pale purple ink saying that Rhodes Scholarships were being resumed after the War and that applications were invited, and anyone who was invited for an interview, which would take place in each of the six or seven capital cities, would be transported forthwith to home port. And 'forthwith' in the Navy doesn't mean 'first available opportunity'; it means 'right now'. So I sent off an application and presently we were on the southern coast of New Guinea somewhere when they got a radio message that I was summoned to Melbourne for an interview, and they had to send a two-engined flying boat to get me to Darwin to put me on a train. I shouldn't be talking in this self-indulgent way.

No, it's not self-indulgent at all, Hugh.

It was what you could call a diversely-experienced childhood and education. And in Oxford I met some marvellous teaching, examples of tertiary education at its very best. And that's not a snobbish observation because it was Oxford; it was because there were some lectures to go to if you wanted to because they were all voluntary. What you did have to do was live in a college – a bit disciplined because you were kids, you were supposed to be in there by ten at night and that sort of thing – but once a week you went and spent an hour with a tutor, an eminent scholar in each case, and read to him the essay you'd written that week and had an hour to talk about how you'd gone about it, what the alternatives might have been and how otherwise or better or worse it could be done –

This is one-to-one?

– one to one. There were often two people in the room, a tutor might have two kids doing the same sort of course, and they would do the essay on alternative weeks, so

SOHC/OH 760/4

there might be another student there listening and joining in; one-to-one otherwise. I don't think the method's been bettered anywhere, especially for discursive sort of work where you're asked to think, and think originally a bit and to understand controversial issues, see both sides of them and so on. Which reminds me of the superb history teacher we had at Scotch College – can I go back to insert that?

Certainly.

Or I could put it into context with what I'm saying.

Please.

The senior history teacher at Scotch College we thought was a bit corrupt, because he wrote the textbook – a fairly plain, ordinary history of England textbook it was, I think – and class consisted of him going through from where we'd knocked off last week or last lesson telling us how to underline the important points and number things, number the four causes that were mentioned for this event and so on, till we knew the book by heart. And we believed, of course, that he was making us mark all this underlining so that the books would be defaced at the end of the year and the new generation of boys would have to buy a new array of books. But we would divert him about thirty minutes through a forty-five minute lesson.

Long afterwards, of course, I appreciated who was diverting who regularly at that point, because the history would have been concerned with some passage of changing government or changing policy or conflict, and there'd be issues in it, and about three-quarters of the way through the class he'd stop and say, of whatever these issues were, 'How do we handle those things these days? What do we do about that?' And he would make us discuss what our equivalent was of that sort of – in our society; and it might be a local thing – how the local buses were run – depending on what the brawl had been about in the history he was talking about, all the way to State and national policies and our relations with the United Nations and that sort of thing. It was remarkable teaching. And he was a very narrow-minded puritan himself, oddly enough.

Really?

Yes, one of the puritan Protestant sects. Boasted that he walked to work a couple of miles and wore the soles of his shoes exactly flat, symmetrically. No bias.

SOHC/OH 760/4

No bias.

Look, you'll have to do some putting together – – –.

I understand, Hugh.

Where are we at?

Well, that little diversion came out of your mentioning the one-to-one relationship with your tutor at Oxford.

Tutors.

Tutors, plural.

And four of them, because we had to do diverse subjects and courses of bits of history, and different specialists taught them, and mine were a wonderful variety. The Medieval historian, Richard Southern[?], was a wonderfully-intelligent, straight forward Medieval historian, he was the biographer of some of the famous saints and that sort of thing. Then you got onto the seventeenth century and the English Revolution, in which I was specialising, and you were taught by a communist, Christopher Hill.

Christopher Hill.

A very able and intelligent historian – the best, still, of the English Revolution in the seventeenth century and the conflicts between Crown and Parliament. And then the tough old ex-soldier, teaching us in the eighteenth century, who had every conservative virtue that you could imagine, in the best sense of the word. And then an Anglo-Egyptian called Paul Rullo[?], young man: I don't think he was a very good historian; he was a wonderful friend, took the out-of-town people like me off on excursions and holidays, and he was unmarried, he was living in the college like we were, so it was a splendid diversion. But he did also [have] contacts in Central Europe, and I remember writing him an essay about what must have gone on in the cafés of some Central European city; he said, 'Oh, you're wrong about that, boy, I can tell you.' I think you can prune a lot of this.

Hugh, you were in Oxford in '46 and '47, would that be right?

Yes. And then more undeserved luck: there were various privileges for returned soldiers and I was allowed to do the three-year course in two years, and at the end of

SOHC/OH 760/4

that I was made a fellow of the college, but they didn't want me, until that friendly don I mentioned had finished his contract and left, because he wasn't a permanent fellow of the college. So corruption, the Master of Balliol went along to the Chancellor of Oxford University, who had in his gift one place for one year, every year, at Princeton Graduate School. Don't know how that had arisen. But the Master induced the Chancellor to confer it on me, so I spent a year – the most serious educational year of my life, probably – at Princeton, exploring all the social sciences around history, which seemed to me a good way to keep it in context, and those were more vivid and interesting experiences.

Was that your first exposure to North American culture?

Yes, yes.

Was it a very different culture from Oxford, Hugh?

Mixed that was, because they come from all over. I find it hard to talk about. And I wasn't doing any obligatory course of study. So I did enrol in some undergraduate courses and one graduate group, just because I was interested in what was happening in the various social sciences at the time; and the opportunities were splendid because some of the more interesting of them were at that place. But I also had time to be away, visit other things around the United States, and especially invocations. I've hitch-hiked both ways across that continent.

Really?

Yes. Learned the job from a couple of what we'd call swaggies who were doing it on Canadian railways, and came back on the United States side, which was a bit more difficult because there were more constraints about it. So I'm just undeservedly but deeply grateful for the kind of youth I had, as a result of that war very largely and of a pair of absolutely splendid parents.

Did you teach at Oxford after your return from Princeton?

Yes, that's what I was hired to do. So there I was, teaching their most up-to-date two centuries of British and European history by that same method, pupil by pupil, essay by essay, and it's where I met some talent that I hired as soon as I got out here.

So how did that come about, Hugh, that Adelaide University heard of you? Did you apply for the job here or – – –?

SOHC/OH 760/4

No, I didn't, no. I'd been teaching at Oxford for I suppose four years when there came a couple of people who were head-hunting because they had vacancies coming up, and Vice-Chancellor A.P. Rowe was one, and he enquired around Oxford – as he probably did around other places – for a possible Professor of History. And some of my colleagues must have recommended me.

This is a favourite little bit. (break in recording) He consulted at Rhodes House because he knew that Australians might have come through that route, and at Rhodes House was a chap who'd just gone there because until that time he'd been my colleague at Balliol, he was the Politics tutor. Before that, he'd been military intelligence chief for General Montgomery throughout his campaigns in Africa and through Europe, whereas Mr Rowe, the Adelaide Vice-Chancellor, through those years, had been administrative head of the special unit in England that had developed radar fast enough to detect the German bombers as they entered the Channel zone for the Spitfires to be there to meet them at the other side. So I'm very proud of having been chosen for this task by (laughs) those two improbable men.

What was A.P. Rowe like, do you recall?

Oh, I recall vividly, as anybody does. He was a very strange mixture of a man. Not a very happy appointment, actually. But he had, as I've said, been administrative head of a group of scientists who had all the brains; he didn't pretend to have the science brains. That was the experience he brought, and it seemed to colour his dealings with academics. I forget exactly what the issues were, but they didn't like the kind of command he wanted to keep over them and their doings and there was always tension between them.

And I remember vividly one experience of mine. He was housed in the attic part of what is now the Staff Club at the University. Quite a comfortable – he was there with his wife; didn't have children with him. And one night he was out, there had been works done in the University and not far from where he came out of where he lived, onto a crossroad of two university paths. There was a big square hole in the ground where works were being done, about six feet deep, and there was a white railing all around four sides of it, and he managed to crash through the railing and fall down and break a leg or something and go to hospital. And this was just a few days after he had tried to persuade the professors in concert to hand over to him some

SOHC/OH 760/4

extraordinary powers of intervention in the management of their departments and they had voted about it and they had voted against this by about – I don't remember what it was, but as it were by twenty-five to five or something like that. So when I heard that he'd had this accident, like others, I thought, 'He's in hospital, go and visit him', and I went along to his secretariat in the University to ask whereabouts he was and how I might visit him and the lady got out a little black book and looked in it and said, 'You are one of the twenty-five people who he will not have visit him in any circumstances.'

So I had the further joy, weeks later, encountered him very near that same spot, just casually walking through the University, and he said, 'Stretton, not long ago I was injured and in hospital and many colleagues came to visit me. But you did not.' And I was able to explain to him why I did not.

That's a hateful story, really. You can leave it all out if you want.

No, Hugh, I think it shows the man to a 'T'. So he visited you at Oxford?

Yes. He was head-hunting at Oxford and he started at Rhodes House. He didn't know that the Warden of Rhodes House was a good friend of mine and a good friend of General Montgomery's, too. (laughter)

So who else from Adelaide University visited you in England?

Douglas Pike, who was there doing some of the key research for his book about the foundation of the South Australian colony, because he was going into all the governmental background of it. It was a unique, unusual kind of enterprise and lots of work to be done. And as soon as I heard about this appointment I met him, saw quite a lot of him there and even helped him with some of the work that he was doing. And he has a most interesting history.

One of the very small Christian, Protestant churches was running a mission to China, sent one of its ministers to Central China – when must it have been? Goodness, round the turn of that century – and Douglas was born into that missionary household in Central China. And there was no English-language school anywhere in reach and the ministers there, in what was not a rich congregation or church, were only financed to visit the coast, which meant going to the port and the central cities and things, once a year. And Douglas remembered at I forget what age now, somewhere between six and twelve, going a long train journey and getting on a

SOHC/OH 760/4

boat and the boat stopping opposite a rocky shore and him going ashore, over rocks – no great jetty, apparently – and walking up a slope to what he then described as the sort of ‘Victorian institution’ that you see: three storeys high, stone-built, and he mentioned one, I forget which, round Adelaide, just like that; and this was the only English-run, English-language school in China at the time, and that’s where he did his main secondary education. Then he was sent down to Australia and – I mustn’t get this story wrong.

It was to Melbourne, I think, Hugh.

Yes. But I’m just afraid that I’m making some big gap in the story. (pauses) Oh, yes. That’s right. His sister had been sent to Australia, to teachers’ college; and he was sent again, at tertiary educational age, but not equipped to go to university. He got a job, worked on sheep stations, and adopted the Australian mode of life. And he would get off at Christmas and have a couple of weeks in Sydney and get drunk and all that, and one time he got drunk and fell under a tram and got hurt and spent a little time in hospital. And when he was better he was sacked, he had been sacked because of absence from his job, so he thought he’d go down to Melbourne and see his sister. That was a twenty-four-hour journey then in the train. He got off the train at Spencer Street on Sunday morning, and across the street there, there was a charitable place of some sort run by one of the minor churches, where travellers could go to brush up or even perhaps spend a night if they were short of sleep. And he went there and spent a couple of days there and found that it was run by a very small church whose training college for its ministry was in Melbourne, and he’d come in those two days to two conclusions: that he wished to join the church, as a minister; and to marry the daughter of the proprietor of this safe haven that he was in.

He did both those things and did a very simple course of instruction for this ministry, because it wasn’t a rich church, and then found himself across in South Australia in the Glenelg Parish’s parish church. It was in that capacity that he was able, consistently with his ministerial duties, to do a university course at Adelaide University and very much impress his teachers as a naturally-intelligent man. When he graduated, they got him a job in Perth, actually, just on his historical talents; and then, when shortly they needed somebody back in Adelaide, they hired him to come home in that capacity. That’s how he got there, in that roundabout way. But that

SOHC/OH 760/4

gave him a very diverse kind of experience of life that he brought to bear on the work he did, and he brought various fascinating attitudes to bear.

He had plenty of the Australian propensity, I think he brought it with him, to distrust and ridicule many people in authority. He knew some history by then. If you walk from Adelaide city across the parklands towards North Adelaide, you climb up a hill at the top of which there's a big, good-looking church. It's a Protestant church, and it had a famous inaugural minister, and it has a spire on top, despite the fact that that inaugural minister, who became a famous preacher, insisted that inside it had a flat roof because that meant that a sermon could be heard more clearly; but there was a spire on top. Now, why do you think there was a spire on top? Because spire building was absolutely prohibited in Britain to any Protestant church except the Church of England; and here he was, in a minor – I remember Douglas Pike thrusting a fish and a finger in the air, saying, 'A finger of *derision*, that spire was!' So that was another nice set of attitudes to live along with.

The people I hired included two that I'd come across in Balliol when the War was over and they emerged from the Continent, from captivity or whatever, and I knew them as pupils; and they included some very tough characters who'd had extraordinary experiences of war. One was an Australian who'd been imprisoned fighting in North Africa and was a compulsive escaper from prison camp, so the Italians eventually handed him over to German military prisons, he escaped from those and was recaptured, and eventually was in a death camp but survived only because the War ended and he got out for that reason. Came to Balliol as a student, knowing much more about life than most of us did, and he was a good student. He taught me one of my lessons in life, I think – he and one other student like him. Can I mention that?

Of course.

He always insisted that you should understand, in war or any other serious conflict, your common humanity with your enemy. There are lots of things that all humans have in common where we're hostile to one another, and particularly so if you're fighting a war with armed force, you probably both share ideals of patriotism and duty and comradeship with your mates and that sort of thing. Phillips[?] insisted in those terms that you must always understand what you shared with your enemy,

SOHC/OH 760/4

including any admirable qualities both of you had because, if you don't, 'You will be ill-equipped to beat them, and beat them you must if you're in a good cause like ours.'

And I knew another man just like that from that sort of fearful experience during the War. In the Second World War there came a time when Germans and Soviet Russia signed a sudden peace, the Hitler–Stalin Pact or Nazi–Soviet Pact, which brought peace between them and together they took over Poland, split it in half and each administered one half of it. When the Nazis were during the War persecuting the Jews but hadn't yet started mass burning them, they were tossing a lot of them out into Soviet Poland, and one of them was a Jewish boy called Israel Getzler[?]. The Russians didn't know what to do with them, and he like a lot of others they shipped out to Siberia and worked them in mines, salt mines. So Israel Getzler had been a Siberian slave worker in Soviet salt mines, had emerged from that and had exactly the same message as Phillips, though it took a different form. It mostly enjoined you [that] in intellectual conflicts with people of other philosophies, other political philosophies, other social philosophies, you should always get inside their heads and understand them at their best – partly because you've got a human duty to do that, and partly that if you're in combat with them you'd better know that about them for the same reason as Phillips had in mind: 'You won't persuade them, convert them, by calling them "stupids" or "shits"; you'll persuade them or convert them by understanding very well the reasons they have for what they believe and being able to reason on that level in that way as one like them.' And they were the most impressive pair of colleagues to have, with that sort of experience out of warfare.

So, Hugh, you met Peter Phillips and Israel Getzler at Oxford, did you?

Yes.

How serendipitous was that!

Well, Peter Phillips was my pupil in Balliol. Getzler, I'm not quite so sure that I remember. I can't remember how I first met Israel Getzler. But he became a very fine leading historian of the decent strands in the Communist Movement. For example, up to the great revolution in which Lenin took over Russia, the humane

SOHC/OH 760/4

branch of the Communist Party, in our terms – gentler, more reasonable, the Mencheviks – were run by – – –. (background sounds) Oh, dear, I'm sorry.

No, that's not a problem, Hugh. That's not coming through.

The Mencheviks were run by a man called Martov, and Getzler is the historian and the biographer of Martov. With the same sort of reasons he could understand what good forces could make a communist of you, and thus he could understand – as simple hostiles can't – what had really gone wrong with the proper leadership.

Hugh, may I ask you a question about your arrival in Adelaide, please, which would have been in 1954, I think?

Yes, yes.

And you were married by this time to Jennifer Gamble.

Yes, yes.

And I think you had at least one child by then.

No.

No?

No.

No, you didn't, sorry, I got that wrong. Were you made welcome by the University?

Yes. The aged state I'm in I have to sort of summon up that – – –. Trying to remember. Well – not for your record – my mum had come across to meet the boat, so I was welcomed by her, that was nice. And the University had bought a block of flats, so there was a flat you could have. So if you'd go back and ask the question again – – –.

Were you made welcome when you arrived, Hugh?

Oh, indeed, yes, in all sorts of ways, especially practical ways. The University was hiring a lot of people coming from far away, so they'd bought a big block of flats in North Adelaide and there was a flat waiting for you, furnished for you and all that sort of thing. And welcomed academically, and welcomed by the Registrar.

Mr Edgeloe.

SOHC/OH 760/4

The famous Mr Edgeloe, yes. I had various happy experiences with the famous Mr Edgeloe. But the first one was that I was shown by somebody else to where my room would be where the History Department was, and it was in an Engineering building which had only been up for a year or two, built in wartime austere. So although it was going to be a building of conventional structure, they'd built the inside wall – the wall is a double wall: reinforced concrete, four inches thick, two inches air, then brick – but they hadn't put the brick on yet, so it was a bare concrete; and pretty much like that inside, too, in all sorts of ways. A cement floor. And we had a row of rooms on the first floor, up away from the ground, and we could share the use of their lecture theatres, which were also a bit primitive; and there was some elementary furniture in these rooms. It was already occupied, the place was running, my History colleagues were in the next-door rooms and there was the Professor's room, which was a modest size and had various bits of furniture in it. And so I went up, among other things, to the Registrar in his room early on and said that I wondered if I could swap a couple of things in that room that I didn't need – I forget what they were – in order to get a second chair. There was a chair to sit at the desk but there wasn't a chair for anybody else. I explained that there'd be tutorials – or perhaps no, I think perhaps I hadn't explained that there'd be tutorials – but he said, 'If we give you two chairs in there we'll have a student sitting in one, and *then where will we be?*' (laughter) Most memorable introduction. He wasn't nearly as bad as that suggested, and he perhaps was half-humorous in that suggestion.

I think it was Horst Lucke who told me once that Vic Edgeloe 'had a healthy scepticism of academics until proven otherwise'.

Yes, yes. Though he wasn't the worst Registrar. Though it was as well that it was very much a university in the hands of its academics.

Was it when you arrived, Hugh, ruled quite in an authoritarian way by Vic Edgeloe?

My memories are too muddled. I think it was in some irritating ways. But they didn't interfere with how you went about your teaching.

Would you mind telling me a little about the staff that you met when you arrived in your department?

SOHC/OH 760/4

Well, the best of them I'd already met, because while I was being engaged in Britain I'd met Douglas Pike and knew him well by the time I got there, and an admirable colleague and teacher he was in many ways.

There was Wilfrid Oldham.

Yes. [And] Kathleen Woodroffe.

Correct.

I think there was a fourth, wasn't there? Certainly those two.

Well, Hancock would have left by then, wouldn't he?

Oh, yes.

Was Professor Duncan still around when you came here?

Yes. I forget who I was succeeding there.

Was it Pike himself you were succeeding as Professor?

No, no, Pike was the obvious successor. It was Pike who I was displacing as obvious successor – considering which he was extraordinary, you never would have known.

So he had that gracious side to his character, Hugh, did he?

At his most gracious it tended to come in rough forms. (laughter) The story you reminded me of, perhaps we can introduce [it now].

Yes, I was going to ask you that. I'd love to hear that story. This was at the launch of *Paradise of dissent*.

Yes. Shall I talk about Pike? I've told Pike's history, haven't I –

Yes, you have.

– where he came from.

Well, that would explain the anecdote, I think, in terms of the launch. I think you said to me previously that it was Sir Archibald Grenfell Price, Sir Archie Grenfell Price.

Yes.

And was Douglas Pike sitting in the corner? This is where I was a bit unclear and I can't recall this.

SOHC/OH 760/4

I must recall it. I've got a vivid picture of the moment when he said it. How do we get back into the story?

That's okay. This was to do with the launch of *Paradise of dissent*.

Yes. When Pike's great book, *The Paradise of Dissent*, was actually being launched, we had quite a formal launch and it was launched by Sir Archibald Grenfell Price – I think he must have been perhaps chairman of the University Board or of the graduates or something like that. And I was sitting talking to Douglas Pike, who was almost ostentatiously not wanting to show off, not wanting to agree that this was an important occasion, and Grenfell Price came by and said, 'Come on, Douglas, come on. This must be the greatest achievement in your life.' 'Good God', said Douglas – I forget what he said – 'Don't be ridiculous.' 'What else could you do that could excel this excellent product?' 'I can kill, skin and dress a lamb in a minute thirty seconds.' And I've got it wrong so you must read it right; I'm sure it wasn't one minute thirty seconds.

I'm pretty sure it was about that time.

Was it?

Yes, I'm pretty sure from my previous memory of when you told me that.

I think I told it wrong the first time as well. Anyway, never mind.

But it was a lovely story which harks back to Douglas Pike's earlier years in the country.

Yes, absolutely.

Hugh, just let me pause for minute.

END OF DISK 1: DISK 2

This is session two of an interview with Hugh Stretton for the University of Adelaide on the 14th November 2006.

Hugh, I wanted to ask you particularly about Kathleen Woodroffe, who would have been a tutor at the University at the time you came.

Yes. And she presently became a lecturer and therefore I got there just as she was having to be decided who should teach which of the regular courses in the Department. And I wanted to be helpful to her. There were two courses lacking

SOHC/OH 760/4

teachers: one was the most modern period of British and European history and one was a general social history, designed particularly for people who were going into other faculties and into particularly services to the public and that sort of thing. So I asked her which she'd like to keep on and which I would take, and she didn't seem to have – she was troubled. It wasn't troubling me because she could have time to consider that. But in came Pike in very firm, stern form and said, 'Will you for God's sake tell that woman which of those options you expect her to choose!' So I sent him back to tell her that she really must choose which she would like, that it was genuine. I can't remember who chose which in the end, but it was a good illustration of both their characters.

Yes, indeed. And, Hugh, I was asking you earlier, Wilfrid Oldham must have taught there for many years. What was his lecturing style like? Fairly pedantic?

Perhaps. But he'd taken trouble with it. He wrote all his lectures and read them, he was taking care. And I think that when he had to do the general European history that we did he got them out of one of the Oxford histories of the subject. Did it systematically – I'm not complaining, either; he was a schoolteacher who'd got into this job when no better was available, and he was conscientious, certainly. And his health was failing by the time I was there and in fact I had to take over some of his lectures.

You were mentioning to me as well that you only had those four rooms –

Yes.

– to play with, and the lecture theatres; were you embarrassed by the number of students that were beginning to come through in the 1950s?

I was pleased they were there. I was regretting that we were teaching them by mass lecture and exam without much individual tuition. We had tutorials, but they tended to be discussion groups – anything from half a dozen to a dozen or more people and the tutor would get them to discuss the problems they were doing – which is not at all a bad thing to do, but it's fundamentally different from one-to-one discussion of how you, student, went about solving this problem, choosing which approach to it, all that sort of thing, which is real tuition, which I'd had lots of and was deeply grateful for.

Was the system of departmental government when you came very much the professor deciding everything, Hugh?

SOHC/OH 760/4

Yes. But there were a number of civilised professors who didn't let it be that; but theirs was the authority to do it, yes, very largely, and some of them were dictatorial, some collegiate.

Did you have a mind to introduce perhaps a more democratic system, if that's the way of putting it?

That's a complicated question, because there were questions about the authority that the academics had collectively as well as individually. I was very concerned that the Faculty of Arts ought to have a good deal more authority over how its region of studies and research were done. But I don't think I was asking necessarily for just professors to be bosses of their Departments; certainly not. Yet it was a perfectly convenient device to avoid anybody else having control of them, and where the professors dealt civilly as intellectual equals with at least the full-time members of their staff that was the best we could do, probably.

We mentioned Professor W.C.K. Duncan earlier: would he have been Professor of Politics by this time?

Yes, he was. And I had considerable admiration for his work. Not all people did.

Is it correct, Hugh, that the systems of honours at the History Department at Adelaide was introduced by Professor Duncan? I've been wondering about that.

First, second and third classes, you mean?

No, the thesis of itself.

Oh, the honours thesis? I can't remember. It was there before I got there and I welcomed the fact that it was there. Shouldn't be surprised. He was good at what he did, but he had authoritarian ways of talking, particularly where women were concerned. (laughter) Bossed his wife.

Amazing. I wonder, could for a moment we divert from Professor Duncan and talk a little about Heinz Kent[?], who I remember well, Hugh, who not only taught me but was a colleague for a time and I thought was a remarkable man, but I don't know a lot about him. Could you tell us a little about Heinz?

I wish I could remember better about his provenance. He'd had a tough time, too; he came to us from a hard world. And when he got there he was a very able researcher at the work he did into the history of European trade, particularly. He was a very conscientious and tough man. I used to think he was not the best at deciding when to

SOHC/OH 760/4

be convivial and when to be gentle and when to be authoritarian with either students or other colleagues, but, you know, everybody's got their propensities. I never for a moment regretted that we had such an able man doing that field of work.

Did he come from a German Jewish background? I understood that from what he told me.

Yes, I believe so.

And I think had fought in the War in some way against Nazi Germany.

I have to confess that I've just forgotten that. Could you leave that question out?

No, that's fine, Hugh.

Of course, I obviously knew his history; and I've forgotten what it was.

He's just such a character.

But his history was to his credit, like he was among those like Getzler and others who'd been through it in some capacity.

Also you hired a number of really fascinating people too, Hugh, and I was thinking two with whom there could have been some difficulty over time were George Rudé and Ken Inglis, for various reasons. I'd love you to talk a little bit about them.

Yes, I love talking about Rudé. He was the son of a Norwegian father and an English wife, born and brought up in England. Schoolteacher, taught first in a posh private school. But he was a communist. He didn't do any of his communism in the school, but he was detected on Saturday afternoons, you know, at the local public speechmaking, and sacked; and that had happened to him twice. The first took him down to a rather good public high school and the second had him down in a rather low-grade comprehensive school. And that's when he was using the fact that he was in East London to do his thorough, good history degree, historical research as well in London.

We got an application from him when we'd advertised I think for a senior lectureship, and it was a very odd application because he's a candid man and he explained that he had been a teacher at this distinguished school and then at the West London secondary school and then at the comprehensive. That was not a very promising record for somebody who wanted (laughs) to be a senior lecturer.

No.

SOHC/OH 760/4

He even had the misfortune that the work he'd done at London University, which had got him a first-class degree I think, had greatly displeased his specialist teacher in French history. And even I, with all my (laughs) breadth of mind, wasn't feeling very hopeful about this application as I read through it – until I noted a reference to an enclosure, which came in a separate box, and that was the unpublished proofs of his first book, most famous book.

Was that *The Crowd in History*?

That's *The Crowd in History*, yes. Yes. At which he was the world's leader in that and extensions of it.

Absolutely.

And I therefore had to go to the Vice-Chancellor, who thank goodness wasn't the one that had hired me, (laughs) but still it was a bit odd. He was Henry Baston –

Henry Baston by then, yes.

– who was a retired British public servant who, when the War ended – or began, I forget – anyway, somehow he'd come from a British outpost in East Asia to early retirement. Forty-five was the age at which they had 'tropical retirement' from the British public service at the time, so that's how we got him. And I went and consulted him about this problem, and a serious problem it was.

The Chairman of the Council was the Chief Justice, who was at that time in dreadful conflict with all sorts of people, including leaders of his own profession, over his conduct of a particular case. Also on the Council, which had to determine appointments to professors [*sic*], was a Catholic who was a very zealous Red-hunter. Between these two, goodness knows what we were going to do. I have to pause to recall the name of the Catholic.

Yes. I can remember the judge would have been Chamberlain, would it?

Yes. And the Catholic was Webb[?], and he had a sort of comic Latinate nickname which had been – oh, yes. I've gotcha! Where do I go back to?

No, just keep going. That's fine.

And a faithful Catholic who on the Council was a very active and able enemy of anybody left of centre and quick to speak up. Famously, his nickname was 'Taci', he

SOHC/OH 760/4

was Taci Hannon[?], and Taci was because in the good Catholic Latin at school that he'd been to teachers who wanted students to shut up told them so in Latin: 'Taci, Hannon!' How on earth would we get a communist appointed?

The Vice-Chancellor said, 'I will appoint him if you can get Taci Hannon and the Chancellor each to agree that he should be appointed. I went to see those two and got faultlessly liberal responses from them both.

Against your expectation, Hugh.

Yes; but to my joy, because he was a wonderful scholar to acquire. That's an incomplete story; I forget what it is exactly I've been leaving out. Oh, yes: what they both said to me – you needn't put this in – the faultlessly liberal responses were they had me talk about him and I told them the qualities of this book, which were just outstanding, everything we could hope for, and it was impossible that the author of that book would come around here preaching stupid pink[?] stuff on wrong occasions. Turned out that when he got here – have I told you this story?

No, no.

This isn't for your book, either, for your record, I don't think. It was a little bit later on. I'm just wondering just exactly where and how it started. Oh, yes. George had his first study leave. George in fact never resigned from a Communist Party. He of course left the British Communist Party when he left and he didn't join one here; that was his way of not having to sort of do an act of denunciation, I think. But working on, ready for his next bout of research and his first study leave coming up, he wanted to go by way of the United States because his work was already well-noticed there. You know this story, do you?

No, I don't.

His work had some big notice there and he was already being offered jobs that he might want to take, though he didn't at that time. That meant he wanted to go that way round the world, but it meant to land there and see some people who wanted to talk to him at one of the universities he had to have an American visa, and he was a well-known ex-communist. So I went with him – with extraordinary luck, really – to the ---. You don't have an Ambassador, you had the US Consul, but a full-time

SOHC/OH 760/4

one, not just one of the locals. By extraordinary good fortune, I vaguely knew him. He'd been one of the liberal minds at Princeton Graduate School. (laughs)

Oh, no.

Yes. I don't think that had much to do with it. But he had a public rule that he couldn't avoid, and everybody knew he had a public rule, that no such person who'd been a member of the Communist Party could be admitted to the United States, however temporarily, unless they'd done one of two things: unless they'd denounced their mates; or what was the other spectacular bit of anti-communism they had to do? And the Consul, however gently, was saying his hands were bound. He couldn't see that George had done either of those things or could be said to have done them, really. 'Is your visit to the United States necessary? What do you need to go there for?' And George said, 'Oh, book's been selling pretty well and the publisher would like me to come and talk to some academics round there, but mainly just come and spend a bit of this money that he's not allowed to export at present.' (laughter) And forgive me, but I'll never forget the Consul's two fists hitting the table: 'But, good God! Why didn't you tell me, man? That's *business!*' (bangs table) This was stamping the stamp on the visa. (laughter) Wanted to spend some money that he'd made. And of course it was almost all right that George hadn't resigned from the Party, he'd just stopped, dropped out. But still.

Oh, yes. George in the course of the converse had said to him, before he got to that point, he explained that he'd just dropped out. There'd been no occasion for these denunciatory things. And he said, 'You must have known Republicans and Democrats who just got tired of politics and dropped out. Can't one Communist do that?'

Does George become a lifelong friend, too, Hugh, in that sense?

Oh, yes. Yes. I mean, he went back to England and back to jobs and so that I saw less of him; but no, I'm very deeply fond of him.

His work seemed to me to have a big impact on the Department and the teaching of the Department through the '60s and '70s. Would that be true?

Well, he was good at what he was doing. So was numbers of the others.

Yes.

SOHC/OH 760/4

I think George probably had a huge advantage from having *been* a very able schoolteacher. He was a very quick marker of work but generally got it right, and that sort of thing.

What about Ken Inglis, Hugh, because there's a like situation with authority, in a way?

What was wrong with Ken Inglis?

Ken's involvement with the Max Rupert Stuart case.

Oh, yes. That's right. Ken was dealing publicly and horridly with the Chancellor, Chief Justice. Ken was also – I don't know whether you knew – a regular commentator on the press. Once a week he had a column about who the press was noticing and who the press wasn't noticing; it was a sweet column, very intelligent. (knock at door, break in recording) I forget who went and saw the Chancellor about Ken on that occasion, because Ken was already a tenured member by then. So he didn't have to take any notice, I suppose, but I can't remember. Somebody I think was thinking that he couldn't be appointed to something or some such thing because he was at war with the Chancellor – not directly, just – – –.

You had hired Ken, though, of course, hadn't you?

Oh, yes. Best thing we ever did. He's a friend for life.

Of course. I understand that. Hugh, some of the other people I remember, I'm not quite sure when they come on the scene. Austin Gough later became a professor.

Yes.

Did you have to do with his hiring as well?

I suppose I must have, I think. And, look, I didn't know much of Austin's work. I must have known a fair bit of it but I've forgotten. And you were going to ask me to talk about John Tregenza, which I like doing.

I am, I'd love to know about John.

Give us a moment to think more about his background. It's terrible, because I used to know all about them and where they came from and what they taught. (break in recording) Yes, I'm forgetting about his parentage and that sort of thing. And there

SOHC/OH 760/4

are some funny things, there are things about John I don't want to broadcast, which is that he became, sadly, a very odd sort of alcoholic. Very sadly. Not corrupting his work ---. (break in recording) I'm happy to talk about his merits.

Perhaps we could talk about John Tregenza's merits, then, Hugh.

Yes. Above all, he was the local historian, in all the senses. He was a boy brought up in Adelaide and he knew Adelaide and its history in a sort of local, touchy-feely way, where Pike was expert in its political history and that sort of thing. Quite a lot of our heritage buildings were saved by him, because he knew about them and loved them and wasn't afraid to make a fuss about them. I remember particularly when Mr Bubb, the City Engineer –

Hugh Bubb.

– was about to devastate Margaret Street and knock down a lot of houses in order to drive a new six-lane highway through from Darwin to Melbourne (laughter) down through the middle of North Adelaide and up into the city the other side, it was John Tregenza who noticed that the first public gift of a civic building in Adelaide's history, I think, which was as you emerged on the other side of the river and went up into the city, would be destroyed by this, which was one of the things that stopped that Bubb project. And he knew that the first secular gift of housing for houseless people in this colony had been down in one of the tree-lined streets of North Adelaide and had that conserved. He did a lot of things like that in the most gentle, effective way. And he was a good teacher because of those intricate sort of bits of understanding of people and local bits, local needs and inventions.

He certainly seemed to inspire students, Hugh.

Yes.

Very much so.

Yes.

And many of those, of course, went on to teach elsewhere in universities.

Yes. He was a lovely man.

Do you have a memory still of any of those students of the '60s and '70s, the '60s in particular, Hugh?

SOHC/OH 760/4

I bet I do; but I can't remember them, if you see what I mean.

Well, there were two that occur to me, mainly because they both went on to be academics, and that was Kay Daniels and Marian Quartly.

Both indeed very good at what they did, and I'm not fit to do the detail about memories of them.

Marian went to Monash –

Yes.

– in due course, and Kay elsewhere.

Yes.

But from Marian I know that she felt about you and the Department that it was really the turning point in her life intellectually, and that she went from there, that convinced her to keep in the study of history. But from what I gather, Hugh, you must have been really quite embarrassed by the number of students coming through, because you would scarcely have had the staff to cope.

Oh, sure. Very much so. And it meant we couldn't run any sort of one-to-one tutorials except to see some individual on a particular occasion for a particular reason, and the load isn't much increased as far as lectures go: you just give the same lecture in a bigger room. It meant that what we still called 'tutorials' might have a dozen or twenty in them instead of six or eight, that was a pity; but above all the stress came on the reading and responding to the essays we made them write. That's where George had a remarkable capacity, George Rudé. He was better and quicker at reading, and it wasn't by cutting – from school teaching, I suppose: he could see what was in that and what needed talking about in it quicker than anybody.

A very good tutor.

Hugh, what about on wider University governance? You sat on many committees throughout the University. Were the '60s a time where that was freeing up and the old way of doing things was changing?

I think that was probably so, though I'm not really now remembering very well what the old way had been. It had tended to run with a masterful Vice-Chancellor in charge, and some important Council members having influence, not necessarily bad influence. But yes, academia ought to be self-governing, academics ought to govern themselves and each other, was very strongly and widely felt, because they were

SOHC/OH 760/4

recruiting a lot of new ones and most of them would have come from other universities where these same problems were active or where they'd been solved several centuries before, like Oxford and Cambridge. (laughter)

Hugh, did you have a personal view that the running of the Department of History, say, should be shared amongst the staff rather than just allocated to the Professor?

Yes and no. There is a minimum quantum of it that's got to be done by one person. It doesn't usually have to be authoritarian, but it takes longer if it's going to be run by one person but conciliar; and there's a lot of it that's not dealing with people at all, either. So it's an administrative task, and that does increase as numbers increase. That's my own reason for retreating from it eventually.

That's what I wanted to ask you. Did the workload become insuperable, in a sense?

No. I had just written a book that I was happy with and wanted that to be the first of many, and certainly the administrative work took quite a lot of time – some of it where you were just required to *be* there, you were on University bodies by virtue of being a professor where you might sit through the meetings with nothing to contribute often enough. It was just time-consuming. So we a *bone fide* – I didn't create it – senior lectureship vacant so I applied for that. And I had to threaten to leave if they wouldn't give it to me, so they graciously turned it into a readership and did give it to me. (laughter) I was very happy and grateful with that. And besides, it was plain when I did it – I forget honestly now which of my colleagues was to be the next head of department –

Austin Gough, maybe?

– very likely; but the likely candidates – or victims, whichever way you thought of it – were all promising and reassuring at that sort of task.

Trevor Wilson would have been there by then, too, I would have thought.

Certainly, yes. That department didn't have luck, I think it knew what it was about; but it found that it was in the world at a time when you could get good people, at first often because there was some eccentricity in their history like Rudé's, but they were there and we did very happily with most.

SOHC/OH 760/4

Hugh, you've talked about luck a lot in our conversation and for your own good self; I was always amazed on a personal level, in the late '60s and early '70s, of the qualities of visiting lecturers who were attracted to the History Department. I'm sure that could not have been luck alone that attracted them.

No. But just from a remark you've made in one of these communications to me, you're wrong to think that they were attracted, necessarily. They come touring. They may have a particular concern with one institution or one research task or something; and, given they come touring, they're happy to be invited to give a lecture. Sometimes they'd write a novel one. So it was part of the life of many who travelled around and looked to get a welcome or just to get an invitation so that that would be a broader invitation, come in and use the place and ---.

So it wasn't special to Adelaide, in that sense?

I don't think so. We may have been one of the respectables, but ---. (laughter)

I just had that recall, as I wrote to you, of Isaiah Berlin and remembering what an extraordinary time that was.

I forget why he was touring around. Was it a family connection or something brought him to Australia?

I can't remember, Hugh. It was the aftermath of 'The hedgehog and the fox', and I'm not sure whether it was a publishing tour for that. I do remember that was much discussed at the time.

Yes. Yes, you've hit it, I think, that he was touring around promoting work and glad to be invited, specially to give a big speech in a big place. I don't think he'd have been a visitor to the History Department; I think he'd have been a visitor to the University of Adelaide.

I recall quite clearly of you being with him at that time for some --

Yes.

-- length of time; but also the comment he made to the audience of the quality of the questions, and he wasn't just being nice, if that's the way of putting it, he was genuinely thrilled to have been there at the night. And it occurred to me even then as a young student, 'Well, the people asking the questions were the Department' and others at the University.

Yes.

SOHC/OH 760/4

They were highly intelligent, commonsense questions, not just theoretical or ideological.

You are reviving my memories a bit, yes.

And I also have that memory of others who came to talk, Hugh, that the questions were practical and thoughtful questions. It just seemed to me – and I'm not meaning to take over this – but the Department had that character about it, of down-to-earth and commonsensical – – –.

Yes. Yes, it had some tense problems with some members sometimes, Heinz could be difficult and John Tregenza could be absent or something like that, but yes, I thought it was a happy department in almost all ways. Very grateful for every year I spent with it.

Hugh, is there anything else at all that you would like to add to our conversation?

Tell me what there ought to be. (laughs)

There's many, many things I know I've missed.

Well, wait a minute. This is a conversation to go into the – – –?

University of Adelaide, by and by.

Yes. Ask me that question again. 'Hugh, is there anything else?'

Hugh, is there anything else that you would add to this?

I would like to tell you how grateful to the heart I am for almost everything that has come from my experience from this university – not that it's always a faultless university; but I had the luck to get the very best of it and learn a great deal to live with, live and work with many wonderful colleagues and not to suffer from any oppressive tyrannies from above. Lucky. It's a good university, I think it still is, but it's not as good as it was. It can't be, because it is under-financed per head as never before – well, that's not true if you go back long enough; but through most of the years that I was there its staff–student ratio was improving. It still wasn't anything like an Oxford–Cambridge ratio, but it wasn't too bad.

Oh, yes: I was proud of having a very small thing to do with making sure that one of our eminent visitors – – –. Can I start again?

Yes.

SOHC/OH 760/4

I was very proud of having something to do with getting Robert Menzies as Prime Minister to invite the head of the British Universities Commission to come out here and visit them all here and advise Menzies about national policy. That introduced a great improvement in their funding in very few years, which was maintained for a while – not for long enough; it didn't survive the departure of Menzies by very long. That's not just politicians getting meaner; it's the society getting more populous and better-educated, just that the funds were not expanded *pro rata* at anything like the rate that the numbers were expanding. And then I think an understandable – I suppose arguable but in my opinion gravely mistaken – move was made by Dawkins and the Labor Governments to redefine the other tertiary institutions as universities: cruel to the staff in many ways, and actually damaging the capacity of some of those institutions to teach well. But I knew it through its very best years.

I also greatly admire the work that that great Labor figure Nugget Coombes did as head of our wartime, postwar economy and then throughout Menzies' whole regime as head of his economic policy. Best economic policies we had came under a Liberal Prime Minister. So they nevertheless go on writing me off as a chardonnay socialist or something, (laughter) but I have that view, that good government is available to both sides of that fence.

Hugh, on a personal level, it strikes me that you were never afraid for your staff to be involved in social issues, like John to be involved in the heritage disputes –

Yes.

– or Ken with the Max Rupert Stuart case; and you yourself and Pat with the North Adelaide Society, if it comes to that. You seemed to encourage that or not discourage it?

Oh, I didn't discourage it and I thought anybody else might feel they had a good cause to discourage it but a head of department bloody better not. Outrageous interference, it would have been. But I didn't have any particular occasion to, I think. I might sometimes have wished that somebody else would give better advice to Heinz Kent, but – – –.

I do recall Heinz could be difficult at times.

Oh, yes, he could indeed.

And so gracious[?] at other times it was almost overpowering.

SOHC/OH 760/4

Yes.

Hugh, may I please thank you very much for giving your time and your memories to this, and I'm very grateful.

I'm sorry that there are so many *broken* memories. I was better at it ten, twenty, thirty, forty years ago. But thank you for coming.

Thank you very much.

END OF INTERVIEW.