



MR. ALAN HODGE INTERVIEWED BY LESLEY JACKSON. 29 AUGUST 1983.

Mr. Hodge, how long were you in Portland?

I was born in Portland (laughs) and so was my father and my grandfather. However, I was away during the War for five years, which brings us up to 1945. And then I returned to Portland for only a month before the State Savings bank transferred me to Horsham. From Horsham I went to Melbourne on the relieving staff and I came back to [...] Portland in ...Sometime in 1948. I was back in Portland to be on the permanent staff at the State Savings Bank, Portland.

And you joined C.E.M.A. then?

Yes, I was taken along to C.E.M.A. by my sister, Gwen who had been the first – or jointly- the first Secretary. She was joint with Joan Beglen. And my friends, Harold Salmon and Bob Stuchbery, Leila Carthew and ...Local people were regular attenders, particularly on a Sunday night, or on every Sunday night, for play readings and that type of thing at the flat above Coles...

Mr. and Mrs. Moody's?

Where Mr. and Mrs. Moody lived, yes. Mr. Moody was the headmaster of the new High School. And Mrs. Moody, in particular, was very interested in amateur dramatics and, oh, many other things: she was a most interesting person, very active person. She had this group of young and not-so-young people coming to her flat on Sunday nights after church. I got involved in the group then, so I wasn't in C.E.M.A. from its raw beginning, but I was, well, say three years later.

And you belonged to the Drama Group?

Yes. The Dramatic Group was what I was mainly interested in, although as C.E.M.A. developed it had a record listening group, and play reading without play acting, and that type of thing. There were several different groups and I used to attend other meetings, but my main interest was the Dramatic Group.

You were in some plays in the early days.

Yes...the first one I can't quite remember...But Mrs. Moody had organized a... Pageant type of thing...Ancient England...Called *George of the World*, based on a short story by a person called Cunningham, and there were a lot of us in that: Mr. Moody and Harold Salmon, Eric Thorpe and all the rest of them. And I was Mac Brewster and I remember getting dressed in a sort of hessian outfit- more like a skirt than a suit- and being a primitive type of peasant or some such thing in England (laughs.) Long Ago. That was my first actual performance. That was at the Christmas party in 1948. 1950 was when *Young Mrs. Barrington* took place and – the play *Young Mrs. Barrington*- and by that time the Moody's had left, because Mrs. Sutton produced *Young Mrs. Barrington*. She wasn't a regular attender at these C.E.M.A.



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functions, but when the Moodys had gone we were at a loss as to how we were going to have anybody help us with plays, and Mrs. Sutton agreed to help and *Young Mrs. Barrington* was the one that she was particularly involved in. Mrs. Sutton had previously been involved in plays, dramatic work, with Mrs. H.V. McLeod and when I was a child, so it wasn't a new thing to her. Thirty years before was when she had been on the stage (laughs), or on the stage in Portland. But I did get involved in some of the musical programmes, because C.E.M.A. in those days was very active and the Music Group used to put on a concert- concerts- which they would rehearse for two or three months beforehand. We [the Drama Group] would put on one-act plays or three-act plays, and go for two or three nights, using the library hall as our theatre. So, the Dramatic Club would have a period of time when they were putting on shows and the Music Group would. And sometimes they would be combined. It would be a concert composed partly of music, partly a Dramatic club event. Of course, when the Music Group was putting on a big concert the musical people, the people who sang or played instruments, were the cast and they needed backstage and all the rest of it (laughs) So I used to get involved with the make-up and backstage and props and prompting and all that type of thing. Occasionally I would be involved in the Music Club, but mainly it was Dramatic Club.

And there was another interesting Christmas party, and we're not sure which year- it would be about '49 or '50- when there were a lot of refugees had come into Portland.

Yes. Well Christmas parties, I think, started with the Moodys. I might be corrected on that, but I think the Moodys were responsible for the early Christmas parties [...] The people had been singing and reading plays and that type of thing, but at Christmas time we'd put on a concert for the local people. A concert by invitation, you didn't pay. There were several of these Christmas parties, which were quite social functions, C.E.M.A. providing the whole of the entertainment to the people who were invited. But after the War, Portland had quite a few people coming to live there on a permanent basis who were what we called New Australians. Mainly they were displaced people from wartime concentration camps that type of thing; Polish people, Lithuanians Germans...Europeans. They weren't the Greeks and Italians, it was prior to them prior to their migration. There were some people who migrated at their own expense from England and Europe and they were treat! And a one-act play wouldn't mean much if you couldn't speak the language. So, there was a least one item was produced and quite a lot of effort put into it...I think Joyce Ridley might have been the producer- I think I'm right- of the item that I was in, which was a one-act play built round an old man and his daughter and the boyfriend who was calling for the daughter's hand. And there were no words; it was all done by movement and mime, and the movement was done to music. There were four of us in it: Dawyn Barclay; Fred Merryweather; myself; and... Oh, a teacher, whose name was Jean Grinton, she was the other person. The maid...Fred Merryweather was the old man, the maid was Dawn Barclay, Jean Grinton was his daughter, who I was courting, and I was the young man who was calling on her. So, we did this in mime and the non-English speaking people who were present would be able to know the story from the actions. I did have a photo, but I can't find it, of the people dancing after the



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entertainment section of the evening. The library hall was full and it held quite a lot of people. The photograph that I had and I can't find, showed me dancing with Mrs. Frank Bubb- Frank Bubb, you may remember, was one of the local butchers. He was in the McKenzie building, near where the T.A.B. is now, oh, maybe the same shop as the T.A.B is in – I think it is. And his wife was active in C.E.M.A. things, and I was dancing with her when the photograph was taken, but I can't find it. But that was a very good Christmas party. The other thing that happened that was different in that a change took place in C.E.M.A..... After it had been operating for a few... Oh, C.E.M.A., when it was started, only raised money for local charities, mainly the hospital; the hospital always wanted money. And many of the early programmes show that the proceeds were donated to the building fund of the hospital, or some such thing. But when Fred Redfern was President, there was a meeting at the new High School, and annual meeting, when the matter was raised about raising money for ourselves for a building fund, because we didn't have any premises; we met in people's homes and that type of thing. Didn't have anything of our own, and it was suggested that it was about time we started doing something for ourselves, instead of for charity. Sort of charity begins at home (laughs). And Fred Redfern was the President... I know Eric Thorpe was also there, and Fred Merryweather, and Miss Hogan. I don't know what other individuals were at the meeting, but I moved that C.E.M.A. create a building fund, and I wrote a cheque out for a small amount, like two Guineas, or... One guinea, it may have been, I don't remember (laughs). It wasn't a large sum of money for the C.E.M.A. building fund, and if they hadn't passed the motion, well they wouldn't have got the cheque! So the motion was moved by me to create a building fund, and it was seconded, I think, by Eric Thorpe, and then voted on by those present. And it was passed. But not everybody was in favour. So, we started off the building fund and Eric Thorpe and myself were the first two people to put any money in it. Well then, when we had a C.E.M.A. function, a concert or plays, we would keep some of the money- sometimes it was half- for the C.E.M.A. building fund, and the remainder would go to the charity that we were trying to assist. Now that account gradually built up. It had a few hundred pounds in it when Miss Tulloh's property was being auctioned by the public trustee. Miss Tulloh had [...] a primary school in Percy Street, down near the gasworks (laughs) [...] In the small numbers of Percy Street, on the uneven side. There was two very big blocks of land, two long blocks of land, and a house on one and the other one was her school. Eric Stephenson was involved. I think he was the President the year when that came up for sale. Anyway, it was discussed at C.E.M.A. whether we would buy it, so we must have had quite a bit of money in hand, and went to the sale and the Buffalo's Lodge bought it, and I presume still have it. So C.E.M.A. was using what was known as the Sailors' Rest- no, wait a minute, not the Sailors' Rest... A building that was used by the sailors... It's part of the Richmond Henty Hotel now. But Keith Anderson, who is a well – known public figure, still alive; Harbour Trust, heavily involved. He had a building, a brick building, in the front garden really, of the [Henty hotel] homestead, facing Bentinck Street. And it had previously been used by some organization like the Missions to Seamen and it had gone into... What's the word I want?... It wasn't being used for that purpose, anyway. And Keith Anderson allowed C.E.M.A. to use it. And that became C.E.M.A.'s club rooms. Keith Anderson



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owned the building. I don't think we paid any rent. Anyway, later on, sometime later, maybe two years- somebody like Eric Thorpe would remember more than I would, and perhaps Leila Carthew...Keith Anderson offered C.E.M.A. to become the owners of the building, which they did, they owned the building. It wasn't much land. Very little land. But the building that C.E.M.A. had been using became the property of C.E.M.A. as a donation from Keith Anderson. And when C.E.M.A. did want to do something about their own building, that building was sold to provide sufficient money with the cash on hand to help C.E.M.A. with the building that they now own on the corner of Bentinck and Glenelg Street. So that's the history of...In brief, of the ... C.E.M.A. having enough funds to do something about building that theatrette. The other slight interesting comment I might make is that the girls always, after plays and concerts and that type of thing, were given by the members of their family or boyfriends or... Who knows? They often used to receive two or three bouquets of flowers, big bouquets, and many there were. However, on one particular play the men also received a bouquet and I have a photograph which is not very good, but it shows a ...It looks like vegetables...I think some of the boys that night did get vegetables; bouquets made out of cauliflower and surrounded by carrots, but I think mine is a piece of cactus that has a balloon attached and a note. So sometimes the men would receive bouquets, but it was regular procedure for the women to be given bouquets by their family, friends, or the people who appreciated their performance (laughs).

Another thing that you were involved in was the re-enactment of Portland's first council meeting.

Oh, yes...

By the C.E.M.A. Dramatic Society...

That happened in...Oh...

1955.

In 1955, which is a couple of years before I finished in C.E.M.A. Noel Henry approached C.E.M.A. when there was some public function due to see if C.E.M.A. would help. And C.E.M.A., usually, was every ready to help. So when the council... The centenary of municipal government in Portland...The municipal government had started in... On the 5th February 1856. But in December of 1955, which is near enough to a hundred years later, short by a month, a month and a half, they re-enacted the first council meeting in the sound shell type of thing that had been built in the public gardens, in the Portland gardens, botanical gardens. So Noel Henry wanted C.E.M.A. to help with doing something about this event, one hundred years later, and he provided the minutes of that first council meeting from the records at the Town Hall [...] Using those, which are very brief, I compiled a script, which I got the information off government gazettes, people's family records and historical books, that type of thing, and I prepared a re-enactment of the first council meeting[...] We had quite a few rehearsals and Alec Tulloh offered to be the commentator, because



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he could us the (laughs) modern equipment of those days, it being done outside. So he read it and acted a commentator and the cast... Oh, first of all the meeting was held at the Tasmanian Inn, and the Tasmanian Inn was later named the Club Hotel and was pulled down. It was the building on the corner of Gawler and Percy Streets and is now a service station- over the road from the R.S.L. clubrooms. At that building they had the first council meeting. The earlier meeting, deciding that they would do that, would have a municipal council, they had at the London Inn which is down on the corner of Bentinck and Julia Streets. But this one was at the Tasmanian Inn. So, re-enacting the programme, we had an innkeeper, and that was portrayed by Tom Anderson. Harold Salmon portrayed Thomas Must, Keith Richards portrayed William Learmonth, Suart Lyons portrayed John Bowning, Eric Thorpe [portrayed] George Godwin Crouch, Graham McDonald [portrayed] John Brian Fitzgerald, Bob Stuchbery portrayed Thomas Finn, and Doug Rivers portrayed James Smith, and Dennis Merryweather portrayed Phillip Scott. Now, the information that I got for the history of the families, or the actual families, I obtained from their descendants or their relatives. So as far as I'm concerned, it's correct. The Miss Grahams provided me with the information regarding John Brian Fitzgerald d and they were very pleased to help. Thomas Must, we got some information regarding him from his own family. Reg Must lives in Ballarat and comes to Portland quite often...Oh, I don't think Reg Must is alive any more now. Phillip Scott was the first solicitor in Portland. There's a stained-glass window in St. Stephen's Church to his memory. But that was the re-enactment of the [...] first council meeting. The one other thing that is of a similar type of thing was the re-enactment of the meeting of Edward Henty and Major Mitchell. Major Mitchell came down from Sydney across country and discovering all the rich land inland, after having crossed the Murray. He arrived at Portland and Edward Henty met him there. They met on the 29th August 1836, and that pageant was re-enacted in 1951. The people involved in the re-enactment were Les Harman, Kathleen Frost, Bill Amor, Bob Stuchbery, Eric Thorpe, Alan Hodge and Fred Merryweather[.] We did the pageant on the oval, football oval at Hanlon Park.