

Following this interview, Felicity Morgan received a letter dated 17/10/08 from John Baily containing some further comments. Some of these comments have been inserted in the text in italics. The remainder are written at the end of the transcript, also in italics.

Transcript of interview with John Baily

TAPE 1

00.00 This is Felicity Morgan interviewing Mr John Baily on 6 August, 2008 at his home in South Australia, about his contribution to the Arts during the Dunstan Decade. This recording is being made for the Don Dunstan Foundation Oral History Project and will be deposited in the Flinders University Library, Don Dunstan Special Collection, and in the State Library of South Australia.

00.29 Good morning John, and thank you for taking time to do this interview with me.

Good morning

00.33 John you're a man who has, in his time, worn quite a lot of hats in the art world in South Australia: Inspector of Art in the South Australian Department of Education; Director of the Art Gallery of South Australia; First Chair of Trustees of the Festival Centre; Chair of the Visual Arts Board of the Australia Council, not to mention other appointments on various arts related Boards, Committees and Councils. In which role did you have most contact with Don Dunstan?

Definitely in my role as Director of the Art Gallery of South Australia and, of course, with the Festival Centre. Don was particularly interested in all aspects of the Arts so that my being in those roles certainly brought me into close contact with him.

01.36 Yes indeed. Do you want to, or mind if I start perhaps, dividing up the various hats that you wore, and we start on the Festival Centre. Are you happy to do that?

Certainly, yes.

01.52 Tell me about the circumstances which led you to becoming very involved in this from the beginning, I believe in 1971 when the Festival Centre Trust was first established as a statutory body?

That's right. I became Chairman of the Trust when the project was still just a hole in the ground, and how I became Chairman was just as a result of a telephone call I had from Don who said, quite out of the blue as far as I was concerned, that he was looking for a Chairman for the Trust and hoped that I would accept it. And it was a complete surprise to me, because until that time, I'd really taken no particular interest in what was going on down on that site. But it became really, for me, one of the best things I was ever asked to do. It was interesting and enjoyable and I had some very good people to work with.

03.16 Your knowledge, or your friendship, or your background at the Gallery was what prompted Don to contact you, do you think?

Oh I should say so. I think that he... I'm aware that he thought I was doing a reasonable job down there (Chuckles), otherwise he wouldn't have been interested.

03.44 Yes. Well, he was quoted as saying [about the first Trustees] 'I wanted people who were acquainted with the Arts and had some managerial experience, yet were not major players among potential users of the Centre'. * He also found other like-people to make up the rest of the Trustees at the time?

Well, we were a fairly diverse bunch you know; there was a magistrate, there was a lawyer, there was somebody experienced in local government matters, that kind of thing.

04.29 Mmm. Well interesting thing that you say...

Oh, and Ruby Litchfield.

04.34 Yes, what was her particular qualification?

Well, she was well experienced in Arts affairs.

04.45 As an administrator?

As a good person! (Chuckles)

04.52 A good committee person – to get things done?

Yes. She'd been on other committees.

04.58 Right. Colin Horne, I don't know whether you're familiar with the chapter that he wrote in this book, *The Dunstan Decade - Social Democracy at the State Level?* * Colin Horne wrote quite extensively about Don Dunstan's achievements, but one of the criticisms that he made in his chapter was that sometimes Don Dunstan's Boards were a bit dilettante and amateurish in their membership to cope with the demands of highly professional organisations. Was any criticism, public or private, levelled at your Trust members?

I think we were pretty free of that kind of criticism, but of course, you don't always, when you're there, you're not always aware of what's being said behind your back!

05.59 What about publicly, in the press and so on, when you were first appointed?

No we didn't have much problem there. There were odd controversies that came up that involved the public, like the selection of artists for providing the works of art...(next words unintelligible).

06.22 (Laughs). We'll get to that in a minute

Alright. We'll leave it for a minute.

06.26 Yes, I wanted to get to the Hajek sculpture a little bit later. Don Dunstan was pretty closely involved and, of course, was responsible for, the

expansion of the Festival Theatre into a much larger complex - what we know today as the Festival Centre. How were you and the other Trustees involved in this expansion, and how did you interact with Don and his enthusiasm to drive the extension?

It wasn't a constant presence in the work that we were doing. He wasn't standing over us at all. He seemed to have trust in the Trustees and in the Manager, Anthony Steel.

07.33 Before Anthony Steel came on board, of course, you were already a Trust in existence by then, and I was wondering whether he [Don] involved you in his thoughts about making it into the complex, as opposed to being just the Festival Theatre?

Those decisions had already been made when we came in.

07.58 Had they?

Yes. We had no major decision of that kind to make. It was already being done by the architects.

08.14 Yes. I see.

We had constant dialogue with the architects. They were always there for part of our meetings – at least part of our meetings, because there was always something to discuss on the progress of the job.

08.37 Well for the first, what was it, two years or even a bit more than two years, you were basically overseeing a building site weren't you?

Yes.

08.50 So it was an architectural project rather than an arts project! (Laughs)

At that stage it was, but we did have aesthetic decisions to make, and somebody had to make them (Laughs), and the architects would come with questions like, what colour should be painted under the soffits where the backs of seats were; what the colours of the walls would be and so on.

09.23 And there was one quite well known decision, a little bit later I think, about fly lines and not having sufficient money in the budget to put in extra fly lines, do you remember that?

No, I don't remember that.

09.38 It was something that just involved Anthony Steel perhaps.

No, I don't remember.

09.42 Did Don take an active role in coming in and putting on a hard hat and visiting the site? Did you take him around at all?

Occasional, not frequent. It's a funny thing; we were always aware of his keen interest, but, of course, he was a very busy person and he wouldn't have, at any time, had a lot of time to spend in one place like ours.

10.26 And when you say you didn't have that much communication with him, that he wasn't standing over your shoulder, were there times when the Board made a decision that then had to be referred to him?

I think that would be so, yes.

10.45 And was he usually agreeable with your decisions, do you recall?

Don was not a difficult man, in any sense. In all of the contacts I had with him, both from the Art gallery and from the Festival Centre, I would have said he was an easy man to get along with, um...

And

Perhaps that was because he always agreed with what we were putting up!
(Laughs) So we didn't have conflicts.

11.30 He was well known to take the advice of his advisors, would you agree with that?

Yes, I think so. But he was also exceedingly bright about matters pertaining to the Arts, and he always seemed to breeze quickly past things that he understood and agreed with without dragging out long discussions on them. But if there was something, and this is where he was cluey, if there was something that wasn't quite well enough thought through and needed a bit more work, he would pick it up, he would spot it very readily, and we'd go on from there.

12.29 And so he would want further discussion on a particular issue?

Yes, sometimes want a bit more work done.

12.35 Yes. That must have been quite comforting for you as the Chair of the Board to have him so engaged?

Yes. His, so far as I'm concerned, his knowledge of the Arts was more general than particular. You know I wouldn't say he had an encyclopaedic knowledge of the details of a particular artist, but he had a very strong overall understanding of [the] Arts and arts movements and all aspects relating to arts in society.

13.32 Well, from the theatrical point of view, I believe when the Playhouse was built it was magnificent in its back, behind the scenes, area with workshops and everything, the building was designed so everything could be made on site.

That's right. We had a workshop, prop shop – it had another name I can't remember –

14.04 Mmm. Yes. What were the main things that the Trust were concerned with in those, well all through, your Chairmanship?

Oh all manner of things. I mean everything related to staffing and the way the place was going to impinge on the public were all our concern. But we also had good professionals giving advice and very often we only needed to nod our heads.

Right. Well you mention staff, which brings me to Anthony Steel, well actually it doesn't, it brings me to the very first Trust employee, Dennis Smith.

Yes. I remember Dennis.

Technical Manager, and I believe he worked out of your offices in the Art Gallery. How was that?

Did he? (Chuckles)

15.12 You remember that?

(Laughs) No I don't remember that, but it's quite possible...

15.17 I guess he had no-where else to sit?

If we had a spare room it might have been given to him to use. *I do now remember. Dennis using a spare office at the Art Gallery – but he was usually at the site and seldom at the Gallery.*

15.27 Yes. I read that in some or other of the background of the Festival Centre, I thought it was rather amusing anyway.

You've got to forgive me if I've got lapses of memory, some things are not all that clear.

15.42 Not at all, you're doing fantastically. Moving from Dennis then, who I believe – just one more question about him – played a very important role in the early stages?

Oh yes, he was a very good officer, very good officer.

15.56 You also had a very good sound person, Dennis Pryce, no not Dennis. Do you remember him; involved in all the acoustics? (Actually it was Mike Pryce)

No. Sorry

16.08 No, okay. Anthony Steel always said , or did say, that he never felt alone, and that the Trustees were very supportive of him. What was your role in the appointment of Anthony Steel as the first General Manager?

I didn't really have a role

The Trustees didn't have a role?

Well we had to examine his credentials (Laughs) and decide whether he was appropriate to appoint, but he was very much Don's nominee.

16.51 Was he

He was definitely Don's nominee.

16.55 I know that Len Amadio went over to the UK...

Well, when I say, Don, it might well have been Len, but I wasn't to know that. It was given to us to look at.

17.13 Did you have other contenders for that position at that stage?

I don't believe we were discussing anyone in particular.

17.28 Um, I believe that...

Anthony, Anthony Steel was a great success though.

17.33 Yes, I realise that. When he first arrived he was the General Manager of the Festival Centre, but he very, well reasonably, quickly slipped into also being the Artistic Director of the next Festival. Was that tricky or complicated or did it happen quite smoothly?

I think he made it happen quite smoothly. It was even appropriate that he should be in the two roles at the time.

18.11 What was the state of the Festival at that stage, do you recall?

I don't remember. Of course so far as the Festival as concerned, I was fully occupied on planning the Art Gallery's contribution to the Festival.

18.33 Ah, I read in one of your bios that you were a member of the Festival Planning Committee and I was going to ask you what that involved.

I don't remember doing that!

18.49 Did you not just say that you were involved in the Art Gallery's planning?

I was in the Art Gallery's

18.59 But not with the Festival Planning Committee? But the Art Gallery did contribute to the Festival?

Yes, we did. I've got to try and recollect now. Yes, we did have meetings of a Festival Planning Committee to which I would contribute suggestions for our contributions to it – the choice of exhibitions in particular that we were going to have.

19.40 Yes, right. Was Don, no let me go back, the Board of Governors of the Festival of the Arts were, may I say, rather conservative, I believe.

I believe, yes.

19.57 And you were never one I presume?

No.

20.00 How did the Trustees of the Festival Centre interact or intersect with the Board of Governors of the Board of the Festival?

We didn't have much to do with them. At our meetings it would be reported to us what had been going on, or maybe what had been said, or what had been decided, but we didn't have meetings with them ourselves.

20.36 Even when the next Festival was upcoming?

No, no we didn't.

20.41 Another thing that Colin Horne suggests is the relationship between the Trust and the Festival Board of Governors was hard to define and sometimes contentious.* I wonder if you found that?

I doubt if it was ever very contentious. Hard to define sounds reasonable enough.

21.08 Particularly when Anthony Steel was wearing both hats, as it were, he was answerable to both organisations.

Nothing ever really seemed difficult to manage. That's my recollection of it anyway.

21.37 Right. Did Don get involved in any of that kind of thing?

There was no conflict. No conflict between the bodies. Oh sorry..

21.45 No, I beg your pardon I shouldn't have spoken over you earlier. I just wondered if Don at any stage got involved with input into....well if there were no differences he would never have needed to be brought in. But do you think it was a function of his appointments of you people on the Trust that made things go so smoothly? Or was it Anthony?

I think we were all experienced committee people, and it is a kind of talent (Chuckles) to be able to survive committees. I don't think we were about to give trouble.

22.33 Yes, well you're right, committees are not the easiest thing to be on sometimes. But let's move on the openings of the Festival Centre. You were the Chair of the Trustees at two of those, two out of the three I believe because you'd left Adelaide by the time of the third one.

The third what?

22.56 The third opening. There was the opening of the Festival Theatre, then there was the opening of the Drama complex and then there was the opening of the Plaza.

Mmm

23.12 Am I right?

You probably know better than I do. I only remember the big opening.

The first one

We had lots of events there.... when a mural was unveiled Don spoke then.

23.39 You remember the big first opening - that was the Gough Whitlam opening, wasn't it?

Oh yes. I remember that. I'll never forget that one.

23.47 Can you tell us a little bit about that from your point of view?

From my point of view?

Yes.

Oh I was scared stiff! (Chuckles). I had a real panic attack as we were just lining up to go on the stage, and it was Margaret Whitlam who was just ahead of me in the line who started asking me questions about things and talking to me and the panic evaporated.

24.32 That's good.

Because I was going to have to introduce the Premier, I think. You'd probably have the programme.

24.45 He gave his famous "They said it couldn't be done" speech at that one, didn't he?

Mmm, that'd be it, yes. But sometimes I did that sort of thing quite well, but I didn't always.

25.12 So apart from being nervous, tell me a bit about the ambience and the excitement of the whole thing.

Well it was a very exciting occasions. It was a big thing for Adelaide.

25.28 Two thousand odd people invited?

Oh yes, yes.

25.34 Who worked out the guest list?

I don't know.

25.37 It would've been the Trustees though, wouldn't it?

May well have done. I don't remember particular things like that. Too much went on. (Chuckles)

25.56 Who was going to get invited and who was left out would have been occupying the minds of a lot of Adelaidians I imagine.

Yes, I should think so – couldn't help that.

26.05 (Chuckles) Yes. Let's go on to the opening of the Festival Centre Plaza.

That was when the Queen was there.

26.18 That was when the Queen was there but you were no longer the Chair I believe?

No, I think I was the Chair

26.27 You were?

I was at the occasion.

Were you?

I shook hands with the Queen

26.34 Okay. I'm getting that information from Lance Campbell's book * and there's a photo of your successor to the Chair, so that's where I got that information from.

Well I was there.

27.02 Right, I imagine you were. When did you leave for Sydney? When did you go to Sydney, because...

November '75

27.17 Well I don't think the opening of the Hajek [sculpture] was until '76 was it, when the Queen visited? (Correction, it was in March 1977). You got invited back perhaps?

I must have done

27.29 Yes. Anyway tell me about it because I believe that [the Hajek sculpture] was quite controversial, and it was down to you, I think you made the suggestion in the first place?

That's what they say (Laughs)

27.41 Is that not true?

I'm not really sure. Someone suggested the Hajek and I was making a trip to Europe and I was asked to go and call on him, so I did that. But Don Dunstan called on him too at some stage there. It's hard for me to remember.

28.34 Was Don there... do you remember if Don Dunstan went after you had suggested that he go?

I can't be sure about that, honestly, the sequence of things.

28.54 It was pretty radical wasn't it? The sculpture [pieces] was pretty radical - how did they go down - did Don have to be convinced after he'd seen Hajek overseas and so on?

No he was impressed, favourably impressed with the idea..(Laughs) *Regarding the*

Hajek development of the Festival Centre Plaza, it would not be generally known that Hajek was not the first artist approached to present ideas. A young (then) sculptor names Nigel Lendon, who had shown talent for environmental installations, was invited to apply himself to it. Perhaps he found the project a bit daunting or for some other reason, he declined the invitation. One thing, I think, that has never been understood by Adelaidians is what an environmental sculptor Hajek was in Europe, at that time, and the many big commissions he had had.

29.20 The Plaza is still, in my opinion, I shouldn't be giving my opinion on the tape but I am, a rather large expanse of concrete that is in danger of becoming a wasteland, or has been several times over the past because several bits of the Hajek sculpture have been dismantled I believe.

Mmm, I've seen it

29.42 When you had to deal with that, as Chair of the Trustees, this massive expanse of concrete, was it a bit intimidating? How did you feel about it?

It was a terribly hard problem. We knew that from the beginning that it was going to be like a wasteland. One of the suggestions that was brought forward was that we create an orangery – like a whole mass of orange trees in big tubs. It was quite a nice idea, might have been a better one, but the Hajek was pretty successful I thought.

30.35 Yes, it's hard to imagine quite how it looked when it was first installed because it has undergone some changes.

Yes

30.50 But Don was using your artistic experience and advice by accepting it, do you think?

Oh yes, I think perhaps, but I'm not sure about that. He really responded to it enthusiastically.

31.18 Did he see any examples of it back at Otto Hajek's home? Did he get some concept drawings or something?

Oh yes. There were books too. Books with illustrations. I've got a couple of them here.

31.35 How was it received by the people of Adelaide? Did that get splashed across the press?

South Australian artists were put out that we were getting, in some cases, overseas artists involved in the selection of art works around the Centre. Our principle was that the Centre being a centre for international art events, that's theatre and music as well, that the art works should be similarly international in character. All the time, of course, we did have it in mind to give a number of commissions to South Australian artists anyway, but we didn't want to neglect international artists if what they had seemed appropriate.

33.11 Mmm. So you as an artist and as the [SA Art] Gallery Director at the time, did you get off-side with a lot of the art community here, you personally?

Not to a serious extent. There were a few letters in the papers. A few people saying things; I mean it was in the press that there was some sort of conflict about it, but it wasn't to a degree that really worried me.

33.59 And did it worry Don?

No, I don't think so, not a bit. I'm sure not.

34.10 (Laughs) Moving on to your Art Gallery time now, that is unless there is anything more about your time as a Trustee of the Festival Centre that you'd like to add?

No, I don't think so

34.29 Any funny stories that involved Don, or encounters with him that you recall?

No. (Pause) I wasn't...my relationship with Don was always related to work. We weren't close friends, socially. Social events that were also, like exhibitions openings and things like that, we'd see each other and get on well, but we weren't so very close. Just then there was something that I was going to say, but it slipped away again – that's what happens to me.

35.44 It happens to us all John! Do you want me to switch off for a minute?

Yes, do that

35.49 Okay. Just switching off for a moment

35.51 END OF TAPE 1

TAPE 2

00.00 This is Felicity Morgan continuing the interview with Mr John Baily on 6 August, 2008. We just stopped the tape briefly for a moment and we're picking up where John is going to tell us about a meeting he had with Don and his entourage in France. Go ahead John.

Yes, I'd been at a meeting, a UNESCO meeting in New York and I somehow fitted into Don's programme. We did a tour by train around parts of France looking at the Maisons de Culture which were very interesting from the point of view of the Art Gallery and of the Festival Centre. The French gave a lot more money from government sources to fostering the arts than Australia did, and, what's the name of the place?...

01.24 In France?

Yes. There was one place in particular he wanted to see, oh dear... *The place we visited, where the French chefs are trained is Grenoble, a very prestigious and famous training school.*

And we visited this place, were given a meal and were attended to by the young people who were chefs-in-training. Don was interested to see how this place worked because I think he had in mind to set up some kind of establishment in Adelaide. And I think he did, which means that he followed through from the result of that visit.

02.41 That's interesting because it was under Don Dunstan, I believe, that the Regency TAFE College which is a chef school, I believe he established that. Is that what you're referring to – the Regency College?

Yes, it would be.

03.00 Yes, well he was very interested [in food] wasn't he?

Yes, it's all related to that, but I can't think of the name

03.09 I was going to say don't worry about it because you've probably got a reference here [in your house] and I can just add it to the transcript. So don't worry about it, we'll put it in. Of course food and wine was one of his [Don's] great enthusiasms.

Yes, of course

03.33 Did you have a wonderful time when you were there?

Oh yes, it was good fun. He was always very straight-forward though. He didn't muck about. I admired the way he operated.

03.43 And out of context – [when] he was away from his political enemies and so on, in a place like France in his milieux of food and wine, did he take on a different persona; did he become more expansive or less formal?

Not really. Not so far as I observed. He was always straight-forward and business-like, anyway when I was around.

04.15 If we could just move on to the visual arts now because I think you've said everything you want to say about the Festival Centre, haven't you?

Oh yes, I think so.

04.27 You said at the beginning of the interview that you had more to do with Don in your role as Director of the Art Gallery than you did in anything else?

Yes. Well he was my Minister so every year we had to have a bit of a conference on what the budget was going to be.

4.50 I've got a question here that plays into that comment perfectly. How big a role did the Dunstan government play in funding and promoting the visual arts in South Australia?

He's the prime example of a leader who had an interest in the Arts and fostered them well.

05.16 Visual Arts?

Yes. All Arts really.

05.22 Was his government generous towards the Art Gallery during your time as Director?

Yes, I think...I couldn't complain. I know the Director of the Museum was always jealous. He thought we got a better deal than he did!

05.48 I think history would actually prove that you did get a better deal than the Museum. You got quite a big lump of money towards the end of Don Dunstan's period where that big refurbishment went on. Did that all start during your time?

After my time

06.08 Oh after your time. Okay. Did he support the Gallery in so far as he always showed up at openings and that sort of thing?

Oh yes, yes. He did what you'd expect a minister to do. He was there whenever it was appropriate.

06.35 And took interstate and foreign dignitaries when they came?

Yes. I think so.

06.46 You would have been involved in that of course, wouldn't you?

Oh yes.

06.50 Did it [the Gallery] expand in your time into different fields or was it primarily a small and perfectly formed boutique gallery even when you were there with ceramics and decorative arts and sculpture and so on?

The biggest changes, so far as the collection was concerned, during my time there, were the growth of the South East Asian collection which rapidly became one of the best of any museum. And the other thing was in the exposition of contemporary art. Before I went there it was a very conservative gallery which didn't concern itself with contemporary art at all; there was almost nothing in the collection that you'd say was contemporary art - a couple of modern English painters - so we set out to remedy that in the belief that contemporary culture was our own living culture and what was happening there was of some consequence to the society of the time. Well he went along with that, Don Dunstan went along with that idea completely and gave me encouragement to do it, and we did it in all sorts of ways; we started those *LINK* Exhibitions. I remember people had been critical of the Gallery for not exposing contemporary art so much, well I put together a bunch of the people who had been most critical and had a long session with them and out of that came the *LINK* Exhibitions.

10.03 Who were those critics?

Mainly people from the Art School, from the South Australian School of Art

10.13 And you actually were on the Board or on the Council of that institution, were you not?

No

10.22 (Reading) Member of the Council of the South Australian School of Art. No, that's wrong, is it?

Oh I thought...

10.28 Well, (Laughs) according to your biography you were, although I can't quite find it at the moment. (Correction, interviewer is mistaken). Now, these LINK Exhibitions – how did they work?

Well, we'd choose, often a young, contemporary artist and mount an exhibition of new work so that people could see and experience something that they hadn't experienced before – new work. And some of them have become very important people.

11.17 And the word LINK derived from your links with the contemporary...

Yes, of course, it had to be, something like that

11.37. (Laughs) I wondered whether you'd linked in with these [then] new regional art centres, or was that before that?

No, no. There was another thing we did was to fit out a truck for a travelling exhibition and we went around, but that was before there was Country Arts.

12.00 Oh yes, it would have been. And when you say that Don was supportive of these innovations into contemporary art and into South East Asian art, was he supportive through the bag of money that you got, is that how he supported you?

I generally felt with him that we got a reasonable deal, considering the priorities that he had to wrestle with. I was always confident that he was treating us quite well.

12.45 Of course, one of his interests as well was the South East Asian area so he would've been delighted at your move into that.

Yes, and it was important.

12.58 Indeed. Did he suggest or did he agree most of the time?

He agreed in that instance.

13.06 Did he suggest other things?

We had a curator of decorative arts, Dick Richards. Do you know Dick Richards?

I'm going to interview him sometime very soon

Well, Dick was really behind that – to put that collection together.

13.30 Very good, very good and nice to hear that the Premier supports things like the Art Gallery. I just wanted to touch on a couple of architectural matters now. According to your biography you were a member of the Council of the

National Trust and a Member of the Council of the Faculty of Architecture and Town Planning at the University of Adelaide and I wondered if you gave Don any advice regarding the harmonising between his government and the National Trust and State Heritage Commission specifically when it had to do with Edmund Wright House and Ayers House that he was so keen to preserve. Did you play a part in that?

I wasn't involved.

14.13 You weren't – not even in your role with the National Trust?

I wasn't involved, no.

14.17 Because he had to interact with the State Heritage Commission

I don't even remember being on the Council of the National Trust

14.29 According to your biography you were

Where, what's the source of this?

14.33 This is (showing copy) Artists and Galleries of Australia, Max Germain, 1985

That's a funny old one.

14.43 Alright, anyway you had nothing to do with that particular thing.

I'll give you later a better...

14.52 A better biography, thank you, thank you so much. They were hard to find actually.

(Interviewee coughing)

14.59 Do you want to stop for a few minutes; we've been going nearly an hour

It mightn't be a bad idea.

15.05 Yes, okay, we're going to stop for a few minutes.

15.06 END of TAPE 2

TAPE 3

00.00 This is Felicity Morgan interviewing Mr John Baily on 6 August 2008, and this is a pick-up from Tape 2.

00.34 Did you engage with Don Dunstan at all in relation to art through the Department of Education?

Not really.

00.46 [In] your role as Inspector of Art?

That was all beforehand

Ah was it.

And it was with the other government (Laughs)

00.55 Okay (Laughs) So when you took up your position in the Art Gallery, what date was that, could you tell me?

Yes, it was 1967

01.05 1967. Did you give away your other role[s] as Inspector of Art and your teaching role?

Oh yes, yes. I moved from being Inspector of Art to Director of the Art Gallery.

01.16 Right. We've talked about the Art Gallery, but you also played another role on a more national scale in pretty similar years during the Dunstan period, I believe '73 to '76 you were Chairman of the Visual Arts Board of the Australia Council?

I was the first Chairman of the Visual Arts Board.

01.43 Yes. Can you talk a bit about that and whether you had anything to do with Don Dunstan in that, and your role and what you did there?

Not much to do with Don there. I had to ask him whether I should take it. I was invited by "Nugget" Coombs to take on that and I felt I couldn't agree until I talked to Don about it, so we had a little conversation about how that might impinge on the other duties that I had, and seemed to think it was all for the good that I should do it, so there was no problem.

02.46 And was he of the opinion that it was for the good because it was raising the profile of this state and the town of Adelaide?

I should say that he thought of all things like that, yes.

03.02 Did any...was there any filtering through of benefits from your involvement on the Visual Arts Board to South Australia or Adelaide?

I think it's inevitable that something takes place when you're doing a role like that, but it wasn't obvious, I don't think.

03.32 What was the role? What was your actual function in it?

What, as...?.

03.38 As Chair of the Visual Arts Board

Chairman of the Visual Arts Board. It's really the body that advises the federal government – the Australia Council does – so that it's quite important in that respect, and, of course, it has a lot of money and a big programme. And you're generating exhibitions and you're rewarding artists by way of grants. It's a funding

body so it's responsible for funding exhibitions when they come around. It's a very lively thing to be doing, so far as art in Australia is concerned.

04.48 Indeed. And were there any, and I don't want to make this sound sinister in any way, but I wondered whether any members of Don Dunstan's government put forward or recommended, or Don himself recommended, people that the Visual Arts Board might consider giving a grant to?

I don't think there was any occasion when that would have happened.

05.23 Mmm. There was another of your colleagues on the Arts Council, Kym Bonython, from South Australia.

Yes. I knew Kym well.

05.36 Yes. He was on another sub-committee I believe, the Crafts Inquiry?

Ah yes, that's right, the Crafts Inquiry

05.54 Yes. So your time on the Visual Arts Board really didn't intersect much with the government of South Australia much at all – Don Dunstan's government?

No, not directly. Only insofar as you're generating activity that goes around the whole country.

06.19 Yes. I wondered if Adelaide or South Australia [may] had sometimes been overlooked, if it wasn't for the guardianship of South Australians like yourself who were keen to make sure that everything visited here?

Well, yes, you had to be a bit on your guard. On the Visual Arts Board at that time there was a group from Sydney and a group from Melbourne, (Coughing in background) and they were very keen to push the interests of their own people. So that, I suppose in that respect, I was able to guard a bit the interest of the promotion of art things in South Australia.

07.18 Yes. You didn't find that you were being squeezed a bit?

Oh yes.

07.25 By New South Wales and by Victoria?

Oh yes. Victorians were masters at it

07.33 Did you become masterful?

(Laughs) That's for someone else to say!

07.40 (Laughs) Well, I'm glad to hear it! And in light of that you can hardly say it was surprising that Don was keen for you to do it.

Well, that's true, yes, that's so, I guess. He would've been clueyer than I would have been to the spin-offs that there might be for a thing like that.

08.08 He was being politically astute.

Yes.

08.12 Would you say he was an astute man?

I would, in all of my dealings with him. I would say he was the most astute of any of the political figures that I had to have dealings with

08.34 And previously you'd had dealings with the Playford government of course, and then the Steele Hall?

Yes. For a short time Steele Hall took the ministership of...was Minister for the Arts, so I was going to him, so I had a comparison to make with Don. Steele was alright...

09.11 Share that comparison with me will you?

He was alright, but totally different talking to him and talking to Don. I mean with Don, in my field anyway, he was very cluey.

09.43 And you didn't find Steele Hall so engaged in the Arts area?

No. He always seemed to be thinking about something else.

09.54 He does admit that he was not sort of an "Arts" man. *Stateline* the programme that goes out on the ABC on a Friday night, just a couple of weeks back had a little five-minute story, did you see it – on celebrating the 35 years of the Festival Centre? *

Oh yea

10.18 You did. It was interesting because they took it from Steele Hall's point of view. Do you remember they walked him through the galleries at the Centre, and so on, but...

I liked him. I liked Steele Hall. I'm just drawing a comparison.

10.36 He [Steele Hall] was quoted as saying that "the Labor Party looks after history much better than we do", and that "Don was the best publicist ever to be elected in Australia" and I took those [quotes] off that tape. What would you say to that?

You could perhaps say that. But I never felt that he [Don Dunstan] was looking at it all that hard. I always thought that Don took it pretty calmly.

11.120 You don't think he was a self-promoter?

I wouldn't say that. No, I wouldn't say that

11.38 There was an enormous whirlwind of Arts policies during his time. On the whole, and from your point of view, from all the things that you were involved in, how would you describe the policies that he introduced?

You'll have to remind me of what they were

11.58 Well, for a start in the Performing Arts - setting up all the statutory bodies – the theatre, the opera, the dance company. The Festival Centre, the arts and crafts movement with the Jam Factory, you know, and not only that, but his liberalising...

I usually agreed with all the things he did. I mean we were just on the same sort of wave-length. I admired what he was doing to promote the Arts. If he did the Jam Factory, well that was a wonderful idea.

12.44 I believe the mover and shaker in that was your colleague from the Art Gallery...

Dick Richards, yes. Oh Dick was a good person.

12.56 But there was something else about Don Dunstan maybe we could touch on – there was a sort of sense of excitement wasn't there, in Adelaide at the time that he was the Premier, that new things were happening, that old conservative...

Yes, all of those things are right, good things were happening, but it wasn't like get up and go; he didn't generate an atmosphere where everything was go-go-go. He was calmer than that, more deliberate. He did these things without creating a lot of fuss about them. I think what you described about him being the greatest publicist is much more in other people's view; it's what people want to be able to say rather than the truth of it.

14.14 Of course I was only quoting, that wasn't my quote

I know, I know

14.18 [It was] Steele Hall, and one can understand a little bit why he said that. So do you think that comes out of political rivalry or personal jealousies to do with Don?

I don't know. Well, there had to be political rivalry there so it's only natural. But other people have said that, but it's not my experience of Don Dunstan. He really wasn't a pusher. He didn't make a big noise about the things he was doing; he just did them calmly.

15.12 You said a little while ago that you didn't have a personal relationship with Don; that it was always on a business level, at least your businesses.

Yes. He never visited my house and I never visited his.

15.28 No, I appreciate that. But you did have personal interaction when you were standing side by side at gallery openings and so on
Oh yes, yes.

15.38 How was his manner – did he find conversation easy, for example?

I would never have doubted that, I don't think. We did communicate quite well together. Maybe with other people he didn't.

16.04 Yes. Did you have much dealing with his number one [Arts] officer, Len Amadio?

Oh yes, quite a lot. Len was one of the people that was in the scene, you know, of the scene.

16.32 Even though you said it wasn't go-go-go there was, as I understand from people who lived here at the time and were involved, a tremendous sense of excitement, that old conservative barriers were a being, not torn down, but were being dissipated, and there was a new sort of breeze that was blowing through conservative Adelaide. Would you go along with that?

In general, yes, but it was on account of the things that were being done. it wasn't really reflected in Don's manner, that's what I'm trying to say.

17.18 No, I suppose it was more the aura of the Dunstan era.

It was what went out. Because to talk to Don wasn't to get whipped up, you know, into any sort of state of excitement.

17.36 So you were never intimidated by him, or nervous in his company?

No, no, far from it. I found it easy, pleasant to talk to him.

17.51 That's interesting, that's good. I'm pretty close to finishing now, but one question I wanted to ask you. With all the innovation in the Arts you were in the thick of things with the Gallery and the Festival Centre, and the liberalisation and enlightenment of the Dunstan government and his public policies in a number of fields, in late 1975 you took up an appointment as Principal of Sydney College of the Arts. Why did you choose to leave South Australia at the time?

Well, I'd had a visit (out of the blue) from Gerry Gleeson, the number one public servant for NSW, with whom I was already acquainted, who described the new College of the Arts project and the principalship in a very attractive way and left me in no doubt that he had me in mind for it. It was an attractive proposal and rather flattering to be head-hunted in that way. I never really applied for it, but sent over my CV.

You didn't feel a sense of...

Betrayal? (Laughs)

18.40 (Laughs) No not betrayal, that wasn't what I meant, but did you feel you were leaving a state that was more exciting or...

No, it was an exciting prospect to be Principal of the Sydney College of the Arts. I spent a lot of time in Sydney, through the Visual Arts Board. I felt I knew the scene in Sydney almost as well as I knew Adelaide, and I was an educator. I was really returning to my profession rather than branching out into something entirely new.

19.37 What about leaving the Festival Centre before its final completion?

It was virtually completed, and operating

19.51 Yes, the last opening I think was probably only about six or seven months after you left. (The official opening of the Festival Centre Plaza by the Queen was 22 March 1977)

When did the government change after I left?

20.10 After you left it stayed with Dunstan until he retired in '79, but then I think [Des] Corcoran had a year or something and then the next election, I think, was 1980.

Because the government changed not long after I left, and the government sacked all the Trustees. Changed them

20.35 Oh is that right? When the Tonkin government came in?

Yes.

20.38 Well, that wasn't actually until 1980, I don't think.

No it was earlier than that.

20.47 So all those Trustees were continuous with you until your departure in '75?

Mmm, yes.

20.53 And then I believe, according to this book here (Points to Lance Campbell's book), David Wynn took over as the Chair?

Yes, that's right. He took over from me. But I'm quite sure I'm right, there must have been...when did Corcoran come in?

21.16 After Don resigned with ill health in '79.

And Don had been continuously Premier until then?

21.34 Yes, he had. He'd had a number of elections, but he fought them all and won them. So what we're looking at in this whole, in these oral histories, is what we are calling the Dunstan Decade, which is '67 when first came in, remember he had that short period of time in, before Steele Hall, and then from '70 through to '79 when he was the incumbent all that time.

Mmm. Well, we've always said that if I'd stuck around in South Australia I wouldn't have been there for all that long because it all changed.

22.23 Mmm. If the Trustees, and I don't know whether that's correct but I'm sure it must be, if the Trustees were all got rid of, then one can extrapolate from that, that the Tonkin government believed they were political appointments. What would you say about that?

You'd think that they might think that.

22.47 Would you say you fitted in as a political appointment?

No, I would never have thought of such a thing.

22.54 What about your other fellow Trustees?

Same with them. You'd never call Ruby Litchfield a political appointment.

You wouldn't?

No.

23.07 A couple of the people, the Trustees, were members of the [Adelaide City] Council, weren't they?. I think that was something that had to be.

[James] Bowen

23.15 Bowen was, yes.

And there was David um...

23.26 Bright?

David Bright. He's a magistrate now.

23.31 Yes, I think so, yes. And then you had the composer Richard Meale, and a judge, John Roder, and Ruby Litchfield.

That's right.

23.43 It sounds like a lively Trustee group.

Well it was a good Board. It was really good. Meetings were pleasant, and helped by Anthony's expertise.

23.57 Yes. He attended Board meetings I presume?

Oh yes. He had to present the material

24.06 Well, I wondered if there was anything that we hadn't covered and whether you'd like to add anything from a personal point of view, or a work point of view, wearing any of these hats of Boards, Committees and Councils that you were on, about the time that you had and were associating with Don, or his government?

I don't think so. I've been trying to think, before you came, about what I might talk about, but you know it's receding. It's receding into the distance a bit.

25.03 Yes, well that's why I said it was important to try and capture people that do remember him. Do you think we've covered everything? Are you happy with the interview?

Yes. I think so.

Alright, well we might leave it at that.

Are you satisfied with it?

25.25 I'm very satisfied. I've been through my questions and you've answered extremely honestly. I always find there's one or two things I think 'Oh gosh, I wished I'd asked that' and that's why I always give people the opportunity to say anything at the end if they want to.

Well, if anything else crops up, you could ask me again.

25.49 I could always ask you by telephone. Alright. Well John, thank you very much indeed for giving me the time and for putting this down on the public record.

It's a pleasure. I just hope that it was alright.

26.02 It was excellent. Thank you.

As you gather I don't find it all that easy to talk....

26.09 No, and I appreciate the time you have given

....when I'm a bit choked up.

26.12 No, well we'll stop there. Thank you very much.

26.17 END OF TAPE 3

Additional comments from John Baily.

We were on Don and John terms always – I don't remember our first meeting. What I tried to convey was that I felt there was a paradox between the somewhat flamboyant image that Don projected publicly and the very straightforward, no nonsense way he had in all of our dealings. I found him easier than most people in important positions to discuss matters with because he was always straight to the point. Other leaders I have known like to display their authority even when discussing routine matters.

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