Hugh Jeffrey notes:

Subjects:

1926 8yrs old, day boy, lived in Malvern
Wangaratta district
Horror stories from Charlie Wellington (relative)
Who was at RVIB 1910 ish.
Miss Green was daughter of Labour minister of defence
Concert party
Harden previously taught at Scotch college
Music at the school
Dance orchestra, concerts
Braille music
Conservatorium
Merton Hall
Salts distribution every Wed morn, boiled lolly to follow
'Tour de Institute' tyre races
'Tour de France'
Authorities, Matron encouraged Hugh's parents and every-
-one to be boarders, pressure applied.
Segregation: Hedger's convictions re not encouraging
-liaisons to prevent passing on conjenital diseases.
Weekly social club dances in O'Hall
John Murphy crossing Stan Hedger, BWU
Batchelor of Music, job as music teacher
George Findlay conductor of AAB choir
Rivalry between RVIB & AAB
St Paul's musical rectory 1957
Olinda, US Forces, O'Hall, McArthur
Gymnasium in girl's dorm, secret meetings, cannoodling
Standard punishments, standing etc
Taking off glasses for visitors
Folk dance groups-names
Dental hospital, previously dentists to RVIB, boys loos as-
-place to do dental work
Stuff about Dave Palmer
Australian Music Examinations Board
Melbourne Town Hall
"Mister" David Palmer
Solomon teacher before David Palmer?
Importance of music as a career
Piano tuning
Piano tuning-lack of organisation for the business side
Brighton Grammar
Pike Glaser machine/Braille
Formation of the guild 1949
About Green
St Dunstans
Persuaded RVIB to set up library for students& professionals
Student allowances
The Victorian (later Australian) Guild of Professional-
-Blind
Pulteny Grammar School
Corowa Girls' School
Gardiner Church
Victorian Council of Adult Education 1943
Hassetts Commercial College-lack of support
Wesley
Conservatorium

People:

Charlie/Albert Wellington
Miss Bryan
Miss Green
Jack Burns
George Findlay
George Etman
Don Forbes
Norm Rees
Mr Harden
Tilly Aston
Charlie Bradley
Harry Warland
Fred Sutcliffe
Mr Palmer (DL)
Dame Ethel Aston
Oppy&Ozzie Nicholson
Neil Westh
Jim Davey
Stan Hedger
John Murphy
Laurie Wilson
Vic Elvie
Ethel Hall (nee Sutcliffe)
Bessie Soul (J Murphy's first wife)
Ada Sharp (Hugh's partner once)
Eileen Bernelly
Mary Jones
Edna Stewart
Albert Wellington
Lottie Lehman
Reg Hill
Albert Harris
Aaron Solomon
Winfield
Geoff Green
Garnet Dent
Keith Smith
Joan Ryan
Ken Brunton
Dudley Tregent
Cliff Monteshaw
Mercy Griffin (Dickinson)
Mr Blackburn
Eric Edwards
Dorothy Nuske
Allan Woods
Norm Rees
Phyllis Lawson (Grace)
Mr Angus
Laurie McCredie
Tilly Aston
Don Forbes
Mary Mitchell
Bob Baynard
Amanda Baynard
Noel Anderson

Getting a blind person onto the board, '53?
Need for educational reform
Guild conference '55, first contact b/w educators of people -who are blind from all states.
ANZATB (Headlines in Herald)
St Paul's formed-resistance
Villa Maria Society
"The Parents and Friends of Blind Children"

Brother O'Neil
Ron McCallum
Peter Walsh
Grant Lee Dozzetti
Ann Carson (nee Campbell)
Claire Ryan
Jolley boys
Bob Williams

Hugh Jeffrey (CD No. 1)
Date: 12th November 1990
Questioner: Alan Nuske

Well, my first contact with the RVIB was, I think, in 1926 when I was 8; I went to school there. I, of course, was blind from birth, but I had just little sight, which was useful; certainly, for the first 50 years of my life, I could never read print, but it was useful in getting about and avoiding certain things, and in certain lights, it was quite good.

Alan: Why did you come to RVIB when you were 8? What happened when you were 5?

My parents sought medical advice in a number of places, and there was quite a discussion as to whether I should have an operation to improve the sight. But one doctor, whom we regarded quite highly, said: "if he was my child, I wouldn't have him touched", so, that seemed to settle it for the parents. We had an acquaintance who was blind; my family lived in the country, up in the Wangaratta district, close to the Wellington family, and many folk would remember Charlie or Albert Wellington, and he had lost his sight. He came down to the institute as a boarder, in the early part of the century – in 1910 or 1915 or something like that. He used to visit us regularly, because we knew him; and the stories he told about the hardship and the gruesomeness, didn't encourage my family to send me to school there if they could possible avoid it. So, they tried ... I was taught the printed alphabet (I could just see the big letters), and they tried to get me to write, and so on. But it became quite obvious that I couldn't function anywhere, except in a school for blind children. I remember being very bored at 6 or 7; I'd lie on a chair and say: "What can I do? What will I do?", because I was, by far, the youngest member of the family, and I didn't really have any playmates (except for my nephew who was 4 years younger than me).

Alan: When you got to the school, what did you find? Who was teaching?

I think we were very fortunate that our teacher, at that stage at the lower level, was Miss. Brian, who had been there a long time. I think a lot of people would tell you that she was a very fine and supportive person.

Alan: That's Lillian Brian

I don't know whether that was her name, or not. It was L. Brian.

Alan: Tell us about her. What do you remember about her?

I remember her as a very friendly person, supportive, and strict enough; she saw to it, that we would do things, and do our best, and so on. You always felt that, though she might have expected a lot from you, she was, nevertheless, a friendly and supportive person. She read us a great deal of ... all sorts of things that children should have, at that stage. And she taught us "The Taylor's Slate", and various things like that. I think it was a good start for us.

Alan: Coming in at the age of 8, you would've been in with children much younger than yourself.

Well actually, at that stage, it wasn't so unusual; we had children of different ages coming in. I remember during my time at school, there were 2 or 3 people who didn't come to the school until they were 14, and in a couple of cases, they had been blind from birth; as you're aware, other people lose their sight at different ages and stages, and they came to the school then. It wasn't really so unusual and surprising, and I caught up fairly quickly; I think I spent the minimum time in Miss. Brian's class, and then went on to Miss. Green's class.

Alan: Now, let's hear about Miss. Green. I've heard of her.

She was the daughter of the Labor minister of Defence in the Scullin government in 1929. I remember the day when the news came through from Canberra, and there was great excitement that he had been appointed as a cabinet minister. I don't think we felt as close to Miss. Green, but I think she was quite a good teacher, really; she doesn't stand out, certainly in my memory, as strongly as Miss. Brian, by comparison.
I should say, perhaps at this time, Jack Burns was just a young man of about 18 or 19, came into the school a day or 2 a week, and just corrected our mathematics, and so on. He was a very able lad who had been to Gardiner High School with George Findlay, George Ettman(?), and, perhaps, Don Forbes.

Alan: Norm Rees?

And Norm Rees, yes, that's right. He (Jack Burns) was touring with the concert party; he was a very able chap and whatever he turned his to, he did well. Also, another teacher – Mr. Harden, who had been a master of maths at Scotch; he was quite an elderly man (or seemed to be quite an elderly man), and he lost his sight late in life, and he helped some of the other teachers. He was a really interesting man, and he could really tell some stories; he lived in South Africa as a young man; he was quite a character, really.

Alan: Was Tilly Aston around at that time?

No. I never actually knew Tilly Aston. I spoke to her on the phone, a time or 2 – instigated by my good friend George Findlay, who was a little older than me (12 years older than me).

Alan: Did you hear talk of Tilly from the older children? She must've left, as a teacher, only shortly before you came.

I think she must've left, at least, in 1921 – I wouldn't think she taught, there, after that. I think it was well before my time. No, I don't remember any of the children mentioning her at all; I don't think any of them did know her at that stage. Somebody, like Charlie Bradley or Harry Warlond, could fill you in, there.

Alan: Tell us about the music at the school.

Well, it was the case then, as it was for some years following that, that virtually every child was given the chance of starting on the piano. Either in the course of time, it proved futile, or his teacher thought: "no good", or he went on. I'd say that 90 percent of children did go on, for most of their school lives, even though they may have had minimal success; but still, it was something.
I started music with Fred Sutcliffe. He, at that stage, was taking all the beginners, and if one showed any promise at all, you then went on to Mr. Palmer (who was the musical director, D.L Palmer), and he then taught one, piano. I think it's worth saying a few words about Fred Sutcliffe: I wouldn't say that Fred was a very musical person, but he had a very natural tenor voice – lovely quality – he could sail up to the top C with the greatest of ease.

Alan: He was a blind person, wasn't he? He had some sight – I remember Fred.

Oh, yes. He had some sight – he would struggle to read the music a bit – getting it almost against his nose, sometimes. I can remember that he played the saxophone in the orchestra, and he seemed to have great difficulty in getting some of the jolly things in his head; you'd hear him in the sitting room .... But , he did play in the dance orchestra, and he sang in the regular concerts that the institute ran, and he was a great success – very natural voice, and he had learned, actually, from Dame Ethel Aston; he was a natural, and I think he could've done much more with his voice, but Fred wasn't academically or studiously inclined, really – he just enjoyed his singing, and that was it; it was really an outstanding voice – as I said, he could've a lot more, I think.

Alan: Did you learn Braille music at the time?

We used to have ... I think I probably started it at the sixth grade – that was when we came into Braille music.

Alan: Do you mean sixth grade schooling?

Yes, sixth grade schooling. What the set-up was: we had a class with Mr. Palmer, after school, at about 3:30-4:00. There'd be about 6 or 8 of us, at about the same level of Braille, and we started to learn Braille music in quite a different way to how it's taught now; we learnt D, E, F, G, H, I, J, and TH, WH, EDR, etc. – that was the concept. We learnt rather slowly, but we didn't really apply it, for quite a long time. Very few of us learnt our music from Braille – we were taught by rote, really – first of all by Fred Sutcliffe, and then from Mr. Palmer. Even when I went on to the conservatorium later, Mr. Palmer used to take me through a lot of the music, and I still didn't read very much from Braille, but it became more and more useful, and absolutely essential, as I went on to do other work.

Alan: Was there anything else about the school life ... for example, while we're staying with music (because there will be a section on music), were there compulsory practice times for the children? Or, did you practice when you wished? Was that supervised?

I wouldn't say it was supervised at the time. A timetable was drawn up, and people – on the whole – did have their practice times. But, you see, I was never a boarder at the

institute; we lived in Malvern, and it was about a quarter of an hour to 20-minute tram ride to school; my sister who was working at Merton Hall as a bursar, used to take me in the morning, and pick me up at night (or my mother would), so I never boarded there, therefore, I wasn't on the practice routine – I had to do my practice at home (my mother certainly saw to that). Incidentally, the other thing I was exempt from – and the other boys didn't think it was very fair – was the salts distribution every Wednesday morning, I think; the salts, with the boiled lolly that came afterwards … I didn't get the boiled lolly, either, so I had the castor oil on Saturday, instead.

Alan: That was a regular thing in those days – we had it on Saturday mornings.

It was the best day for the inevitable interruptions that would occur in the daily routine.

Alan. Exactly. Hugh, just while we're still with school, being a "day boy" (and I only relate this to the time that I was at school), I felt that there was some sort of a gap between the "day boys" and those who were regularly boarding at the place; did you feel you were part of the group, then?

Well, there were certain things. I couldn't play in some of the cricket matches that went on at lunchtime and after school … not until I got older (I don't know what we did about it). And certain things that they had … I know they used to have a "Tour de Institute" – tyre races where we'd do so many laps in the afternoon, and so many laps tomorrow … modelled on the "Tour de France"; Oppy, and Ozzie Nicholson were our great heroes at that stage, and they were riding in France; we tried to imitate them, and my friend, Neil Westh, kept the records and the timing, very carefully and laboriously. So, I was out, and missed out on quite a few things like that, and some of the readings they had at night, and so forth. I don't know if I felt so much of a gap, but there were certain things that I missed out on, there. But on the other hand, I think they (those who didn't go home) felt that there was some jealousy. There were only about 3 or 4 of us who were "day boys" – it was the exception rather that the rule.

Alan: Did you feel you made friendships with many people?

Oh, yes, I did. Jim Davey came home, to our place, for the weekend, just once or twice a year; this was the thing that the country orders liked, if possible, to go out for the weekend with either, people who are friends of the institute, or fellow students. Everybody was encouraged, really, to be a boarder; the authorities and Matron, tried to suggest to my parents that it would be better for me, but my parents resisted – they liked to have me at home, and thought it would be better. But, basically, the policy was: the children will board through the week (Monday to Fridays), and the country ones had to live-in through the term. That was the general pattern, and the emphasis, there.

Alan: Hugh, this might be hard to dislocate from your time at school to your time as, later, a member of staff, but cover it any way you can: the topic is going to come up, often, about the segregation of the girls and the boys; was it ever explained to you – either at the time we're talking of, or later as a professional person on the staff – why this strict policy was adopted?

It wasn't that exceptional for a blind school – or for any school, for that matter. In those days, there were virtually no co-educational schools – except, perhaps, at the high school level; certainly, in the public schools … primary schools were segregated, but I think we, and everybody else, thought that it was natural to have segregation.

Alan: But the segregation went further than that, didn't it? We didn't play together.

Oh, no, definitely not.

Alan: We didn't sit together in class; we spoke together, to each other, in class, but you never sat next to a girl.

No, that's right.

Alan: You didn't dine with them.

No, that's right.

Alan: It was a very carefully considered policy. I had heard at one stage, that it was Hedger's policy, and that it was to prevent blind people from becoming too friendly with one another, and therefore perhaps, marrying, having children, and perpetuating congenital diseases.

You're right there; that was a very strong conviction of his. I know that in a couple of cases when blind adults did try to marry, one could say that he moved heaven and earth to discourage or prevent it altogether; he felt that this was a terrible situation, and it should be avoided at all cost. The strange thing is, you see, we had the dances for the social club at Ormond Hall every Friday night. Later on, after leaving school, it was a good opportunity to get to know them, although sighted folk were encouraged to come along and dance with blind folk, and so on. Naturally, the earlier segregation – in a sense, the continued segregation – made it more likely that blind folk would come together. There weren't, I don't think, a tremendous number of cases of 2 blind people marrying, but it's happened quite a bit.

Alan: You've raised the question of Stan Hedger and again, no oral history could be complete without quite a section devoted to him. Could you give us your thoughts about Stan Hedger, for good or for ill? You've already mentioned his stubbornness. He certainly took a stand.

He was an interventionist – he wasn't a free-marketeer, at all. I think, inevitably, he was a force (as you say); whether he was for you, or against you, he was a force. I think I've said to my friends, on more than one occasion: "look, if you went into the office with Stan Hedger, you knew you'd either come out a "made person", or you'd be out on your ear. There were those who had fought against him, and they *were* out on their ear, and paid the price.

Alan: Can you give me some examples of that?

Well, I can. John Murphy was one of the great characters who resigned from the workshops in, I think, the early 1930s (or mid 1930s), and became secretary o f the

union (of the national body), and he had some very strong ideas about the charity system, and sport, and so on. He was virtually ostracized, at that stage, and I think it's true to say that he probably wasn't allowed into the institute, but I don't know that as a fact (but I've got the impression). When I was appointed onto the music staff, as a young person in my last year of my Bachelor of Music course ... in July of my last year of my course, I was asked to take "music appreciation" classes for the first time in my life, and to take some theory students at the RVIB for 2 mornings a week. Well, that was a jolly nuisance because – and you'd know something about this – I was preparing for your final exams in the final year. But Mr. Palmer, who was always a friendly counsellor (I must say more about him, later), said: "well, look, I think it would be wise to take it", because it's an opportunity, and there weren't too many employment opportunities that one could turn down, in those days. My friend and harmony teacher, George Findlay (as I said earlier, he was 12 years older than me), had done that work for some years (of course, he was a Bachelor of Music before me); he dared, in that climate, to apply for, and get the job of Conductor of the AAB (Association of the Advancement of the Blind) choir, at their concerts – their concerts running as fundraising competitors with the RVIB. He took this job on, and that wasn't the "done thing" – you're either for us, or against us – so, he received a polite letter telling him that his contract would be finished in 3 months; he would be paid off, straight away, and given the 3 month salary, so he wouldn't be required after the next week or the next month. They wanted to make way for a younger man (or to give a younger man the opportunity), but everybody knew – of course – what the reason was. So George, at that stage, paid the price, and I got the opportunity. I felt pretty dreadful about it because my father had died when I was 13, and George really took quite a paternal interest in me; we had a lot in common, and he thought I was a pretty promising student, so we had a lot of bonds. I felt pretty dreadful about this, but Mr. Palmer said: "well, look, I don't think it will really make any difference if you don't take it – he's out anyway". So, George understood the situation (fortunately), so I took the job, and it was the beginning of my period, on the staff of the RVIB, which lasted for some 18 years, until I gave it up to go to St. Paul's musical rectory, in 1957.

Alan: George then came back in 1942, when we went to Olinda. How was the situation resolved?

Well, that was an interesting situation, and a bit of a challenge for me, really. It came about that when the American forces took over Ormond Hall and the institute, Mr. Hedger said: "well, you've got to find us another place"; he was very forthright about things like that – he either got things done, or certainly his demands were pretty substantial. Eventually, we were going to the Georgian. I don't quite know the sequence of events (or recall them), but ... do you know whether George was back on the staff before then?

Alan: I can't recall, but I don't think he was.

I've got an idea that he might've been because, a year or 2 later, there was a reconciliation, and I know I felt a bit threatened then. We were both called into the office, and Mr. Hedger got this sudden bright idea that 2 Bachelors of Music – the only ones in the southern hemisphere – were going to play the piano together; there'd be 2 pianos on the platform, and we'd play 2 piano works. Well, we did work up quite an interesting arrangement of Schubert's "March Militaire", and we enjoyed playing

it, and then we did some Brahms Hungarian Dances. Anyway, that was the great idea: "Bring the Bachelors of Music together". George did come back to take some organ pupils. The Findlays decided, I think, when the institute was going up to the Georgian, that perhaps it would be a good idea to evacuate their family (a number of people did at that stage), and they got a cottage up at Olinda. I think that George, understandably, thought that he'd work up there for most of the week, and then keep some of his teaching practice down here. Well, the situation arose that I really wouldn't be needed, up at Olinda; I said that I would be quite willing to go up to Olinda, which I did. It was a fairly long discussion, over the phone, with Mr. Hedger one late night; I kept the work I had, but it meant going up to Olinda, 2 days a week; I used to catch a tram at 6:30a.m from Malvern, a train at Glenferrie, and I'd be up at Ferntree Gully, by about 7:30a.m, to wait around for the bus to get to the Georgian at Olinda at 8:30a.m, followed by a 10 minute walk, sometime through the snow (and the sleety sort of rains that you get in the winter, over there), and get home at 6:30p.m. It was, as I say, a challenge.

Alan: It was a job

It was, yes, that's right. The work was interesting too, but I thought I would be fighting for my existence.

Alan: We're going to have a lot of people talking about Olinda, so we might leave that; but I'd like to, before we get any further …

Your first question was about romantic entanglements. Well, there were some … I did hear stories about what had happened, before my time, after school hours – when some of the staff were, perhaps, off duty. Some of the boys did fraternize, of course, and there were some attachments. In fact, I know of one case where a lad used to meet a lass at the gymnasium, in the morning, before school.

Alan: Where was the gymnasium then? Here?

Over the girls' side, if I remember rightly, upstairs there. I think it must've been not too far from the girls' dormitory – but I'm a bit vague about that. But they certainly did meet there and, sort of, had more than words, I think.

Alan: Do you want to give names?

I don't think so; perhaps it may not be appropriate as some of them are still alive, and they might prefer not to … anyway …. Love will find a way, and people do get together. If they were caught, of course, there was quit a lot to pay; one of the punishments, in those days, would be to stand in the corner for all the hours that you were out of school (or out of mealtimes), perhaps for a week or even longer – that was one of the standard punishments.
In those days, of course, there was a very closed concept of what a blind school, is; a number of us wore glasses, but if we knew that visitors were coming through (and they frequently did, just to look around the place and see us at work), there was a rush to put our glasses off. I always carried a glasses-case in my left-side pocket and, as Ted Hanlon could well tell you, he and I used to spar a bit, and sometimes (9 times out of 10), Ted would knock his knuckles onto my glasses case – it was quite a good

defence. Anyway, at a blind school, you can't see – you don't wear glasses. I remember, one day, I had forgotten about my glasses, and a lad said: "you silly fool, take your glasses off – this is a blind school". But we were on display – on show – and, of course, in those days, some of us (and I was one of them) were in the folk dance groups, and about 6 to 8 of us would do folk dancing; we were taken out of school – and sometimes at night and afternoons – to perform and dance at the concerts. A couple of times a year, we would go, with the concert party, up to Ballarat or Bendigo; of course, that would be a 2-day trip, and we thought it wasn't too bad – getting out of school and going up there.

Alan: Do you have some names for that one, Hugh?

Names for the dance troupe? Oh, Neil Westh, Laurie Wilson, I think Vic Elvie was in it, Jim Davey (who, of course, has died a long, long time ago); the girls were: Ethel Hall (who became Ethel Sutcliffe), Bessie Soull(?) (who was John Murphy's first wife, later on), Ada Sharp (she was my partner, at one stage) Eileen Bernelly(?) (I think she died some years ago), and Mary Jones (I think).

Alan: There was an Edna someone.

There was Edna Stewart, but she didn't dance.

Alan: No, someone else.

Whitehead? I can't remember an "Edna" dancing. Anyway, we had to do this and some people thought it was unfair on us. And the teachers … next week you'd find – in your Braille class or history class – 4 people away; they'd have gone to Moonee Ponds to dance, or something. The dentists – as you'd know Alan – were the same Tuesday after Tuesday mornings.

Alan: The dentist; tell us about the dentist.

The dental hospital; they used to take … ; again, I didn't go because I wasn't a boarder. They used to take about 12 to 15 to 18 in the van (it seemed to be every Tuesday morning in the winter) and often, half of them would go in, and wouldn't be dealt with that day, and they'd go back the next week; it was terrible for teaching (as I found later on) – you'd find half, or less than half, your class there, week after week.

Alan: Did you ever hear tales of the dentists, before they went off … when the dentists used to come to the institute?

No, I didn't.

Alan: Albert Wellington used to tell us; I thought you might've heard.

No.

Alan: Well, they used to just go into the shower (what is now the staff-ladies' toilet in the upstairs Community Services), you'd just sit on a chair, and away you'd go – no anaesthetic …

I think it's important that I tell you something of Dave Palmer because he was an influence – not only professionally, but also personally – in the lives of very many of us. As I said earlier, he was the musical director when I went to school, and remained so until 1942 when George Findlay and I shared the responsibility. He was a very quiet, gentle, shy, and unassuming man, but a man of great talent. He took those of us who showed some promise in piano (Fred Sutcliffe), and developed it further, and put us through the "Australian Music Examination Board" examinations. It wasn't easy for him because he was legally blind, and I remember him always leaning over the piano with his nose almost to the printed music with his magnifying glass, and reading; he would teach by rote. He wasn't a specialist in any area, because this was the time before specialization, but he was a very fluent pianist; as a violinist, he had a lovely tone – I always was delighted when he'd pick up the violin and play a little. He taught most of the instruments; he taught, almost all of us, about the piano, he taught many of us the violin. As I said, he didn't know a lot about any of them but if someone wanted to learn the trumpet, he'd read a bit about the trumpet to learn a bit more about it, and he'd teach them the trumpet; the same for the trombone, the drums, the saxophone, flute, clarinet, and so on; he taught all these instruments, and he would admit and agree that – in an imperfect way – he wasn't a specialist, and he wasn't afraid to say so, nor to seek help. He was a very humble man. When I was a student at the conservatorium, he used to say: "Jeff" (he used to call me Jeff, and he had a son named Jeff) … he'd say: "Jeff, you know more about this than I do … what do you think; how is that going to work"; he was a very unassuming man in that way. As I put it, I think he was the right man at the right place at the right time, because he really cultivated "all the shoots of the budding tree", as you might put it; some of us for piano, some for violin … in fact, he even taught me the cello at one stage – he thought it would be a good thing, for the orchestra, to have a cello. He even taught me the double base, and I actually played the double base on RVIB concerts on about 3 or 4 occasions; in fact, I played on the Melbourne Town Hall platform, 24 hours after Lottie Lehman had stood singing so superbly on the same spot; I thought it was pretty good. But I found the double base too hard on the fingers, if I wanted to continue on the violin – which I did – I had to stop playing the double base. He taught some who were musical, and others who were not musical by any stretch of the imagination, but if the orchestra wanted a trumpet, then he'd teach Reg Hill the trumpet; Reg learned that there were 6 B-flats, then you'd stop, and 4 Ds, and then da, da, da, da.

Alan: Reg couldn't read music, right?

I think he might've, in the end, but basically, "Mister" (as we'd call him) was telling Reg that there were 6 Bs there, and so on. He just had the knack of really maximising the material he had; some of it was musical, and some of it was not musical. If there was a gap in the orchestra, he might suggest that somebody could play the clarinet, and he'd help him. He arranged a lot of the music for the orchestra, and then Braille departs for each of us; I can well remember that often, if you had to be in your lesson on a Monday morning … he had a bit of a lame – I think he put his foot through a drum when he was fairly young (before my time), and he'd come in with a bundle of small half-sized sheets of Braille (Australian paper, as we called it – very thick paper) and that was the music he had written for the weekend (Jack's violin part, or Sam's saxophone part, or something of that sort). Leaning over the piano with a magnifying glass, and writing a few notes, and reading some more – it was an astonishing effort;

there was no overtime for this – he was on a salary, and it was a meagre salary; he was a jack-of-all-trades but master, in a sense, of all.
We had concerts, just about once a month, in different places; the RVIB gave concerts, and the public would come along (fundraising). He would not only play for the orchestra, but he would play the accompaniment for just about every item, for the whole concert – Fred Sutcliffe songs, Albert Harris's violin solos, and whatever you happened to have … John Murphy's flute solos, and perhaps 1 or 2 sighted artists; he could memorize all this music and hold it in his mind – it was astonishing and extremely accurate; he was very good at that sort of thing. He was an accomplished man. He played with the orchestra; in those days, Mr. Hedger used to say: "you can hire our dance orchestra for 5 shillings a man, per hour", and there were a lot of small orchestras – 4 or 5 players for dances, weddings, and so on, and "Mister" would play for those, and sometimes they'd be playing at Warragul, they'd get home at 3 o'clock in the morning, and then he'd come in at 9 o'clock and give you a piano lesson; Fred Sutcliffe was doing the same thing. They were certainly the days – they were fulltime people on very meagre salaries and, as I say, no overtime. He was a great man, and a very good friend to all of us; you could confide in him, and he'd give you good, sound fatherly advice of what he thought you ought to do and whom you should see, or he'd speak to Mr. Hedger. He was an informal man – he'd say: "next time I'll meet him in the lane"; he didn't like ceremony and he didn't like formality, much – he wasn't at home …

Alan: Talking about the lane, Hugh; it's called Solomon's Lane, and Solomon – I understand – was the old music teacher before Dave Palmer. Did you ever hear anything about him?

No, I really didn't, but I know that he was the music teacher. Also, another man that I never met or never knew was Winfield. We always referred to that little music room, at the opposite side of the courtyard (on the boys' side, we used to call it), Winfield's room.

Alan: I'll find out about them both.

In those days, music was felt to be one of the best areas for blind people. Career opportunities were very limited in those days; there were virtually only 2 things you could do – the most likely thing you could do was to go into the workshop (mats, brushes, or brooms), but, if you were musical, you might do music – probably as a player, part time; it was generally thought … while I was at school, that I would probably play in the orchestra, perhaps in the concert party, and do a little bit of work in the library … that would be quite a pleasant and perhaps, reasonably remunerative source for me. Of course, I was one of the lucky ones – mainly through the pushing of my parents who saw to it that I went to higher education and to university. Music was one of the few openings before the existence of the guild; the field wasn't really very wide for switchboard operators, we only knew 1 or 2 lawyers; there were no stenotypists, or anything of that sort. So music was the thing; everybody was encouraged … if they were any good at music, then: "ah ha, there's some hope for him".
The other aspect of music, which was encouraged, was piano tuning. Rightly or wrongly, the public had a concept that our ears were very much better, and they had a bias in favour of blind piano tuners. Mr. Hedger, through his publicity, really fostered

this, quite advantageously, and a number of blind people were encouraged to be piano tuners, and it has been – through the years – a very good field for a number of blind people. Unfortunately, I always felt that the business side of the thing, wasn't developed in the way it should've been; they should've given them some idea of publicity, and of accounting, looking after your work, and so on. I know George Findlay and I sent a lot of work to our blind piano tuner friends, but they never really protected it. I know that sighted tuners keep a record, and ring up in about 9 months or so, and say: "look, I'll be around that way next week, you haven't had yours done for a while", but I wasn't aware of any of our guys doing that. But some have been tuners in piano factories, and so on; generally, it has been – here and abroad – a very worthwhile, satisfying and remunerative area and, of course, it can be quite flexible too. It is still carried on, but I feel that there ought to be much more stimulation and support, and encouragement for blind piano tuning; it's a shame that it's lost out in recent times. One of the reasons is that there are now much more career opportunities so there won't be so many people going into it, but it's still – given that a person gets the proper training (technically and in business) – a very worthwhile and flexible source of self-employment possibilities.

Alan: You're making your sermon there, Hugh. Getting away from what we're doing.

Alan: One of the personalities of the 1940s – as far as the school is concerned, Hugh – was Geoff Green. He came, after Garnet Dent, as the principal.

That was a change, a very healthy change. The early days of the Olinda sojourn … there'd be a lot of stories that can be told about that. One went up there on a Tuesday or Friday morning, and you'd wonder how man of the staff had resigned or eloped, in the meantime, during the Dent era. Yes, I think it was a very fortuitous day that Geoff Green came to the institute. He had been at Brighton Grammar. He was certainly an enthusiast for education and for learning; he developed a great rapport, and empathy for blind people, very early on. I've never seen a man settle down so quickly, enthusiastically and so thoroughly; he learnt Braille. He used the Pike Glauser machine(?), that I think may still be around. He would be constantly putting up Braille problems to us, and really trick us; Neil and Don were supposed to be fairly ofay with Braille rules, but he'd be testing out the exceptions, and so on – it was a remarkable effort, and he enjoyed the challenge of it. I've never had the experience – before or since – of going along to school on the first day of term and be handed, in Braille, your music timetable; it was a tremendous thing, particularly in those days – maybe you don't think it's so marvellous these days, with all the embossers and various things, but in those days, it was a great thing.

Alan: He had a lovely speaking voice.

He did. He also had a very unrestrained and unrepressed laugh (if he enjoyed something, you know?).

Alan: Perhaps you could talk about his speaking voice, since we just talked over each other).

It was very responsive and quite rich, really. He had an unrestrained laughter when he enjoyed something. What was quite new to us, of course, was that we had always

been called by our Christian names (in fact, we rather resented that; we felt that that the blind staff were called by their Christian names, whereas the other teachers and office staff were always referred to as Mr. or Mrs.), but now, Geoff Greene brought a public school sense of name … it was Jeffrey, Forbes, Westh, Findlay; it was a little bit strange to us, but still, it was a quality from the public schools.
Educationally, I think he was the best headmaster we'd ever had … at least until the seventies (I don't know the seventies situation very well). In those days, we used to have our lunch … the women and men (teachers) never fraternized at lunchtimes or other times, but George, Neil Westh, Geoff Green, and myself (Don Forbes used to go home for lunch, he lived not far away) sat in desks in the schoolroom area, eating our sandwiches, and just using the electric jug; there, we talked, long and often, about the different students and what they might do, and what their abilities were, and so on; Geoff was always very concerned about them, and really had a lot of faith … he really knew the abilities of some of them, like: Keith Smith and Joan Ryan and Ken Brunton (particularly); we "talked shop" virtually all the time, and enjoyed it. It was out of these discussions that Guild was formed. I think we were very fortunate to have had Geoff Green, and it was a shame for the school, and a sad day … he was just missing, and we didn't why for a long time; we couldn't get much information, and everybody was completely silent, but we know the unfortunate thing that happened to some of the best people, apparently – some of the most sensitive and good educators. It was really a shame.

Alan: Would you like to just explain a little more? Did you ever hear the end result of all that?

We didn't get very much information at all, really. There was a trial, and he certainly spent some time in prison. We lost touch after that, really.

Alan: That was for interfering with the boys, wasn't it?

Yes, that's right; there seems to be some cases that were proven.

Alan: You lost touch with him after that.

We did, really. I don't think anybody saw him after that.

Alan: It was kept very quiet.

Oh, it was, that's right.

Alan: Hugh, the setting up of the Guild that you mentioned before: what was the catalyst – what started that?

Well, really the catalyst was the discussions between Geoff Green and some of the students … what would they do … they had ability; Neil, George, myself, and Don Forbes had had the opportunity of going to university, and doing courses, but we hadn't had much sound advice and background – particularly in the case of Neil and Don; they had done subjects, primarily on the basis that they were easy subjects that you might pass (that could, in fact, be handled by a blind person) – so that's why you did those subjects, and that's how you got your degree. They weren't necessarily the

best subjects from a career point of view; for example, Neil Westh did 3 years of Latin, and specialized in Latin but, of course, there weren't too many opportunities for him to exercise his teaching capacity in Latin. So, we felt that blind students coming on, needed some guidance, needed some advice, and needed some support, which we felt we might be able to give, and be helpful. Also, they needed guidance in what subjects they might do, and also, they really needed to know what was possible in the career situation. Now, we knew of 1 or 2 lawyers – Dudley Tregent was one of them – who had come back from the war and gone to St. Dunstans (the rehabilitation place in England), and had actually done law, and had managed to get through the depression, and was still practicing law. We knew of Cliff Monteshaw – a physiotherapist. So, there were some cases, but we wanted to investigate more fully, and get information from overseas as to what was being done and what could be done, so that we could bring more to the notice of the authorities and the board of the institute, of what they should be encouraging blind students to do, and what they should be backing them in; and to make it clear to business, what a blind person could do. Also, we'd had very, very few textbooks, and this was the days before sound recording. Most of the stuff had to be read to us; my sister used to read history to me at 6:30 in the morning, and I would make some notes; I didn't have the history book in Braille (for my intermediate history). So, we did manage to persuade the RVIB to set up a library for students and professionals – that was quite a task; we had several discussions with the board, and they, in the end, agreed to do it. Also, student allowances – that was coming into being for sighted students (Commonwealth scholarships and so on); we thought it was necessary for blind students to have some form of remuneration if they weren't going into the workshop and were going to stay at school. Gradually, we were able to build up, and we did collect information and then formed the Guild.

Alan: We haven't mentioned it's full name yet.

Well, first of all it was "The Victorian Guild of Professional Blind", and then we heard of these people in other states, like Cliff Monteshaw (NSW physiotherapist); Mercy Griffin – as she was in those days, but now affectionately known as Mercy Dickinson – in Queensland, who did an arts course and then did some teaching at the school up there; there were a few others, including Mr. Blackburn in South Australia. We thought we'd be stronger if we could collect all these people together so it became, "The Australian Guild of Business and Professional Blind". But we didn't set out to be an elitist organisation – we didn't want to – but the blind workers' unions were organised and catering, reasonably well, for the needs of their people, which they understood much better than we did. So, we thought we needed to press the opportunities for those who were, or could, become professional people, so they could have the chance to use their capacities in the same way that others would. The Guild was started in 1949 and after that, we sought positions in sighted schools, which we didn't expect we'd get. First of all, for Ken Brunton in teaching, and we must say that Mr. Hedger went to far as to offer a year's salary if any school would take him on (and Eric Edwards was in the same position) and offer him a job. So, Pulteney Grammar School took him on temporarily – I think – in about 1952 or 1953, and he's still there now (some 37 years later); he's been: history master, history coordinator, history examiner at the university, and senior master, etc.; he's done a magnificent job and, of course, proved the point that … the whole point is that not every blind person will be a teacher, but a blind person with the right capacity, opportunities, and training, can do the job, and you needn't discount him simply because he's blind.

Also for Dorothy Nuske (as she was then), we managed to get her an opportunity at the Corowa Girls' School, as musical director; actually, the head there at the time (Miss. Guyatt) was a member of the congregation at Gardner Church, where George Findlay had been organist and choirmaster for some years (actually, he was there for 40 years before he retired). There were fortuitous opportunities for people we knew. At the time, George Findlay and I ... well I was first, I started lecturing at the Victorian council of Adult Education in 1943, and George joined me later; we found that work very congenial and good, and it's expanded ever since; you, of course, and Alan Woods elected to teach at teachers' college ... and we could go on.

Alan: Yes, we're getting away from the ...

Well, this question of mainstream, of course, wasn't a term that was well known then, but actually, in the 1920s, George Findlay, Don Forbes, Jack Burn, and Norm Rees, went to Gardiner High School, and that was the first ... whether Miss Astin ever did go, I don't know; but this was the exceptional thing and later on, Neil Westh, Phyllis Grace (Phyllis Lawson as she was then), and myself went to Hassetts Commercial College, where I did my Intermediate and Leaving. I left the institute school when I was about 15 ½, and went on to Hassetts; it was a bit hard-going because we had no resource teachers, no tutorial support at all (apart from our school), very, very few Braille books, no Braille machines, and of course no audio recordings. At Hassetts, the main class teacher would never ask me a question (or Phyllis, for that matter); you'd put up your hand ... sometimes, if you knew the answer, you'd at least like a chance to get the response ... but that was a frustration, which we endured, but anyway, we got there in the end. There was just a trickle of people that went to Hassetts; I don't know where you went, Alan, I've forgotten.

Alan: I went to Wesley.

Oh, that's right, you did – that was a first, I think. But that was just a trickle but now, it's become more acceptable – for better or for worse. I think that without the support, it can be difficult; you've got to be selective of the person, you've got to be selective of the school and the teacher, and see that the appropriate support and textbooks are available. I wouldn't have gone to secondary education at all, if it hadn't been for my mother who went down to see the Matron, Mr. Palmer, and Mr. Findlayson (the headmaster); as they saw it, I would never be another George Findlay or Don Forbes, but Mr. Findlayson said he could give me a bit more work – I would play in the orchestra, visit auxiliaries, or work in the library, and I could have a comfortable life, but my mother wanted me to have the opportunity; she was a battler, and she almost insisted, and she wanted me to try; if I was found wanting, then o.k., at least I tried. So, I had the opportunity. I remember always feeling, "what if I fail?", and I think I did my darndest ... actually, I didn't do so badly because ... the first year I went to Hassetts – it was on the 24th of April (I was happy to have a holiday on the next day – Anzac Day) – I wondered what they were talking about when they talked of "double fractions", I never heard of them; that year, with my one music subject, I passed ... I got my intermediate, I think; I got English, arithmetic, history, music, geography ... I must've done 5 subjects, and I still had intermediate French to go, in the next year. Then in the next year, apart from my intermediate French, I got my 5 Leaving subjects, including 2 music subjects; that was matriculation, except for the fact that I had to have another language – other than English – to matriculate, so I had to do

Leaving French the following year. I got onto the conservatorium, and when I heard these people in the entrance exhibition (George Findlay took me there in January to hear them), playing their concertos … I didn't know what a concerto was, I thought, "this is the wrong place for me", and I must've got so scared of it, that I worked as hard as I could, and I remember the day of my piano examination – it was at 10 past 4 – I practiced all day; we went into the room and the professor was there and went out for a cup of tea; Mr. Sidle, who was my piano teacher (as he was for many of us), came up and said: "Hugh, I'll see you on Thursday for a lesson", and I almost felt like saying: "you silly man, you won't want to see me on Thursday at all". Anyway, I must've been in a trance, because I played better than I had ever played before. It was supposed to be secretive – you supposedly never knew your results, but my teacher told me – he said: "Hugh, you played splendidly – you've got first class honours". Anyway, I knew I was alright on the theoretical side, and I finished up that year as being second on the class list; I never did as well afterwards but I did alright, of course.

Alan: Hugh, let's move on to something else. It's lovely to reminisce, but I think we need to keep it somewhere near the track. The next couple of points were fairly closely related in time, at any rate. At about the middle 1950s – I think I've got them in order – the first thing was getting somebody elected onto the board, or the process of getting a blind person onto the board; there were quite a lot of repercussions at the time. Hedger wasn't around at that time, was he?

No – I don't think we could've carried on … we would've been out on our ear if he was there. I think it was in 1953 when he left. You might say that this was an expansion – or intensiveness – arising from the formation of the Guild; we had done a few things, as I've already mentioned, but we felt that the administration was one of the opportunities – we couldn't get through; the switchboard work, for instance, was becoming recognised as a possibility for blind people, but we couldn't persuade them to have anybody on the staff during Mr. Hedger's time (and Mr. Bunn followed too); "they'd know the secrets, you see, they couldn't be there" … so we couldn't get a breakthrough on that. There seemed to be a lot of barriers, and we felt that blind people needed to have the opportunity to do what they could do, but they needed to be encouraged by the administration and the board. Although there had been blind people (very few of them) on the board before, they had been – I don't suppose it's unfair to say – "yes-men", people who were newly blind who obviously didn't have the background and didn't know the problems – they just went along this marvellous management.

Alan: Such as who, Hugh?

Mr. Angus, I remember when we were at school; he used to give us – what we thought were – very pathetic speeches of the tragedy of blindness … "I've been blind, and I know what it's like"; it was all very negative, and we used to squirm a bit.

Hugh Jeffrey (CD No. 2)
Date: 12th November 1990
Questioner: Alan Nuske

**** This is a continuation of CD #1 *****

Mr. Angus, I remember when we were at school; he used to give us – what we thought were – very pathetic speeches of the tragedy of blindness … "I've been blind, and I know what it's like"; it was all very negative, and we used to squirm a bit. As we went on in the Guild, we didn't particularly want to become political, but we felt we had to. The education needed reforming and there was a feeling that, perhaps, the funds raised weren't being used in the most productive way. It was always, "what they could do for us"; there was no consultation with, "what do you really need, what do you really want?"., and we wanted to get away from that. Mr. Hedger would come back from abroad, and say, "You're mighty lucky in Australia … over there, the conditions are dreadful for blind people"; we didn't quite believe that, from what we read in some of the overseas magazines, but none of our people had been over, to find out. Mercy Dickinson (Mercy Griffin) did get a scholarship in 1954, I think (or 1955), and did go over and spent some time in England and in America in schools, and we thought that this would be a marvellous opportunity if we could get everybody together to hear what Mercy had to say. So we called a national conference, through the Guild of Blind Professionals from the different states, and all the educators; we sent letters to the other schools and at this stage, of course, we'd had virtually no contact with the other states. The response was excellent – they all responded, saying that they would come and they were all interested – so we had the first conference, at Cheltenham in January 1955 … you'd remember that.

Alan: I do.

It was at the Recruit House at Cheltenham, and we prepared the programme, and we were leaders of the groups, and so on; we arranged for Mercy to speak to us in the evening sessions, and tell us what she'd found. It was most stimulating, and out of that – and this was the first contact between educators of blind people from all states – came the formation of the Australian Association of Teachers of the Blind, in the next year at Kalbula(?), and ultimately the Australian and New Zealand Association of Teachers of the Blind (now known as ANZAT and AVTH, or something). Then, Don Forbes delivered a paper on education and the charity system, and it got headlines in "The Herald"; we didn't know if we'd be all out on our… . We were a little bit annoyed with Don because we thought he had taken the bull by the horns without consulting us, but it was a catalyst. That year, we decided to stand candidates for the board of management; this was an extraordinary situation because 4 of us were all on the staff (the other one was Jack Murphy, who was the institute auxiliary organiser) and, as staff members, it was a funny situation. We realized the problem of it, and we didn't enter it with any sense of glee, but we really felt it was necessary to try and do something to break this bond, if you like. We stood 4 candidates for the board election; we had Don Forbes, and while we couldn't have stood (as employees of the institute, we couldn't be members of the board), Don was employed by the education department as a teacher at the institute (that was an arrangement that had been in effect for some years, and I think it originated with Tilley Aston); then we had Laurie McReedie(?) – he lost his sight in a grenade accident, and we saw him as a very able

young man. There was Mary Mitchell, a blind authoress, who lost her sight in recent times; she originally wrote a book called "Uncharted Country", which was about her problems and needs as a blind person, and losing her sight. We also had a parent of a blind child: Bob Baynard(?) – his daughter was Amanda. So, that was our team but, of course, we didn't have the resources of the others and we weren't allowed access to the rolls, and so on; we were only allowed – after appealing to the electoral commission (or charities commission) – to have a little bit of access to the rolls for certain hours; Laurie McReedie would take a recorder into the office, and one of my readers would read, onto tape, some of the names. We tried to circularise (the board had done so) as many people as we could, and we had gatherings at Don Forbes's place, in Prahran, overnight. I remember I had adult education music classes at 6:30, and I told the folk what was going on, and said that if anybody was interested to come and help us (with circulars, and so on); 2 or 3 people did come up to Don with me, and we bundled up these things (circulars), addressed them, and so on. At 3 o'clock in the morning, I got this huge suitcase, got into a taxi, and went to the GPO to get these things off; the hours of postage were a bit more flexible in those days. These were the days … telephone conversations with John Murphy at midnight, to discuss what the strategy was, and so on. Well, we put up a good campaign and we got about 40% of the votes, really. But, according to the electoral system, we got no candidates on; it was like the old system of the Australian senate – it was all or nothing, their party ticket gets in and the party ticket got the result. When we met, on the Friday, to declare the election, on behalf of the group, I congratulated those who had been elected and we hoped that they would do the job. But – as we pointed out – in a charity system, you can't run an organisation on a partisan line because 40% of the subscribers who had voted, supported our candidates; I thought that – in recognition of this – they should at least take some of our candidates onto the board, but Dr. Bennett, who was in the chair, said, "no, no, no", so I immediately sat down, and he declared the meeting closed. But, it had results because, within 12 months, they invited Laurie McReedie to run for the board ... oh, I'm sorry, there must've been 5 people … also, we had – as a candidate in our team – Noel Anderson, who was George Findlay and my boss at Adult Education; he was director of classes, was a very good fellow, and I enjoyed working with him. Noel had agreed to stand, and they also invited him onto the board; I remember getting the letter when Alice and I were in England, and it did make a difference. Progress had been slower because, in more recent years, more blind people have been on the board. I think we've got to watch that we don't make the mistake of saying, "Look, it's just a blind person on the board" – that's not the point at all; it's a person – whether blind or sighted – elected by blind people themselves, who understand their needs and can represent them; that's the fundamental thing, it's not a matter of getting a blind person on the board, but a person who represents blind people – who are, after all, the recipients … whose needs and welfare are the only reason for the existence of the organisation – so, surely, they should have some say and really express their needs.

Alan: Interesting, Hugh. The other event, which I'd like to talk about (we've just about got time for a little bit), is the time in 1956 when it was decided that the Catholic children should have a school of their own, so St. Paul's was formed. Was there any sign of dissention, argument, or resistance to that structure?

Yes, well there certainly was resistance.

Alan: It was cutting up the cake a bit.

I'm not aware of what steps were taken, but I'm sure it would've been discouraged. It was felt to be an undesirable thing yet, of course, you can understand it from the point of view of the Catholic fraternity, because … Brother O' Neil (he was a blind person) had come to the institute – 2 afternoons a week – to give religious instruction after school; it was tolerated rather than encouraged, I think (I don't think he felt his visits were very easy). He felt that the only way that blind Catholic children could get the type of education, which – as sighted children – they could get (on a religious basis), was to form their own school. So the Villa Maria Society, which had been a support organisation for elder blind folk, set up the St. Paul's School for the Blind. That meant that we would lose – as it so happened – some of our brightest and best young children. We had a crop of young blind children who were very bright; I only have to name 2 or 3 of them to know how bright they really were: Ron McCallum (who is now a professor), Peter Walsh (social worker), Grant Lee Dozzetti (singer and light entertainer), Anne Campbell (she did an arts course, and she's Anne Carlson now), Mary Wynne (qualified librarian) … they were a real bunch of bright children. The situation was that there were all sorts of conjectures as to who's going where and what's going to happen to the institute, and so on. I could see that there could be a possibility that our music work at the institute would be probably lesser, and George was musical director then; we worked very cordially together – it was a great partnership and a most enjoyable time. So, I decided to apply for the job of Musical Director (at St. Paul's) – I was encouraged to apply; they were a bit scared because they were going over there without teachers who were qualified or experienced at teaching blind people, so I was encouraged to apply, and I was successful in getting the position of Musical Director. I stayed in that position for 8 years until I went to a sighted school. It was a bit of a gamble on my part, and in those days, the climate was different to what it is today. I was a fairly active Methodist person in youth work and lay preaching and so on, and I think that some of my Methodist friend thought, "Oh, he's let down the flag, he's gone over to the opposition" and I think, understandably, some of the Catholic fraternity felt the same … "oh, a Methodist Musical director, goodness me". However, we worked through that, and we worked very happily. Also, about 12 months before, in pursuit of our attempt to get candidates onto the board, we had set up an organisation that was known as "The Parents and Friends of Blind Children", and this all (the formation of St. Paul's) looked like splitting up, and we all thought, "What's going to happen there?". Some of my Catholic friends at St. Paul's, and parents, encouraged me to stand for the presidency. I thought that, having been with the institute for so long and now being at St. Paul's, I might be sort of a buffer or unifier so, after a lot of thought, I did agree to take on that position. I was president for 2 or 3 years, until we went abroad (I got leave then). So this did attempt to keep contact between the parents, and we also set up sports competitions … we tried to do it but it was a bit hard to maintain, but we worked through the situation, anyway. I found it a good experience; it certainly was good for me, and I don't think it did any of them any harm. I had the satisfaction of teaching Claire Ryan (one of the best pianists – perhaps the best pianist – I've ever taught); Claire died, quite young, with cancer, unfortunately, but I was delighted to listen to her play – on the St. Paul's concerts at the Melbourne town Hall – the Rachaminov C-sharp minor, prelude; she'd really get around the piano … totally blind girl; she also played the ???? … it was pretty exacting work, and she really carried it off. I've taught the Jolley boys … they weren't so musical, but they were characters.

Alan: Hugh, I think we might leave it at that …

Ummm, yes, alright; if I could just say another sentence about this first, and then I'll go on.
One of the great satisfactions I've had is: how many of these kids – at the RVIB and St. Paul's – have turned out to be fine contributing citizens; if we had time, I could tell you a lot of stories about that, but I think it speaks for itself, and I think it's most satisfying; as a teacher, at least you feel you haven't got in their road, and if you've been able to encourage them, then o.k.

Then, I was out of touch for a while; as I said, I went to sighted schools. But I came back after I had retired – because of my hearing problems – from the sighted school. I did a term while Bob Williams(?) was away. I was a bit sad, really; it seemed that music didn't have the pride of place, not that we necessarily wanted to have the pride of place, but it didn't seem to be given the significance that, I believe, its career results for blind people really deserved; the practice didn't seem to be supervised at all … it was difficult find out whether the kids had done any worthwhile work between times. Also, the programme was such that you often found people missing on the day because there was some other counter attraction; now, it's good to have all these other things, and no one would want to curtail the breadth of the programme, but I think that some regularity, some discipline, and certainly some encouragement and organized support – for people who have got ability in a certain direction – is really desired; whether that happens, I don't know. This is one of the problems we faced: as the education has become broader (and that's a good thing), and career opportunities have become more varied (which is also a good thing), perhaps there has been a lack of the speciality for a subject like music, and it meant that some people – who might've done music with a very satisfying and remunerative reward – might've missed out on it (we'd be very sorry if that happens).

Alan: Hugh, thanks very much indeed. That's been marvellous.