



MR. ERIC THORPE INTERVIEWED BY LESLEY JACKSON 14 JUNE 1984

What are your earliest memories of C.E.M.A.?

Coincidentally; I was at a meeting in Melbourne where the first C.E.M.A. organization was mooted – was actually formed- and it was in the hands of Sir Bernard Heinze, the conductor of the Melbourne Orchestra. There was a free concert and there were quite a few speeches, but I just forget who else was there, but that's my first recollection of it.

And you were at the public meeting that was called to form C.E.M.A. in Portland in 1945?

Yes. That's of course, a long time ago, but I do remember that John Harris was elected the first President.

What part of C.E.M.A. was your particular interest?

My main interest at the beginning was the Literary Group. Then Harry Moody and Mrs. Moody formed the Drama Group and dragged everybody in that they possibly could (laughs) to make up the numbers – and I was one of those that were dragged.

Could you tell me about the Literary Group – where they met and the type of things that they did?

Yes the Literary Group met mainly – the initial meetings were at the then – High School, which is now the primary school in Palmer Street. And I remember the first meeting we had: everybody discussed a book that they had read, just off the top of their head as it were. Harry asked people just to discuss a book, just to have an interest in the opening meeting. It was quite interesting, too. Everyone spoke about a favourite book of theirs and the meeting was quite satisfactory, but after that, of course, we formed the Group with the C.A.E.; and they sent us books.

And that was quite a few years later?

Well we must have had books to discuss...No, that's right. We did decide, at the meeting, what form the next meeting was going to take. Some people volunteered to lead the meeting- it could be anything really, anything which interested them – and other people joined in their conversation and contributed to thoughts.

Did the format change every week?

Yes. We decided at each meeting on the form that the next meeting would take. Each person volunteered to lead the meeting with an idea of what they thought would be interesting. I know I did one on D.H. Lawrence. I can't remember, really, what the others were, but it was quite successful and, you know, very well attended. People got quite interested in it.

In the early days you decided to do a magazine.

Yes, we did. That was probably either Harry or Doris Moody's idea. Each person, again, was asked to contribute an article which makes up Literary magazine and there is a copy of it, actually, today. The magazine was published in December 1946.



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Then in 1947 you were appointed the convenor of the Literary Group.

Yes.

Later on, in 1951, the format was changed?

Yes. We decided then to affiliate ourselves with the Council for Adult Education, and they then sent us a book, generally of our choice, every month. From then on the meeting has taken the same form.

And are you still in the Literary Group?

Still in the Literary Group, yes, and quite interested in it. We welcome more members (laughs)

Do you still get the book from the Council of Adult Education?

Yes. Our meetings, generally, are held at Dorothy and Colin Woolcocks. We have around about seven or eight to ten people per month.

Getting back to the second part of your interest in C.E.M.A., that was the Drama Group.

Yes.

Can you remember the first play you did?

Yes, I can indeed. It was produced by Mrs. Moody and it was *Baa Baa Black Sheep*. A big cast- the idea of course, was to involve as many people as possible. And it was a great success – in the old Free Library Hall, of course. They were only ever done- no, it was originally for one night, but there was such a demand for it that we put it on again a fortnight later. And the second one was *Leave it to Psmith*, which was equally well supported. From then on the Drama Group went from strength to strength and, in fact, it was the main factor in our fund-raising efforts towards the new C.E.M.A. centre.

And you were President when the building fund was first mooted.

Yes, yes, yes. That was in the High School and we decided that so much of the funds from all our efforts were to be devoted to the building fund.

It was a very forward-thinking idea.

Mmm.

You stayed with the Drama Group?

Oh yes, until recent years. It was a very worthwhile thing to be in, really, for anyone that wanted to develop themselves in any shape or form.

What was the last play you did?

(Pause)

I saw you in *The Gazebo* not that long ago.



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Yes, I think that was the last three-act. I did take a little part in some of the musicals that Ron Eichler did, but I only took a very small part in them, really.