

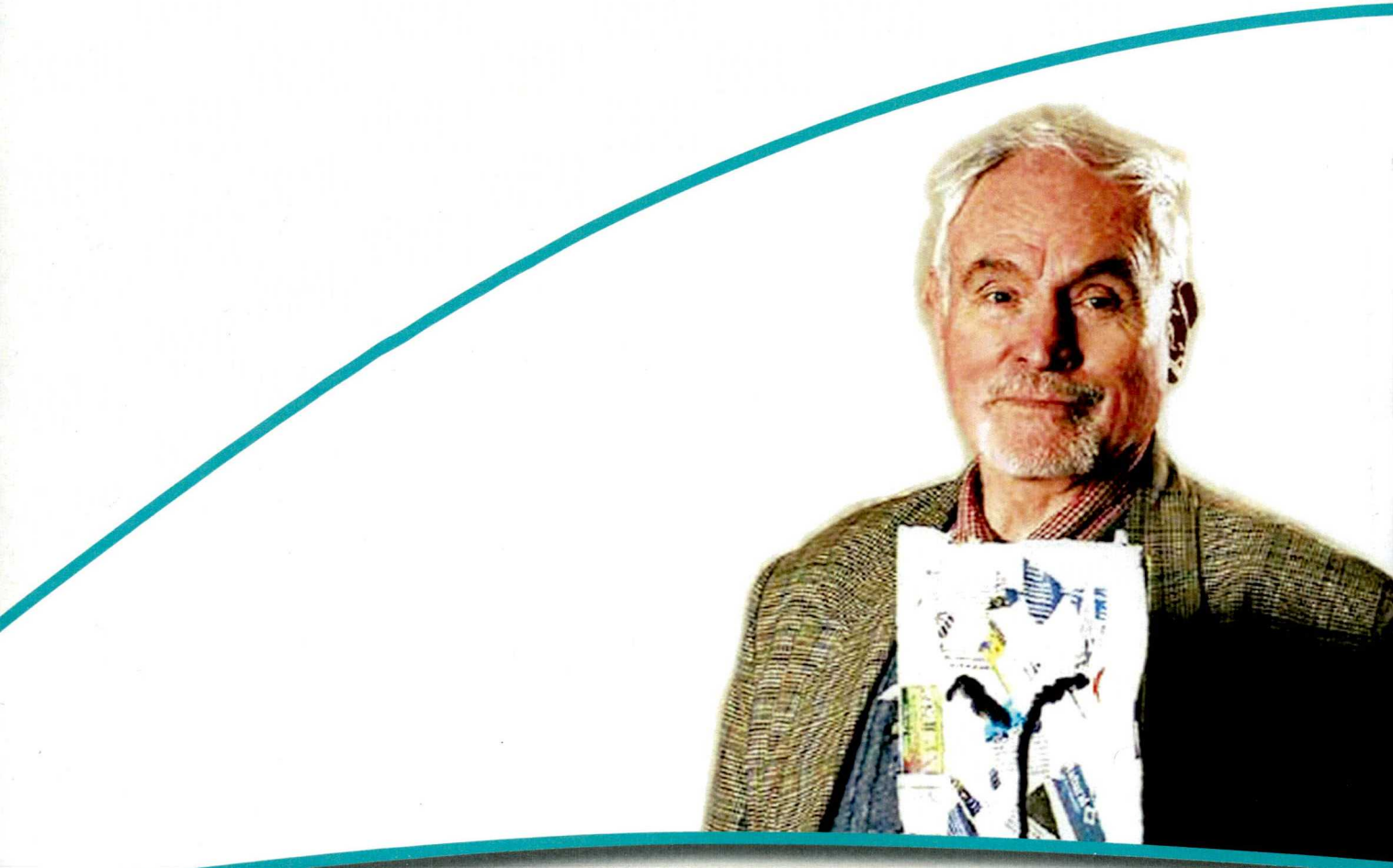
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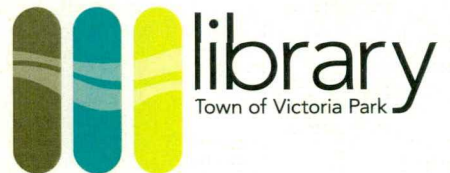
# Oral History Interview with David Crann

*interviewed by Heather Campbell*

*April 2017*



TOWN OF  
**VICTORIA PARK**



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## INTRODUCTION

David Crann, born in Khaufpur, India, in 1931, was one of three children born to David Crann snr and his wife Jean. The family originated from Scotland and returned there on occasions, but were based in India where his father worked as a train driver for the Bengal National Railway.

Most of David Crann's childhood was spent in India, including the latter years of his education at boarding school. Growing unrest associated with the coming of Indian Independence in the late 1940s forced the family to return to Scotland, leaving his sister Jean, who was married to an Anglo-Indian, in India.

National Service was still in operation in Britain at the time and as Mr Crann was approaching call-up age he had difficulty in obtaining satisfactory employment. Assisted by his parents who were concerned about the possibility of army service, Mr Crann obtained a passage to Australia, joining family friends at Woonona, a mining town in NSW. He was joined by his parents and brother a few months later. In the meantime his sister and her husband had left India and moved to Western Australia; they encouraged the family to join them, which they did in 1951.

Initially sharing a house in South Perth, the family sought a permanent home and were attracted to Victoria Park. They subsequently purchased a block on the corner of Mackie and Gloucester Street and built a monocrete house there in a cooperative arrangement with other residents. The men of the family obtained work. David Crann secured a position with William Adams and Co. Ltd. in Murray Street, where he remained for ten years until he was made redundant. Lack of suitable work, his interest in Victoria Park and in cultural and theatrical pursuits, particularly involvement with the Patch Theatre, resulted in Mr Crann supporting himself in a variety of ways including as a door-to-door salesman and as a cleaner thereafter.

In the early 1960s David Crann went to the Eastern States to further his acting career and he worked in Tivoli Theatre productions. In 1966 he returned to take up the directorship of the Patch Theatre. As the position offered little financial remuneration he continued to support himself through casual work while trying to revitalise and develop the organisation. During this period his spiritual life had become increasingly important to him; he subsequently became a Roman Catholic and was baptised and confirmed in Melbourne.

During the interview Mr Crann talks of his early life and education in India and of his family and family life there. There is also commentary on his work in Scotland before coming to Australia. There is some discussion on first impressions of Australia, attitudes of Australians to 'Poms' and life in NSW. He talks of the family's decision to come to the West and of their subsequent decision to make a permanent home in Victoria Park. He describes finding a block of land, the roles of family members who built the house in cooperation with neighbours, and the difficulties in obtaining building supplies.

Many aspects of local community life are discussed, including relationships, cohesiveness, the impact of its multicultural residents, and the activities and work of the people who lived in the area, including their religious and leisure pursuits. There are word pictures of many individual personalities which cover their contribution to the cultural, spiritual, commercial and business life of Victoria Park. Also included is commentary on individual buildings, shops and landmarks and of the changing nature of the area and life in it, from the forties onwards.

Mr Crann traces his association with the Patch Theatre, covering its acquisition and use of the Victoria Park Public Library Hall and including Mr Crann's trusteeship and subsequent



care of its library collection. The story of Patch Theatre and the Victoria Park Public Library and its book collection become interwoven. The acquisition and use of other premises, including 47 Kitchener Street, are also covered. Care should be taken when reading this transcript not to confuse this library and its board with the Town of Victoria Park Library and the Library Board of Western Australia. They are completely different and separate entities.

Mr Crann's caring and commitment to the Patch Theatre, to the church and Catholicism and to Victoria Park and its community are evident throughout the interview. In closing he reiterates that Victoria Park felt like home 'right from the beginning' and 'is still home'.

The interview which was conducted in March and April 2017 is contained in just over 3½ hrs of recording.

Researchers may also care to consult attachments which follow the transcript:

- Listing of occupants of 47 Kitchener Avenue 1930-1949
- Additional notes provided by David Crann
- Poem about Mr Crann: 'Sundays Play', published in *Truth is a Walker: selected poetry of Mick Ryan*, Edited by David Crann and Ross Kendall, Victoria Park Post, December 2005, Victoria Park.



## TRANSCRIPT

This is an interview with David Crann for the Town of Victoria Park, held at his home in Victoria Park on Monday 10 April 2017. The interviewer is Heather Campbell

David, could we start off with your full name and date and place of birth please?

**CRANN:** Yes. David Crann, born 3 February 1931 in Khaufpur, India. My father went out to India because of the General Strike. He was contracted by the Indian Government, or the Bengal National Railway, to drive trains, but my parents were poor working class, both of them. My mother was a domestic help, afterwards she worked in the factory, World War One. That was the early part of my life. Education was there also. I went to school rather late and the lady concerned, 'shouldn't you be using what we call the Waldorf system of education'. But until I was eight years of age my mother, not having very much money and with three children to take care of she used to teach us herself – her teaching would be on the basis that... She spoke endlessly in her magnificent Glasgow accent about music, religion, Mary Queen of Scots, Queen Elizabeth, the Clans. It was always done with bursts of song and rhymes and sometimes dances etc. She'd keep saying – the word I kept hearing, [spoken with a Scot's accent with a rolling 'r'] "It's pure, it's just pure." So what I found for ever afterwards and when I eventually got to go to a college, they were asking about my speech patterns. I said, "My mother's Scots. Much of the patterns you hear are the rhythms that come from her. Not that I'm speaking Scots, but you'll probably hear that I do roll my 'r's a bit further than somebody else does. And I may now and again break into, 'Nae th' new' or 'Jist a minute ur tois,' or something of that nature." But I said, "No, essentially that was it." Keep in mind also that India had its own kind of musical language. What Bowers ancestor picked up was the musicality. We had Anglo-Indians; we spoke with an Indian sound which was always very, very rhythmic. At the same time my mother's Scottish sounds. We had a lot of that; she was totally imbued in music and dance all of that sort of thing. In her kind of dance and music – music hall, not quite the classical sort of thing you might think about. We were great lovers of gramophone records. My father's great thing would be that if he had a win on the races he brought home 78 playing records (not the number 78); therefore we grew up with music constantly in our background.



HC           What sort of music?

**CRANN:**     Oh everything. It was the most Catholic thing you ever heard. Everything from Father Sidney McEwen to Harry Lauder. Incidentally my mother's maiden name was Lauder, but she was no relation to him – she kept reminding us – “No relation to him!” for some reason I don't understand. Will Fyffe. She spoke about these people, again as if she knew them personally, but that was her way. She always spoke of people in the first person, you'd say, “When was this?” She'd say, “Oh just the other day, just the other day.” I'd say, “Just the other day is one hundred years ago” She'd say, “No for me, no for me, it's just the noo.”

HC           What was your dad's name just for the record?

**CRANN:**     David. As far as the background to the Davids is concerned, I was the ninth David. The tradition in Scottish families is to keep the family names. My various cousins of which there are number all had family names belonging to those families. In one particular family it was William, Robert and James. In our section, it was David, Jean and Gordon, and so it went on. My successor is a nephew also called David, but he's not a Crann, he's got a different name. My brother was given Gordon and one of the other uncles had a second name Gordon. The Jeans, my mother's Jean, my sister's Jean, my sister-in-law's Jean. So she put her foot down and said, “Well I'm not going to have a fourth Jean in the house.” They said, “Why not, two of us will be missing soon, so you'll have just two more to go on with.”

HC           How long did you live in India when you were a child?

**CRANN:**     Oh about thirteen years altogether. I was born there, went back to Scotland for a while, paralysed all the natives because I didn't speak any English I only spoke Hindustani – I'd been brought up with a servant. My mother was obliged - the shock of her life to discover that she had to have servants whether she liked it or not because if she didn't she'd lose face and besides the economics of the place is such that you were obliged to hire these two or three servants. One to cook for you, one to clean for you and one to run your messages for you. That worried her



because she didn't know whether she was going to get the money from. The 'station committee' – just like one of those magazines, the stories you read about – came and saw her and said, "Mrs Crann, you're now in India and there's standards that you must maintain. In India you can't interfere with the economics so you're obliged to have two servants. You mustn't be seen down on your hands and knees washing the floor, because you lose face in front of the Indians." So the metharani – Indian word for someone who cleans the floor – would wash the floor only to come back the next day and find that it had been done all over again because my mother was a keen carbolic person, everything had to be washed in carbolic, including her sons. So she washed everything in carbolic because, 'it was no clean, if it's no done carbolic.'

We went home after I was about nine to seventeen. Seventeen I was at a boarding school. Somehow they scraped up the money but I think how she did it was that she was advised... There was a gentleman who had no family who worked in the workshops and she was approached if she would take him on a lodger because she had children to educate, which she did. So that paid for our education, my brother and I. Later on my nephew joined us. At that school it was strictly English and strictly military.

HC            Was this in England or in India?

**CRANN:**     In India, at the north of India at a place called Mannitol. I like to mention it because most people don't know about, yet three taxi drivers this week all knew it, so that made me feel much better. They all said without hesitation it is the most beautiful place in the world. I agreed wholeheartedly. We're describing a place where the rhododendron trees were forty feet high and they were full of flowers. The birds were called minahs. The male was red and female was yellow. So you imagine red and yellow birds and parrots flying amongst all this colour. And a lake that constantly had tinkling bells around it all the time because that was keeping the spirit awake. If it fell asleep the mountains would rush together and there'd be a landslide (they'd already had three of them and evidence of one of them was still there). When we went for hikes up there we weren't allowed to speak, we had to whisper – in fact we had to take our shoes off and walk across this stretch of ground and not say one



word until we got to the other side because the sound of voices disturbed the rocks and the rocks tumbled down into the lake. From the back of the college there was a magnificent place called Dorothy's Seat, put there by an Englishman whose wife died, going home, back to England, on the Red Sea. He came up and put up this memorial to her – a beautiful round seat. Looking to the north are the snow-capped Himalayas, when you look down to the south you're looking at the plains of India. In between are all these forests. It was breathtakingly beautiful. It rained a lot of course. That was where we spent our education and it was very strict.

HC           What sort of experience was school for you?

**CRANN:**   Mixed, very mixed.

HC           In what way?

**CRANN:**   Well I found out very early I was inclined to want to be artistic, so that when something like Geoffrey Kendal's Shakespeareana came to the school... who do you think was amongst them? Felicity Kendal, his daughter, who was a young girl. He would do Shakespeare – *Julius Caesar* on the steps leading up to the hall and we were told to bring our bed sheets and wrap them around. Of course I was in my element. Felicity was the only girl and all these public school types were behaving like idiots. Her father used her to drive the crowd scenes around. We enacted the various scenes from *Julius Caesar*. The very first year I was in a school play, *Jan of Windmill Land*. The second year I was in another school play, *The Nodding Mandarin*. When I went to the upper school there was a great reluctance by female staff to participate in dramatics so I was padded up and made to play the nurse of the lady (who was actually my teacher in the school), *Eliza Comes to Stay* – how these names stick in your mind I don't know. I think the next year was *Ambrose AppleJohn's Adventure*. I also sang in the choir, but the singing came quite easily because at home we sang all the time, we endlessly sang. When it was radio time, the radio came on and it was always the BBC. My mother would find the station and everything stopped on Sunday while we listened to the BBC. We came to school with these backgrounds. My brother was entirely the opposite type, entirely committed to sport. He was exceptional in all of them. I don't know how he came to do though.

With me chasing a ball seemed a silly pastime, I just couldn't be bothered with it. They forced us to do all the sports. They used to have these huge physical exams, everyone was dressed in white singlets with white long trousers and white shoes and we were put on a big geometric pattern on the main field and we did all sorts of exercises. The best of us were selected to be part of the marching and running, another squad was to do the horses and another squad to do something else. We were inculcated into dancing maypoles, 'Come lasses and lads, get leave of your dads....' It was just perfect me. I was selected for the marching and running squad and that was just up my alley, I liked all that stuff, just perfect.

HC            But David with interests like that, what on earth did you do with yourself when you left school?

**CRANN:**     The actual education portion was very strict – very, very religious, deeply religious, high Anglican. Every day began with chapel, every day ended with chapel. The first period in every class was always scripture and you were expected to learn the Bible by heart, so all of us did. Singing in the choir meant I sang in festivals and concerts. Also to get an extra eight pence a month we used to go up to sing in the big cathedral church in town, or at weddings when we got an extra sixty annas. The subjects were strictly what you might call general. They adored giving you things like general knowledge and they used to print all the, what were called 'howlers' in the magazines – you know when people got words mixed up etc. The music master for instance, George G Thomson, he was so strict he would stand over you and if he found anybody who was lagging you came back at ten past three and he'd make certain that you caught up. You were always threatened with the cane if you didn't learn your stuff, so there was always that in the back of your mind. The exams were set by Cambridge University, they were sent out from there. It was Cambridge Junior and Cambridge Senior and those that who still went on, went on to university. There was a strong academic background to it. It was also very social, very social indeed. The principal was a Reverend, the Reverend Alwyn E Binns who was your all-round Oxford Blue, who also rowed. Came out to the country to teach and ran the school and he changed it from being the Diocesan Boys' School to Sherwood College. We were divided into houses, Robin Hood, Alan A-Dale, Little John and Friar Tuck. The competition between the four houses was intense. He had



all that very strong English thing. We were getting towards the tail end of the Raj. There were quite a few Indian students, but they were usually from well-born – even royalty, Indian royalty amongst our class.

HC            Did you finish your education in India?

**CRANN:**     Not quite. I only got as far as Year 10 when they decided to call Independence<sup>1</sup> and we were all advised to leave because already it had started, they were murdering people, they were splashing trains as they went past with animal... colours, etc. Insulting people as they went about, spitting and all that kind of stuff. We were told... they didn't say get out, they simply said, "We advise you to go." So this large contingent of people who had British and part-British and old-British etc., all were listed to get out of the country. This massive exodus started in late '46, going to '47. That was my last year at school and by the time we got home mother had packed up the whole household, everything and we were gone. We were told my father would not be able to get his retirement money because with that many people leaving all at the same time it would leave the country impoverished. We left and we crowded onto trains and arrived at wharfs and sat down there in our hundreds and thousands waiting for the ship to arrive, slept overnight on the wharf and took turns to go to the bathroom, or get something to eat and come back again. It was all very basic. We got on board the ship and actually saw cabins and beds and people waiting on you for a change. Sittings with menus to choose from rather than just anything put in front of you all the time.

We left the country in that state; we left our sister behind – she was married to an Anglo-Indian gentleman and she had a young boy, but he had to finish his contract he was a different category altogether. Being Anglo-Indian it sort of gave her a slight edge over us, being Scots. *Strathaird*, on board, very interesting, went to London, was the entire Australian Cricket Team, headed by Don Bradman and Keith Miller, so my brother was ecstatic and that's where he spent all his days. I discovered that the entire Australian company of *Annie Get Your Gun* was on board, so that's where I spent most of my time. The ship was absolutely packed, there was eight, four and

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<sup>1</sup> The India Independence Act came into force on 18 July 1947. It separated British India into the two new dominions of India and Pakistan.

six to every cabin, packed, packed, packed. We got there only to find it was quite dismal and we were informed that rationing was still in force. We had been carefully lined up to take off boxes of fifty and slide them into our pockets. None of us smoked, it was just so we could give them to relatives when we got there. My mother had a small parcel which she was allowed to carry off which was a leg of ham, which she kept aside. So we arrived in the dead of night at Falkirk having changed trains at Edinburgh.

HC            It must have been a terrible culture shock.

**CRANN:**    Oh it was terrifying and to suddenly say goodbye to all the people you knew and all of a sudden the glamour of the Australian Cricket Team and stage team all vanished and people you'd spent the last four weeks travelling with... My mother said to me, "They canna afford to buy woollens any more than we can." So we got there, it was tearful, but we just knew we'd never see each other again and that was it.

My mother somehow managed to get on a train. My father took us to buy a pork pie because we hadn't had anything to eat since the morning. When we returned the train had gone with my mother on it. Both of us were panicking; then we couldn't find our father. A policeman came up and said, "What's your trouble?" I said, "We're from India and we're trying to get to Scotland and the train's gone." He went off and he spoke to someone. Something came over the loudspeaker. It was someone calling my father who was on another platform. So he came and collected us and we got onto this train and eventually got up to Edinburgh, changed trains to get down to Falkirk. When we got there we found ourselves in this 'wee hoose' (as my mother warned us it was going to be). It was just a but and a ben really<sup>2</sup>. There were already four people living there. After we arrived there was another four to add to it. Then we discovered there was also a visitor who came, so there were nine people. We found out after a very little while that things were grim and I got acquainted for the first time that I was within military age<sup>3</sup>, so that it was highly unlikely that I would get any kind of regular employment. I got the results of my exams from Cambridge to do

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<sup>2</sup> A two-roomed cottage.

<sup>3</sup> The Call Up or National Service was in operation in Britain from 1947 to the 1960s.



chemistry and they said, "Apply to ICI and see if they will take you." I did get into ICI, but a week later they discovered where I was from and my background and they told me, "Since you won't be staying here longer than next March we won't take you on at all, we want somebody who is going to be permanent." So I got a job delivering telegrams. This was my first job. There were five of us on this bus, jumping off and delivering telegrams and now and again somebody would give you a 'piece and peely' That's what they used to pay you with, that's a piece of bread spread with jam and you'd break it in half and give half to somebody else. Then I managed to find work on a trial basis in a men's store. He was very impressed with the fact that someone spoke English the way I did. Again when it came pay day and up came the information that I wasn't going to be there past my birthday he asked me to leave. That was the end of that. I was going to be eighteen and I was going to be called up. My next job was the Alexander Bus Company. The idea was taking care of all the uniforms that the staff wore. When they came in you signed them on and they took them off and they were sent to dry cleaners and you'd get them back again. I got a trip up to Edinburgh. I got the shock of my life because I went into a factory and the chap said, "Brace yourself, you're about to be very embarrassed but try to look calm." We walked into this factory and there were wolf whistles and screams and this sort of stuff. It was all these girls whistling and wolf-calling me. He said, "Just keep walking!" My face was red. I said, "Why did they do that?" He said, "Well you know most of these women haven't seen their men – some of their men are still in uniform. To see somebody like you, seventeen years of age, six foot, walking through the middle of a factory, well that's like Sean Connery coming through."

I had my first Christmas there and the New Year which was quite an experience. Someone informed my parents that it's very likely that the call up for me would come within the next two or three weeks which caused them to panic. We rang P & O and they said they didn't have any bookings and they put my name on a cancellation list. Just four days before the date I was to leave a cancellation came through. My mother borrowed the money, because we didn't have any. It was £180, a lot of money in those days. It was a cancellation first class on the *Strathaird*, would you believe it, the same ship. We said our farewells. On board the ship, being first class you had to behave yourself and there were very important people on board. Every year at school we did two or three different countries in depth. We had just the year

before done South America, Australia and Canada. When my mother were first asked which country would like to migrate to – “You’re not likely to be able to leave for at least two or three years, that’s how long the waiting list is.” Everyone said, “Canada,” because it was most like Scotland I think. I had a fair idea of what Australia was like – I wasn’t expecting kangaroos down the street or anything of that nature. On board the ship, for the first time I met people who were pastoralists, plus a number of people who were English migrants who were coming out here who had taken up properties. We got to Fremantle, but I went on to Sydney where I was sponsored by good people who were friends of my parents from Glasgow – the MacArthurs. They had offered us accommodation if we came out with sponsorship. I arrived early March, exactly five weeks before Anzac Day. I travelled down the coast to a mining town called Woonona<sup>4</sup>, not far from Bulli. They had a comfortable home – quite a number of people living in it. I’d never before slept in a sleep-out, to me from India, it seemed somehow inferior. The first job I got was delivering telegrams on a bicycle, up and down Wollongong streets. You didn’t get sustenance money or dole money, there was none of that then – they just gave you enough money - if you were going to apply for a job they’d give you the fare; that was all you got. Mrs MacArthur was quite friendly, but they still lived as though it was the depression. She grew all these chokos and things and she made brawn. We used to get brawn sandwiches which in that heat used to melt. I got this job in Metal Manufactures, a large factory in Port Kembla. It was quite a good job entailing wages, so I had to very quickly learn how to use an adding machine and a subtracting machine and all those kinds of machines. My job was to go to each of the factories and get their figures for the days output and bring it back so they could calculate how much work each of them had done and pay them according to how many things they’d turned out.

When my parents arrived about four or five months later, the only place the MacArthurs could put us was in their garage, so I spent some weekends calcimining the inside of the garage and cleaning it all out. On the ground they’d put a big hessian sack which they filled up with straw. I thought I can’t see my mother sleeping on this, but I said nothing. Anyway being Scots when they arrived they were all terribly friendly and affable. I had offended Mr MacArthur, because they had a welcoming party when I came and I was asked what my politics were. I said I was a

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<sup>4</sup> Coal mining.



great admirer of Winston Churchill. Since that time he hardly spoke to me - everything about me upset him. When I was coming to Australia I had bought a London Town suit and in Bombay when I met my sister, who had travelled all the way from the other side of India to meet me there, just for those two hours while the ship was in dock and she'd bought me a pair of tan and white shoes. I thought I would make a big impression when I landed and I was there with my London Town suit and down there was Mr MacArthur in a two-piece suit with a cigarette hanging out the corner of his mouth and greasy hat on the back of his head. He said, "Aye." And he was looking at my feet and looking at me, I thought this is not going too well. Then when I came out with the Winston Churchill thing; that was it! From then on there was friction. Mrs MacArthur said to my mother, "You and I will kip into together in my bedroom and my husband and your husband can have the other bedroom and your two laddies can come down here to the straw."

HC            David, did the conditions there influence the family decision to come to Western Australia?

**CRANN:**    No, no. The decision for Western Australia came as a result of a series of mishaps. My father hadn't worked and he was still not working when we eventually found a house. What had happened I had started a correspondence with India to get my father's savings. I kept writing until such time as we got it. When the money arrived we bought this house. My brother had to go to school and then came out of school to do telegrams. I had got Metal Manufactures. Within the course of a few weeks my father couldn't get any work - he eventually got work in the ironworks, Australian Iron and Steel. I, as a result of the constant rains, contracted meningitis and within a week my brother was knocked down by a bus and broke both his legs. My sister in India was panicking over the fact that she had a mother trying to hold together a family with no income or work and two sick men. Any rate she wrote and said that they were leaving the country to live in Western Australia because her mother-in-law had a house there and they were going to stay with her. She said, "You can come and live with us." So they decided to go and join her in Western Australia. When I told the people at work that I was going west they said, "Oh you'll love the west - the Riverina is beautiful." "Not that west, the west west. Way out

there - Fremantle.” They said, “Sin, sun, sand and sex. There’s nothing out there, it’s just Aboriginals.”

We managed to sell the house and my brother and my father and I went to Sydney and we caught the *Strathaird* – the third time on the *Strathaird* – heading back to Western Australia. My mother stayed behind to hand over the keys, something you had to do officially, and then she flew over in a plane.

When we got here we discovered we were staying in this house at 40 Canning Highway, South Perth. We managed to find work quite early – not me at first. I was just coming up nineteen and I had to go to quite a number of places before I actually found work. The accent was a problem. We had to learn to say ‘ite’ [mimicking Australian accent] because when you get on a bus and you say eight they kept saying to you, “What?” and you’d say, “Eight, eight pence.” Someone behind would shout, “He means ‘ite’ – he’s a Pom – ‘ite’.” My brother found work at Jason’s Furniture Store<sup>5</sup>. My father found work in his favourite setting, the railways, but he was a cleaner this time. We settled into that house and we were there for a while, but there were so many people in the house and there were so many people coming and going – we had sponsored out some of our cousins, three sets came out, but two sets went back they didn’t like it. The house was just full of bedrooms. There was a falling out, I can’t remember what about, but our family are quite famous for falling out. So my mother decided that this living together like that was going to cease so we had to find something else. We got on our bicycles and I dinked my mother, my brother dinked my sister and dinked around here to Victoria Park and we dinked up and down the streets till the police caught the pair of us and warned us not to dink. My mother had incidents with policemen. She was coming across the corner of Barrack Street and the Terrace – that was era of oranges in string bags. She was standing with them and the bag broke and the oranges were running all over the place. Being brand new she sees this chap standing there and he’s busy directing the traffic and she says, “Dinna stand there, come and give me a hand!” I said, “Quick pick them up. We can’t take them home we’ve got nothing to put them.” She said, “Put them in the gutter.” She said, “Why did he no come and help?” “He’s on

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<sup>5</sup> Jason Industries Ltd, steel furniture manufacturers, Welshpool Road, Welshpool. *Wise’s Post Office Directory*, 1949, p. 284.



point duty.” She said, “What the hell’s that?” I said. “He’s directing the traffic. He stopped the cars so you could pick up your oranges!”

HC           When you got on your bike and came to Vic Park was it conscious decision to come this way to Vic Park – what made you choose to come to Vic Park?

**CRANN:**     We heard that there were vacant blocks. We used to look at the paper and see where they were and my mother was looking at the prices. She saw Victoria Park and she said, “Where the hell’s that?” We met up with Horace Taylor and his wife who we grew up with in India. He was Anglo-Indian, they both were. He was a very good carpenter/joiner type person who was building his own home and was being highly pioneering. He was pioneering the introduction of monocrete housing into Victoria Park<sup>6</sup>. You couldn’t buy bricks and you had to make your own bricks – wherever you went people were making bricks or picking up bricks out of the dump or making them out of cement, whatever the case may be. Everyone made things when I first came here. I had an overriding impression that somehow the Depression had never left us because when we came here these people... I started work in William Adams and the bottom of their trousers were torn and they had cardboard inside their shoes. They smoked ends of cigarettes all the time or they rolled their own. They were always at lunch hour unrolling newspaper and taking out bits of card telling you how something from a Hillman could fix a Morris. They spoke cars, cars, cars, all the time.

HC           This is 1951 by then.

**CRANN:**     This was 1951, yes.

HC           And did Horace Taylor live in Vic Park.

**CRANN:**     Yes, yes. He lived at 51 Cargill Street. That house is still there – ours are gone. We formed a co-op. There was them and two other Anglo-Indian friends of theirs and there were eight. They used to work on his house which was partially

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<sup>6</sup> Monocrete is a building construction method utilising modular bolt-together pre-cast concrete wall panels.

finished – we were staying there and it was our lot to always stay in a place... There was Horace and his wife, George Oates and his son, four Cranns, in a house that was only meant for two. There was just a dining room. Most of the time we took turns to sit in the kitchen. It didn't last long. He put us through all the processes of putting in for it. We used monocrete. We bought the property on the corner of Mackie Street and Gloucester Street. We put down the foundations – limestone – we had to do it all. Someone delivered the limestone but you had to get out there and put them down. But of course, there was always this thing about the fact that you can't ask David to do it because he's not recovered yet. So I took on the job of getting the goods, so if you wanted paint, nails, timber, whatever it is, that was my job. I'd take the bus, go wherever it was I had to go, collect it, bring it back mostly on the tram, as much as I could carry and bring it back to the house through Horace's place. From there just take it to our place as we built it.

HC           As you were building were you and your dad and your brother trying to work at the same time?

**CRANN:**     All working at the same time, yes. My father was with the railway, Gordon was in Jason's Furniture and I was working at William Adams. Murray Street in those days starting from William Street going west was essentially all warehouses. So Dunlops, Atkins Caryle, William Adams<sup>7</sup>, H C Little, G and R Wills, McPherson's, all up that area, all together. The whole world arrived at half-past-eight and they all knocked off at five o'clock and we all caught the buses in the Terrace or in Wellington Street as the case might be. India's poverty was poverty, but with them they lived within it – there was colour and movement and rice and vegetables. When we got to Scotland there were vegetables in big pots. It was cooked with a contribution of meat or ham as the case might be. So you had soup for two days with bread, or you had vegetables on your plate with bread. That was the kind of set-up it was. When we got here we suddenly found there was this other kind of poverty where they were making their own clothes and making pickles and brawns and stuff of that nature. When we came here we found it was almost the same. There were terrible shortages, awful shortages. You had to put your name down to get bricks,

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<sup>7</sup> William Adams and Company Limited, 432-436 Murray Street Perth.



you had to put your name down to get timber, you had to put your name down to get glass and so it went, putting your name down and waiting your turn. If you happened to know somebody like... I discovered that Barnett's<sup>8</sup> didn't have that many customers. I was working for William Adams and I used to get their dockets and I could see who was ordering from where. So I used to ring up and get down there, get the tram on my way home, dive in there, buy the stuff I needed, nails, screws, whatever was wanted and take them home. That kept all three houses going – Horace's place, our place and then we started building my brother-in-law's place as well, but it had started to improve by then.

We built Mackie Street and we settled there and we discovered across the road was a Polish gentleman. His way of building his house was to go down to the tip and rescue broken bricks and put them in a big packing case on the back of his bicycle. He travelled all the way from Northam Immigration Camp<sup>9</sup> where his wife and children were - very small children. He'd come down here; spend the time sleeping in the outhouse of the house he was working on. He'd got it when it was partially finished and that's the reason he took it. He used to go backwards and forwards, work all weekend and then take the train and travel back to Northam, to be back in the camp again. On the other side were a large family from Ceylon, Sri Lanka as it is now. They were pretty well off. I think they were Germans who had settled in Ceylon and therefore had come away from Ceylon fairly well cashed up. Opposite them was a little humpy of a place with two very elderly English people living in it. Next to them was another house, a wooden house, in which the Bottle-oh, the marine collector, Mr Excell, he stayed there.<sup>10</sup> But they all shared things. The ones that lived behind us were all the Australians. They were the ones who used to come around and say hello and help you out a bit. They were the ones who used to come and pinch the mulberries and take the figs off the trees etc. and all that kind of stuff. It was bare subsistence living. It took up to about '56 before we got all the houses finished. Then immediately tragedy struck when Lorna died suddenly<sup>11</sup>, leaving Horace on his own.

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<sup>8</sup> Barnett Brothers Pty Ltd., 203-209 Hay Street, Perth. Builders' Supplies, Glass, Paints, Hardware. *Wise's Post Office Directory*, 1949, p. 485.

<sup>9</sup> Northam Migrant Immigration Centre, used for displaced persons and immigrants from continental Europe, including Poland in the 1940s and 1950s.

<sup>10</sup> Possibly Allan C Excell, 87 Mackie Street, Victoria Park. *Wise's Post Office Directory* 1949, p. 566.

<sup>11</sup> Lorna Mavis Taylor, wife of Horace N Taylor, Victoria Park, died aged 31, on 30 July 1954. Metropolitan Cemeteries Board.

But then he suddenly remembered that the girl he loved before he met and married Lorna in India had also been widowed for some time and she was living in America and he wrote to her and she came out and they were married. It only lasted six months and I remember thinking well if you've come from America and you've come to this, it's a hell of a jolt. Also he was very Catholic and she was very Protestant, so I could see another clash coming with that combination there. The underlying thing all the time was the colour. When we were in my sister's place, she used to bring all sorts of people that we knew in India to come to the house to see us. My mother and her and one or two others used to give all these ladies from India lessons on how to run their households – how to shop... My mother used to look at their nails and say, "Oh you're not going to have nails polished like that here, you'll have to wash dishes, so that means you are going to be painting your nails a lot and it costs a lot of money for painting your nails. You better cut them and get used to them." She showed them how to wash dishes, showed them how to use a washing machine - showed them how wash; there were not many washing machines then. She took them out and showed them the scrubbing board and how you scrubbed it and boiled it etc. The Indian ladies were never told that they had to wash the floor, that really came hard to them because that was just not done. She stood up there with a mop and she showed them how to mop the floors, how to dry it off, how to put Relax polish on it.

HC           What you describe is a very multi-cultural society...

**CRANN:**     It was.

HC           But with harmony between them.

**CRANN:**     Yes. You see we had to. If you're all broke and you've got no money and you're looking for cuts and you're eating bread and jam and jelly and eating old scones and stuff like that, well you're all doing it. When we had a party – we had this big party at Leederville Town Hall, Lesser Hall, and all these people from Calcutta, they're all talking [mimics an speaking English with a strong Indian accent], "My goodness me, look at Mrs Crann – how are you Mrs Crann? How lovely to see you, it's very good of you to come." And they're all chattering away like this. She said, "I don't know why, but somehow they seem funny to me now." "Well," I said, "you've



been away from them for two or three years, they would seem funny.” They’d come around to the house and they’d have these sessions. Now all these ladies, Heather, were very adept at embroidery, knitting, darning, sewing, all those delicate English ladylike things they used to do – you’ve no idea, the most exquisite antimacassars and tablecloths. They could do all that, but wash the floor or cook! But once they all took to it, they all took to it like ducks to water. Then they got rather adventurous and said that how an Australian person had shown them how to make a sponge, so they came to the next do with a sponge.

There was large consignment of them living here in Victoria Park, a lot of Anglo Indians here. One of them was the nurse from the hospital in India who I was actually terrified of, but she wasn’t a nurse then. She just looked at you with that stern matron-like manner, “Ah, you found your way here did you?” In that kind of voice. Got to know them, saw them at church, saw them at the soccer games, saw them at the marches and parades etc.; all the dances, but we seldom went to dances because the girls learnt to dance perfectly well, very well. When they came here and they saw Australians doing *Pride of Erin* and [tapping the table top] *Te Boom, Tum, Tum, Te Boom, Tum, Tum*. That was the only tempo that was ever played, that heavy left hand playing all the time. They used to sit there and say, “Oh gosh I’m not getting up and dancing to that, when does the real music start?” So I said, “I’ll put records on and then you’ll get to dance *Begin the Beguine*,” so naturally when they put the records on these people got up and they used to clean the floor because they used to sweep around and look like a room full of Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, all dancing and swooping around and doing all these extensive steps and wearing exquisite clothes that they had all made themselves. So there was again, a mixing, you see.

HC            It must have been quite a shock for the Australian side of the community to have all this different food and the different styles of dress.

**CRANN:**    They wouldn’t put it in their mouths to begin with, but the smell got them.

HC            The curry you mean?

**CRANN:** Yes. It was the smell that got them. It was much the same. We were sort of a bit hoity-toity about... Maria came to live next door and she was all Italian and we thought - garlic! I am not eating garlic and stuff like that. But when the smell came across, then she passed over a pizza, wow we were gone, that was it. My mother passed over her brawn and she passed over a pizza and Mrs Corry passed over her sponge cakes. Mrs Cypelt, the Polish couple. She lived almost entirely on cabbages, so her house smelt of cabbage and you could smell her house at least half a block away. My brother-in-law, in 1959, had left an insurance policy which allowed my sister to get a car. She used to come past my mother's place to pick up what my mother wanted her to do in messages and she'd pick up Andrew from across the road, to take him. I only found this out just last year. I wrote to him about the fact that his mother had passed away just late last year. He said he remembered the family very well and, "Your sister used to pick me up," he said, "every time I got into the car she used to douse me with apple blossom perfume." He never knew what that meant. We knew what it meant. Eating so much cabbage they smelt very badly and they didn't realise that they smelt so badly of cabbage all the time, so that's why she'd bring apple blossom.

HC It sounds a very happy existence. When did Vic Park seem like home; how long did it take for that to happen?

**CRANN:** Right from the beginning. Right from the very beginning. As we walked down the street and we saw Anglo-Indians who had also come from India and they knew Australians. They were all so easy; they all spoke all the time. They all said things like, "Oh how long have you been in this country? Oh well we came here in such-and-such a year." The Italians tended to be a bit more tricky, but they thawed out just as well. By the time you went in to pay your lay-by you were standing alongside other people who were doing lay-bys and being my mother and my sister they naturally started to speak, "How long have you been in this country?" You got into the habit of saying, "Two years, three years, four years," as the case might be. They didn't ask you where you came from – usually they had worked it out already. As you stood in the queues, especially picture queues – there were long picture queues in those days, especially if you were going to town to the Ambassadors or



the Plaza or the Piccadilly or the Theatre Royal. It used to last a whole hour or two hours. Percy Buttons used to come and perform in the street, which again was a memory of Scotland. We were just standing there and we'd be chatting away. Someone would go and buy chips or something and pass them up and down, while you're eating chips you're waiting for your turn to move forward. Most people were standing in the queue because they wanted to sit up in the gallery because that was the only seats they could afford, they couldn't sit downstairs. Fortnightly plays in those days, once a fortnight you could afford to sit downstairs but for the other movies you wanted to see you sat upstairs. But you spoke to these people all the time.

At work there was a constant gentle rubbishing, sometimes it was vindictive. In fact some said, "Bloody Poms, how long are you going to stay in this country; when are you leaving?" I heard a lot of that. Bastard. I was called that two or three times. I took exception to it. They said, "Oh it's a term of endearment here, we don't worry about that. We're all bastards." Anyway that went by the by. They went out every weekend; some of them had boats. Max DeManiel who worked in the same office as me he always came back with whiting and things that he caught and he'd bring them back and share them out with people, so they had fish to take home.

I hadn't been at work very long when I was delegated the duty to 'hold the fort'. Holding the fort meant that it was Christmas Eve and they all went to the pub. Now they were supposed to take it in turns, but they said, "You're a bloody wowser so you can hold the fort." So I had to stay in the fort and hold it on my own and they were across there drinking. They would come back and I'd say, "Because you have been gone and it's run through my lunch hour, can I go home an hour earlier, I want to do Christmas shopping." They said, "Don't make a habit of it!" My father, his job was fairly lonely, in carriages, constantly cleaning carriages, so it was different. Gordon, on the other hand, adapted very fast. He's about four years my junior so it was quite easy for him and being maddeningly sport inclined he naturally gravitated towards people of that kind. Within a very short while he was playing tennis on that court across there, playing Australian Rules down there, soccer at another place over there and going to the pub to play darts. He had that natural affability.

HC David, you said what your father, your brother and you did for work, but what did most men do for work in Vic Park in the early fifties?

**CRANN:** They fell into four categories. They were either working for the government – post office, trams, etc., or they worked in Swan Portland Cement or Thomas Hardy, or as Gordon did, Jason's and Chamberlains Factory, out at Welshpool. A lot of butchers, lots of bakers. Undertakers, timber workers because the factory was just up the road from here. So it was distinctly a working class set up. Earlier there had been people who had their own businesses like candle-makers and piggeries and orchards and dairies, but as the population moved in they moved further out. That salt of the earth type of people. The ladies most of the time were doing voluntary things except in wartime when they took on the men's work. There wasn't anybody who you'd call VIP, unless they were shining in a particular area. Now for instance Rolly Tasker, the man who made the sails for *Australia II*, he lived up here also, so he was there for a while. Once they began to get successful they tended to move away. Sometimes moving away meant that they sometimes left Victoria Park to cross the line to go into Lathlain because Lathlain was considered a bit more upmarket than this section was.

HC Why was that?

**CRANN:** Because at that time it was a stunningly beautiful place, with wildflowers. People would come for miles to look at the flowers from there. But when they started to build Housing Commission places that they seemed to be getting people from all over and they weren't essentially the, what you might call, the Victoria Park type, who had a working class background, they were mostly people dependent on something else. But it came through each phase – Aboriginals selling you props to prop up your washing or Chinamen starching your collars in the laundry and growing vegetables down by the river, or catching fish and selling it to you off the boats. So that was the beginning. The first industrial things came, which again is associated with the Causeway. The old Causeway was a rickety old wooden thing. I think I spent the first six to eight months travelling over it before the new one was built. You virtually hung onto the outside of the bus, with the water just down there below you. It was quite primitive. In fact the old Causeway – and I picked this out of



the Fire Brigade's records, they used to have buckets of sand at regular intervals all the way across because on very hot days the horse manure used to burst into flames and the idea was as you were walking past you picked up the sand and put the flames out. They couldn't call the firemen all the time; they did mostly but not too often.

People were catching fish. In summer there were that many people in the water catching prawns it was amazing, with those kerosene lamps etc. For us it seemed like India again because at night when you were going there were people sleeping on the lawns in the summer and everyone left their doors open. People called to the house to sell you things. That was pure Indian again. So there were lots of cross reference things that were similar. The Australians never let you forget because they kept in saying, "Are you a 'to and from'? How long are you going to stay for?" All that kind of thing. That was a constant jibe. But once you got stuck into their sport and you became part of what they were doing and you joined their clubs... Sheila Burn, another Anglo-Indian lady, related to the Harbens<sup>12</sup>, she joined the Red Cross. She came out in a uniform and three or four ladies joined the Red Cross. Because music was central and there was all this dancing going on most people at the beginning had a piano. It was very unusual not to find a piano in a house, much the same as now you've televisions all over the place. You went to a house and people frequently sang, or they rehearsed poetry to you. The nuns were responsible for that. Right at the beginning they were living on handouts, whatever food was left over at the hotel. It was sixpence for a class and they were teaching people music and all the things that have become so... They virtually put the foundations of Victoria Park – it makes me angry to see it all wasted and all these people moving away. The average length of stay for people now in Victoria Park is about seven years, they move very fast.

HC            Why do you think that is?

**CRANN:**    It's the atmosphere. Aside from the highway there's nothing. People don't live up and down here very long, they change all the time. They always move somewhere else. Wembley, Darglish, Nedlands, Peppermint Grove, they even say it with a kind of ring. When I met David Brand some years later, he said, "You're from

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<sup>12</sup> Jean Crann, Mr Crann's sister, became Jean Harben after she married.

the south, the southern districts?" I said, "Yes, Victoria Park." He said, "So am I, I am from South Perth. Before that I was out in the bush, Three Springs." We became great friends. He said, "This mob over here..." his right hand pointing to the north and to Charlie Court... he said, "They think they make the place function, it's us, our factories, our industry, there are the workers. These are the white collars."

HC            Apart from David Brand if you mentioned that you lived in Vic Park to other people, ordinary people, what sort of reaction did you get?

**CRANN:**     What gang do you belong to? At that time both Vic Park and South Perth had a reputation for fights and gangs. That word 'gang' is not quite true because gang in my mind meant New York/Hollywood, but they meant gangs of people like John Corry – he was long time on the rail – he and quite a number of apprentices would come together. All the apprentices who were bakers and all the apprentices who were woodworkers, they would meet. Their usual thing was to go down to the springs with a policeman on his horse and they let the policeman hang up his jacket and they go into the bush and cut sticks and promptly have a stoush (that's the first time I heard that word). They'd get stuck into each other and have a good time bashing each other up and all jump into the springs and clean up and put their clothes back and come back up to the pub and have a few beers and part good friends. So that kind of gang is what they were talking about. People tended to belong to social groups. I gave you list of them for you to follow.<sup>13</sup> There were friendly societies and men's fraternities and ladies' get-togethers and all that sort of thing. They've all gone now, but every weekend there were street stalls with people selling cakes and pickles. Of course when the ladies from India arrived they were red hot at makings pickles and chutneys, that was their specialty, and sauces. People would come to it like flies to honey. The tables were full; they'd set out their tables in the morning about nine and it was clean gone, nothing left, by noon. But now you have to have insurance to have a stall on the street and now they have corner markets. But in doing all that kind of thing they became more and more integrated. I was the last to join something because when I came home at night I usually used to have – which is returning to me now – trouble seeing, because all day in the

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<sup>13</sup> Attached to this transcript.



warehouse it was glaringly sunny, very hot and very dusty – you wore dust coats all the time. When I got home I was just done, so I used to spend my time making carpets, because that’s what the hospital taught me to do<sup>14</sup>. Then I went into embroidery and I would just sit still for the evening and not do anything. Eventually I used to go for long walks on weekends; I used to walk from here out to Gosnells and back again. On the way I used to stop at stalls and come home with fruit and bottles of pickles and whatever. It sort of became a therapy; I got better. I saw a notice in the paper and thought oh well, I’d join this group – the Southern Review. That was a culture shock. Somehow my mother had got notice of the fact that they were mostly Catholics and that they were ‘fond of a few glasses’ – that is how she described them. So when I met them all there again there was Anglo-Indians amongst them, a lot of Irish, a lot of Scots – mostly Australian, mostly second and third generation Australians. They were all very affable. Somebody said I changed them. Well I said, “You couldn’t go on indefinitely singing like you were always singing in a hotel. I thought when I joined that you wanted to sing or perform as though you were going to do it professionally in a theatre.” He said, “We do it in the theatre.” I said, “Yes you do it in a theatre, but watching twenty-four people all standing in two lines swaying backwards and forwards singing *Now is the Hour*, no-one is going to put up with that. I certainly wouldn’t pay money to look at someone doing that.” So I began to change them slightly to make them more like the movies we were used to looking at. One of the people who helped me a lot was a chap called Peter Bubb, Bubb’s Bakeries was a very prominent place at that time.<sup>15</sup>

What was interesting at that time, quite a number of men who were well-to-do, with businesses in Victoria Park, used to stay in the pub during the week and go home to homes in Nedlands or Dalkeith or wherever on the weekends. So there were quite eminent names that used to stay here. There were the Coleman Brothers who owned the three hotels<sup>16</sup> – there were five hotels in Victoria Park – they owned three of them.

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<sup>14</sup> Referring to treatment after contracting meningitis on the east coast before coming to WA.

<sup>15</sup> Bubb, A S, C, G & H 28 Rushton Street, Victoria Park. *Wise’s Post Office Directory* 1949, p. 829.

<sup>16</sup> C K Coleman, ppr Sandringham Hotel, 88 Great Eastern Highway, Belmont, E J Coleman, Victoria Park Hotel, 605 Albany Highway, Victoria Park and F Coleman, Hurlingham Hotel Canning Highway, Perth. J A Coleman was the proprietor of the Raffles Hotel Canning Highway, Canning Bridge but it is not known if he was related. *Wise’s Post Office Directory* 1949, p. 529.

When something was going to happen, everyone was aware of it. This was Holy Week, so there would have been a procession with someone carrying the cross. They've come out of the Catholic Church, the Anglicans would come to join them and they'd all move down to Memorial Gardens and hold a service together at that spot. Then come Easter they were all mixing one with the other. It was at this time that the Catholic influence was strongest when they felt this was a time to examine yourself, withdraw, and take account of what you are doing here and why you are doing it and are you doing the right thing. The big thing would be you would do a show called Easter Parade, but of course, it wasn't going to happen until after Easter. It was all these people from these various schools. When you looked at their record – and once I became part of the Historical Society and I was looking at all these photographs that they used to bring in, I discovered that most of them had come from St Joachim's, which was Ursula Frayne, or they came from the other one up the top, which was Francis Xavier. There were all these photographs of all these young people who I knew as adults later on. That was the foundation, that's why when you went to their houses they could all play the piano, they could all sing, they'd been in choirs, they'd been in choral speaking, they'd taken part in performances, or plays or something of that nature. There were three theatre companies here. Can you imagine a town of this size with three theatre companies running at the same time? They had three bands and five cinemas, all of them packed full; you couldn't get in most of the time. We often used to spill over and go into Perth to go to the Embassy or Anzac House or whatever the case might be.

But there was always this community thing. From the moment you'd go out in the morning, as you walked down Mackie Street, it was, "Good morning Mrs McKay. Good morning Mrs Watson. Good morning Mrs Romano. Good morning Mr Chapman, good morning...." And you nodded and you nodded and you nodded all the way down to the bottom of the street. If you happened to have something wrong with you like they noticed that my brother, after playing football, he had his arm or sling, or he was hobbling, they'd say, "Not so good; did you win or lose? What did the other chap look like?" All that sort of stuff. So they used to talk to you as you went past and as you came back in the evening they used say, "Was it a good day or a bad day?" We weren't used to that, that was something quite new for us. I think the



Anglo-Indian had the sort of British reserve, whereas when they came here they didn't, they had a more relaxed reserve.

HC            You are painting a picture of a lovely friendly community with a soul – with the cinema, the theatre groups – what it was like in the fifties; when did that change?

**CRANN:**     It started to change around about the start of the middle to the end of the seventies and then it deteriorated very fast, very fast. The shops started to close down and then the big factories started to go, because they were starting to think in terms of going out further, because they felt the city was going to expand in the future. It was horrible seeing shops boarded up. I think also the generation that did all the work... This week at a meeting I saw two pictures showing where the Council had put up a sign for the Walkemeyers<sup>17</sup>, there where he had his business and they've called it Terminus Lane because that was the name of the bakery. Further up from there is Ice House Lane – that was where John Collier's father had his business. The running of those things was taken over more by people coming in or it was being done by somebody else or being bought out as the case might be. People started to move away. The ones who were here for a long time started to move away. The Wolinskis<sup>18</sup> who ran the famous fruit market in which you bought fruit by the bucket-load – you didn't weigh it, you just bought a bucket of oranges or apples as the case may be. They sold up and went to live in Mount Lawley, because they were Jewish by background.

There were a number of Jewish people here – the man who ran the Manchester Trading<sup>19</sup>, Richard Sofia – he was a South African Jew. When I was up painting the roof he'd say, "Ahh, I'll tell you, give us a song!" Mrs Hoffman, who had the dress shop next door, or the Bensky's who had the furniture store, or the gentleman who was the optician. None of these people exist today, they're all gone, not one.

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<sup>17</sup> Walkemeyer, Bernard, Baker, 916 Albany Highway, Victoria Park. *Wise's Post Office Directory* 1949, pps. 788., 830.

<sup>18</sup> See *The West Australian*, 15 and 16 Sept 1953, p. 4, 'City Council Stops Victoria Park Stall Sales' and *The West Australian*, 18 March 1954, p. 36. Application to the City of Perth by P and M Wolinski for registration of premises known as Victoria Park Markets at Albany Highway, Victoria Park.

<sup>19</sup> In 1949 *Wise's Post Office Directory* lists The Manchester Trading Co, drapers at 7/235 Murray Street, Perth.

HC            But did they become more affluent so they could go and live in a place...

**CRANN:**     Affluence was one of part of it. They may have retired and felt that would go back to where they came from. Most of them had already come from some other place; some other place was home, not this one. Much as they liked it here they wanted to go back to wherever they came from. My mother hankered to go home, back to Scotland, all the time she was here. She never stopped hankering to go back to Scotland. We used to keep saying to her, "What on earth would you go back for?" We left it because it was too cold, she couldn't take it. She'd say, [using Scots' accent] "It's no the same. They don't talk the way we do." I was often known as 'Mrs Crann's son'. I was never called 'David', "This is Mrs Crann's son." My mother always talked to people, she often talked to Maria, who became the only Italian in Victoria Park who speaks English with a Scottish accent. She'd say, "No the noo," and "I'm awa," and all this sort of stuff. My mother always kept hankering about going back. A couple of times I'd even get home and find she was busy packing! But there was nobody left there!

HC            A while ago David you mentioned The Causeway – the final bit of The Causeway was officially opened in September 1952 by Premier McLarty; did you go on that occasion?

**CRANN:**     Not on that occasion. Up to before it was quite a crowded event so you couldn't always get there. I don't know what day of the week that was. At any rate the opening of that spilled back up this way, up towards our house a bit. Where we lived wasn't that far away from The Causeway – it was only three blocks away. The old Causeway Bridge was very precarious, especially in the wet weather. The water used to be coming up and up and up and you just kept thinking, well... The buses were old. Most of time people were standing – they didn't put you off, but you were left hanging on to the outside, getting soaking wet. Later on I acquired a Lambretta and didn't mind getting wet. You used to see people out there fishing underneath the bridge all the time. Meanwhile of course we were madly looking at the completed bridge and looking forward to being able to ride on that one, rather than on this rickety old thing. I think that was one was about the fourth one as it was. It was in a



very, very poor state, virtually in high winds you could feel it moving. There's pictures where there's a tram and carriages drawn by horses, carrying kegs of beer. The first of the motor cars coming out and people on bicycles, all going across at the same time and you kept wondering how does it not collapse underneath all that weight because there wasn't any control going over it. Sitting beside it – it stayed for a long time – was one of the first neon lights showing a trotting horse, telling you that Gloucester Park was over there. Most of it was heavily flooded; there was a lot of marsh etc., around that section. But pretty, pretty, because the Burswood section where it is now, it was full of wattle and arum lilies in full bloom. I used to go down there to pick the flowers or catch rabbits as the case might be. But then of course the rubbish tip was near it. For somebody coming new to the country and looking at that bridge, you thought to yourself this really is backward out here, they'd be terrified to be on a bridge like this. You wouldn't say that to anybody because you knew you'd get a mouthful.

HC            Were there still many horses around?

**CRANN:**     Oh yes! Right next to Horace was a family who had three of them. They were trotting horses. There were other horses that people kept. Mr McKay who sold vegetables door-to-door, he had horses in his back yard. Horses were quite common. People used to wonder why there as a house and a spare block, and a house and a spare block (there was quite a lot of that). We used to hear horses galloping around and it was the Travers who were training their trotting horses in that empty paddock.

HC            That was for sport or recreation but what about for transport?

**CRANN:**     Not very much for transport. Tradesmen would have them; the sporting people would have them. Mr Excell used a horse to pull his marine cart around and for a long time; the Corporation mud cart was hauled by a horse.

HC            What about deliveries from shops and things?

**CRANN:** Some of the older ones used to. People got very fond of the horses and they expected to see them. They used to bring out treats for them. The horses knew when to stop; knew which houses people came out of. Mr Walkemeyer, the baker, had horses well into the fifties.

HC Before we finish with The Causeway can we talk about the trams? I think you came just before they were de-commissioned and it was changed to buses. Tell me about the trams and the tramlines.

**CRANN:** I'd come down from William Adams, along Murray Street, and catch the tram from the corner of Barrack - at the Treasury Building – Barrack Street and St George's Terrace. We used to stand in a long queue to get onto it. It was quite a rush to get on – not as organised as getting on buses. The minute you got in the tram you knew full well that more than likely you would be giving your seat up to a lady or a girl. It stopped frequently, but sometimes people just got on and off, because it wasn't going that fast for those who were a bit more agile, it wouldn't worry them. They were absolutely significant for people late at night because they were the only things that were moving for all those people who were dance fanatics. Coming back from the Embassy or the Anzac House, or the Town Hall, the trams were pretty full. Mr Farley was a very popular driver because he had most of the night shift. He used to welcome people on board. I think sometimes they didn't always have the fare so they were on board 'on a promise' I think they called it, that was the expression they used.

HC Did they have a conductor on them?

**CRANN:** Yes, yes they did. Not all time; at the busy times they did. We occasionally saw, at the time when we were coming through Perth, the combination of a policeman on point duty, with trams going down Barrack Street and going along the Terrace, it was like San Francisco, a bit like that. That picture you have in the movies of people on trams. '*Clang, clang, clang went the trolley and ding dong dang when the bell!*' That was the sort of thing. It did clang. When we lived at 40 Canning Highway, it was at the start of slope, you could hear them changing gears as they



went up the slope, claaaang-annng-gg-gg as they were going up and it would be claaaang-annng-gg-gg coming down.

HC            You mentioned Mr Farley before we started recording. Tell me a bit more about him.

**CRANN:**     Ah Mr Farley. His wife accompanied him all through - a lovely couple. He used to sing in a magnificent baritone voice. Now singing by men was very popular in those days, the Methodist Choir, or the Catholic Choir, the Protestant Choir, as the case might be. Whenever there was a function and somebody was down to sing, Mr Farley was down to sing a lot. He always sang masterful songs like *The Road to Mandalay* and *Jerusalem* and that kind of number. It was amazing that considering being one of the early victims of the polio epidemic that he could get on quite well, but the trams suited him. He knew people, so when people got on he knew them all by name, as they got on and got off. Sometimes he would simply say, "Mrs O'Shaughnessy, your stop next!" because Mrs O'Shaughnessy would be busy reading the *Daily Mirror* inside, you see. She'd missed on a couple of occasions and had to walk back, so it was saving her the necessity of walking back. He had that kind of personality. He only died about four years ago; his wife died two years ago.

HC            Was he a resident of Vic Park?

**CRANN:**     Oh yes, yes, a long time, Basinghall Street, they were there for years and years and years. A family of four I think. Some of them are still here. They had a family tragedy; I think the oldest boy passed away last year also. They were very popular, very strong. Mrs Farley would play for a couple of my shows. We did *Oklahoma* for Premier Tonkin. He must have got quite a shock. It was at the Vic Park Library Hall. He sat in the front row in one of these seats for the first time. There he was, I could see him watching – how anyone could close their eyes in the middle of *Oklahoma*, but he did. Any rate in the break he managed to get a custard pie and a cup of tea and of course he's saying all the right things. He was quite a nice man. He was brought there by Ron Davies, who was meant to be his successor. Mrs Farley would play, but she knew him as well, because at that time the politics and the Council and the people were closer together, you could talk to them, they were very

affable, always affable. Mick Lee for a while was president of the Patch Theatre. He, at that time, was Deputy Mayor up there, so he knew the Farleys very well because he and his wife used to worship at the church. The Methodist Church was directly opposite what's now the convent, on the corner where Woolworths now stands, that's where they were. She used to play there and then she moved up to Uniting Church in Archer Street and she played the organ there as well. She kept playing right to the end. Mr Farley in particular, had this rich baritone. At his funeral service I was standing beside this man and he said, "I had to be here because he and my father were the great rivals, but they always came together – my father was tenor and he was baritone (or vice versa). They would sing duets. '*The Gendarme Duet*,'" [sings and taps table] '*We run them in, we run them in, we run them in....*' You can imagine these two. They had the rich, full, voices that we mentioned. Just recently some photographs came of the Friendly Society Hall which is going to be redeveloped and there's these photographs of all these men who belonged to it and they are amongst them, wearing their aprons at the front. Singing was uppermost, they all sang, everybody sang. When you walked past the Masons they were singing, when you walked past the Methodist Church, they were singing. When you walked past the Catholics they were singing. Everybody sang - wherever you went – the pub was full of singing. You walked around the streets, someone was playing the piano. All gone!

HC            Before we leave the trams you mentioned about the problems with bicycles.

**CRANN:**    [Laughs]. Well Mr Farley used to say, "The cyclists are a damn nuisance." Of course cycling was a big sport in Victoria Park, very popular. The famous Stan Gurney, the VC winner, was a champion cyclist - The Stan Gurney VC Memorial Bike Ride was named after him; they used to start off from the hotel. They did try re-introducing it, but it didn't last. But where all the trams criss-crossed like that you had to be careful because if the wheel of the bicycle got inside it you virtually came off, or you had to get off in any case and pull it out and put it back on the road before you could continue. Sometimes a lady with a pram would get it stuck and then there'd be a panic if a tram was coming towards her and this pram's stuck.



The thing is you have to get the pram wheels out before you could go, but everyone knew about that sort of thing.

One day, the first summer we were here, very hot, trying to get on a tram. My mother came out from behind the car to step up on the tram. As she did her shoe stayed behind because the tar had melted and her shoe was stuck in the tar. She got on the tram. Somebody was there and called her to stay put, pulled the shoe out and ran after her, handed her back the shoe. "That's fine, thank-you Mister!" Hot days in those days were hot, real hot and the bitumen.... but it's now all paved, it doesn't matter. But the trams were central to all that drama. People coming home from dances, romantic and singing and having to get off or missing their turn-off and asking to go back, the driver would say, "No, we don't take people back, we keep going forwards, you walk back."

HC            Didn't that happen when the buses came in, instead?

**CRANN:**     I think not so much. The stories I heard from the Beaufort side of things because I used to think how we talk about Victoria Park compared to say Subiaco or Mount Lawley or Belmont. Actually there are striking differences but some similarities strike me as the same. But it was very community-minded altogether. Everybody knew everybody. At the pub, especially on Christmas, even on Easter, they'd be pouring out of the doors, passing jugs of beer and glasses of beer over the top of their heads to chaps sitting out on the footpath. No gardens in those days. They'd be drinking their beer and singing and carrying on.

HC            What about Guy Fawkes Night?

**CRANN:**     Oh that was huge; that was huge. That was absolutely massive. They went to great lengths to do that. But there was a lot more vacant properties in those days where they could easily assemble things like tyres and rubbish and put them altogether. I also thought that the kind of fireworks they had were quite innocent, even innocuous. Tom Thumbs or something they called them and Chinese Crackers and sparklers and that sort of thing. It was big. I recently had an old book given to me by a man who lived here in Sotheby Road all these years ago, Homewood. He

writes at length about Guy Fawkes and about the dunnies, which were so fashionable then. There are quite a few dunnies still around here. He wrote a good three or four paragraphs talking about fireworks. It was a big night, everyone joined into that sort of thing. Big, very big.

HC           With an immigrant community, from everywhere around the globe, what sort of response was there to Anzac Day?

**CRANN:**     That came slowly. Some of that has changed. There is still a hesitancy amongst Catholics to attend Anzac Day. It is better than it used to be, but they still have a tendency to fit in both as it were<sup>20</sup>, rather than exclusively Anzac Day.

HC           Why?

**CRANN:**     I think it was partly to do with the hang-up about the fact that the Italians were Fascists. Though they might not have been Fascists themselves they were aware that there was that attitude towards them. Much of the humour that we know of Australians towards 'Dings' came from that early part. Last weekend's *Review* talks about Lawson writing poetry and Banjo Paterson. They referred to them – that's where words like 'Ding' and 'Wop' came from, back then. They kept very much to themselves. I have written at length about the Isaia family for you to follow up on<sup>21</sup>. But they were an enclave and I think that used to worry people a little bit, but because they were so outgoing and beautifully dressed and self-sufficient and they built their houses and built beautiful houses, not the ordinary thing that we build, and they had wrought iron and marble and stone. They went on trips back to Italy and they made excess of things. They always had times when they got together - they got together and made the sausages or they got together and made the sauce, or they got together and made something else. That kind of thing was done to a lesser degree amongst Australians, but very exclusively amongst them. Even up until three or four years ago, I was up at Swan View, I was wondering why Caterina Antonuccio was making all these preparations. All this stuff was being laid out. I said, "What's happening?" She said, "They're all coming today because they're all making tomato

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<sup>20</sup> As well as 11 November, Remembrance Day.

<sup>21</sup> See David Crann's notes following this transcript.



sauce.” They’re having lunch and getting busy. One would boil the tomatoes and one does something else; they’re bottling them and all that sort of stuff. All the time they’re talking and singing and carrying on. They have that thing within them. It’s just like the Polish community across the road.

HC           With those immigrants and with all those different people, were there any Aboriginal people in Vic Park?

**CRANN:**    Oh yes a few. Not very noticeable. You saw quite a lot of them.

HC           What were they like then?

**CRANN:**    They seemed to be, you know, “Good day, how are you?” when you went past and they’d nod their heads. They were usually selling something. I didn’t get an impression of a begging element - that came when the downturn came, that suddenly appeared, where they were standing on corners and asking for money.

HC           They appeared in Vic Park in past years, but did they live here?

**CRANN:**    Yes, especially across in Carlisle. It starts from Carlisle, coming across this way. They came here quite a lot. Everyone had a sort of a... shall I say – a distant respect for them. I never saw them in each other’s company very much. When I went to Broome some years later then I saw what I thought must have been the way Victoria Park was. No-one noticed any difference, they were there and you were here, that was it, you just noticed it. They had shops etc., and they do all the things that we do. I thought that must have been the same here, but there weren’t that many of them, certainly not as many as I saw in Broome. I think as far as they are concerned, living in Mackie Street as we did, we rarely saw them. I think I saw them mostly in Perth. The usual thing was that Perth used to be the lawyers and doctors and the specialists on St Georges Terrace, the shop-keepers and the others on Hay Street. Wellington Street had the food etc and the railway workers were on the next street before you go over on the train. You would see it in their clothes; you would see it in the way they spoke. There as a distinct change from one to the other.

The end of the shops in those days were Aherns and Boans and Foy and Gibson and Cox Brothers Economic.

HC           With the Aboriginal people though, it sounds as though they lived in Carlisle and were within the community, but they weren't part of the community.

**CRANN:**     No. I don't think it mattered to them or us. I didn't get the feeling that somehow they were excluded, whereas when I was in India I was very conscious of the fact that the metharani who washed our floor wouldn't be seen talking to us outside. The cook, who was a Muslim, although he was working beside this woman, had nothing to do with her, even though they were working in the same house. That distinct drawing of class distinction. There was a kind of class distinction here.

For us a big adventure was if someone had a car and come lunch hour we'd race down to City Beach which took fifteen minutes, swim for fifteen minutes, jump back in the car and race back again and eat your sandwich while you worked. That was a big outing for us to go to the beach here. The first time the whole family went to the beach I think we were taken to Swanbourne and when we got there, we had barely got into the sand when there was a shark alarm. So we stood there and waited for half-an-hour getting thoroughly sunburned, all being Poms with fair skins. We'd just got into the water and the alarm went off again and we came out of the water and we stood there for another half-hour, got back into the water and the alarm went again and came out of the water a second time. My mother said, "In the name of God I am not sitting here waiting for some bloody alarm to go off. Home! Let's go." That was the end of the beach expedition for us. It took me a long while to get back to the beach after that. I had to go with Australians to get used to the beach after that.

## **END OF INTERVIEW SESSION ONE**

## **INTERVIEW SESSION TWO**

HC           This is the second interview session with David Crann for the Town of Victoria Park, held at his home in Victoria Park on Monday 24 April 2017. The interviewer is Heather Campbell.



David, what about the industry in Vic Park – I know there was Portland Cement - were you familiar with Portland Cement?

**CRANN:** Yes, particularly the nationalities. What sticks most in my mind is that when we built the house – and other people in Victoria Park - the complaint then was this constant cloud of dust that was settled all over our properties. Everybody was out every morning sweeping up cement dust that had settled on their footpaths and their verandahs etc. It was an ongoing complaint. Moves were afoot right from a long time ago to try and get something done. They did some adjustments to the chimneys that spewed this stuff out. That dropped it down quite a lot until they eventually decided that like other industries it would be better if it was moved further out. Swan Portland and James Hardie were both together on that peninsular and one was supplying the other. What was significant about Swan Portland is its association with South Africa and the Boer War. Then I got to meet some of the people, a gentleman, who came from this very house<sup>22</sup>, Mr La Rosa for instance, he worked there for many years, like many Italians. Many of those Italians who came in between the wars worked at those two places. From there they gravitated in towards the town itself. Swan Portland, Hardies, Chamberlains out at Welshpool on the perimeter of Victoria Park - the munitions work was very important also throughout the war, it remained there for a while. There were abattoirs and of course the all important timber industry, which is huge, very vast and concerned most people. Essentially people by and large were tied up with those industries or they were government, like the post office, or trams or services of one kind or another. A very strong community social gathering because they were conscious of their work. They had these parades two or three times a year, usually led by union groups with banners, very impressive banners actually, they used to march down the street to say they were from this particular union or that particular union. That's when the buildings and the actual Albany Highway comes into focus at that time because you never thought about doing something spectacular unless it was in Albany Highway. That was the place you came to do it because there wasn't any other place of significance. As far as that street was concerned, up one end was the spectacular Edward Millen, which was lying... well not at first, it was a hospital, still going as a hospital. We used to go there

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<sup>22</sup> 47 Kitchener Ave, Victoria Park.

to entertain the invalids up there. It had been a maternity hospital before that. There were many maternity hospitals, like St Ives, for instance, which was essentially maternity. Dotted down the length of that the halls that were most significant were the Friendly Society Hall, Tuam Street, but to me the most important was the Victoria Park Public Library Hall. Founded in 1913 as a branch off from the rear of the Town Hall<sup>23</sup>, which was the centre of vitality at that time. But when the Library Hall came into existence then suddenly all the groups such as unions, women's groups etc., they all met there. So if you were near there you got the real feel of what Victoria Park was. Just across there was the pub and across there was the movies and here was the hall and down there was the Town Hall. They were all in close proximity to each other, so it was a vibrant centre. Anything that was going to happen was likely to happen there. The Library Hall was the scene for the enlisting for each of the wars. Also when the demob came they went there. Most of the marriages that were celebrated, or the twenty-firsts which were popular, were all in that hall. It wasn't a particularly big hall, about say twice the size of this room<sup>24</sup>, a bit wider. Everyone went there - Red Cross and Oddfellows and engineers and anglers and the library<sup>25</sup> itself. The taste in the library was very simple, cowboy stories and mystery stories etc. These people would collect there; I could visit them, as I did, in their factories, especially when I was running a newspaper. I used to go to the factories to get advertising and a story about them. Swan Portland had a tremendous significance for me because I noticed that aside from our street which had people who worked there, were these Italians I hadn't met, who also had worked there. When I used to go there they would tell me a little bit of the background and I suddenly saw the association that once again the lifeline was the railway line. All the industries were on this side and all the life was on the Albany side. They were only virtually three blocks apart. The churches were dotted in between and the pubs in between that. It was all terribly convenient then. Of course the sporting identities; all these industries had groups, sporting groups that played. The community was very locked in together in

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<sup>23</sup> Wise's Post Office Directory of 1914 lists the Victoria Park Public Library at 179 Albany Highway, Victoria Park, and the secretary as J B McCreagh. The Victoria Park Town Hall is listed at 132 Albany Highway, with Walter J Cohn, Town Clerk.

<sup>24</sup> Approx 7.3m x 3.6m.

<sup>25</sup> The library Mr Crann is referring to is the Victoria Park Public Library instituted in 1913 and originally based and operated from the Victoria Park Library Hall. Administered by Trustees and run by volunteers, it has no relationship with the Library Board of Western Australia, and should not be confused with the Town of Victoria Park library which was first opened to the public in June 1966 at its original location at 2 Mint Street. It subsequently moved to the Park Centre and then to Sussex Street in November 1994.



many ways – sporting, religion and socially they were locked in together and the Library Hall most of all. My earliest experience in Victoria Park theatrically was in that hall – the Southern Review Group, which was made up of people mostly who worked in either taxation or in the shops – mostly shop people – and also people who had trades of some sort, carpenters or plumbers or something of that nature. There were three small orchestras that played all the time, the four halls were always being danced in; five cinemas that were usually full and these endless shows. There was all this vitality going on at the same time, all these people who knew each other. See when you walked down Albany Highway you were constantly nodding – it was very friendly – ‘Good morning’ ‘Good morning’ Good morning’ – or then stopping and talking. There were the SP bookies. That usually happened in the barber’s shop at the same time. Of course when you got your hair cut you had to listen to what the latest race was or the latest football game that’s coming up. These were all the same people who were employed in these industries, who’d be sitting there as well. They were quite distinctive but when it was a social occasion they came together – they were great in coming together. They always constantly reminded me, as a new chum (as they kept calling me) what their values were and I was distinctly a colonial. They constantly said, “A Pom.” And I said, “No, Scots.” And they’d say, “Oh that’s the same place.” So I’d say, “Oh no, not quite.”

When the tramways were being built they built a whole tent city down there. As the tram moved away a lot of those men who worked in the tramways, putting the tram tracks down, eventually bought properties around Mackie Street, Armagh Street and all those names for that – that was another industry that popped up. They stayed behind and formed the basis of the next rise in the town’s population. So when we met industrially, my sister would be fitting shoes to people who had to have either working shoes or dress shoes and of course, that was the time of your weekly suit and your Sunday suit, so you had your Sunday best and you had your weekly thing. If you had a party thing... of course my wardrobe of the time was a sports jacket in which you turned your collar over the top of your sports jacket and there were flared trousers with elastic-sided boots with umpteen buttons down the front here. You had your hair full of either Californian Poppy or Brylcreem. The girls all wore split skirts with billowing petticoats underneath with ropes through them and either stilettos or flatties (as they called them).

HC           Your sister had a shoe shop?

**CRANN:**     Yes, Ezywalkins. Ezywalkins and the other three or four were actually kind of connected to the same Jewish family – Breckelles was the main one. So she had a shoe shop here and then she moved further out to another shoe shop and further out to another shoe shop, all in Albany Highway. My brother-in-law worked out at Midland, so the bus would bring him in. My father would come off the train and the two of them would meet up with my brother and they would all be in the Broken Hill. Of course the usual thing is to hear, “Who is going up on Friday to tell them to come home, so we can get our fish and chips before they’re stone cold?” We used to go there to wait for these jugs of beer being passed over people’s heads and drinking. They were all very, very merry and very, very happy, especially Friday night – there was always a big fight then. The attitude always was there was lift on Thursday and then on Friday it went up and then on Saturday it sort of peaked. Then Sunday you sort of recovered but then you went to people’s houses for lunch with the family or whatever the case was, and meeting each other. Or if you had a car you went driving. Some of them, like Excell for instance, the marine collector<sup>26</sup>, he would take his family to visit our family and then we’d go down to... it didn’t seem very far to go, but it was far enough in those days, we’d go down to the river or to Canning Bridge. There were a lot of crabs and prawns around in those days. It was a time when you sort of went there and you put up tarpaulin; everyone was in just shorts and shirt and that was it. You slept on the sand and you ate fish and just mucked around all the time. That was popular; I think the most popular thing. So those working class people; that was their outlet - a most important outlet.

We were part of that. My brother was in Jason’s; that was an offshoot from the furniture store up in Welshpool, right next door to Vic Park. My father was Railway. I was working for William Adams. My sister had the shoe shop, Ezywalkins. She had started first of all at Ezywalkins in town and then had come up to here. My mother, of course, was with the various Red Cross groups etc. We were inculcated – and you felt it very strongly. I had never known... I suppose in my growing up years and India being a totally different kind of society, I had a slight taste of it in Scotland, more so

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<sup>26</sup> Allan C Excell, 87 Mackie Street, Victoria Park. *Wise’s Post Office Directory* 1949, p. 566



when I stayed with the MacArthurs. Then I became very union conscious because it was a mining family and they spoke endlessly about miners and strikes etc. Strikes had a bad note in my mind because they meant that each time we'd gone somewhere we couldn't get any work because they were on strike. When we came here and we suddenly found that it was... well it was a way of life. So we attended all the functions and the parades and we found that the schoolchildren were involved in the same things also. When there was a parade there was a truck with children dressed up, standing in the back and people marching with banners. This was something new to us, but as the unionists who came to the Library Hall for their meetings (it was a popular spot for meeting) you would hear them discussing that amongst themselves about the fact that this community had to be led by certain people. You felt that these people were... When you looked at the list of the councillors etc. they were people of the street. They were people who had businesses – Mr Harvey who had a printing business, who lived directly opposite what is now the Council Chamber – and McMaster and Rushton and Harper. They were all local people, but not your sort of learning how to do the Council, but people who had been here a long time, were very conscious of who was here, of the unions that they belonged to, of the societies that were functioning. Mr Todhunter was in the thick of all that. The same with Strang. You sensed that it was definitely working class. In my youthful, early boyish thing I kept thinking of *How Green was My Valley*, or some of those early British films in which you saw union workers against the bosses as it were. I thought to myself, well yes, I'll get used to it, for me who was still, shall we say, suffering from the idea that we couldn't get started to begin with and it had been such a major setback to us, as a family. But we got to like it. I must say the Federated Clerks Union wasn't much to me. On the two occasions I lost jobs they didn't offer any defence for me to go back and say, "Well he's been here ten years you should be giving him something or other." They [William Adams] made a final small settlement. It was enough to buy a Lambretta which gave me more access around Victoria Park. With the theatre and William Adams no longer my boss, the Lambretta, calling on people, selling insurance policies for T&G – they had all sorts of names for that. T&G was either Touch and Go, Tickle and Giggle; there are the sort of things they would say. They'd say, "Who are you working for now?" You couldn't be not working – the very idea was just not going to be accepted. When I came home and said, "I've been laid off, sacked," my parents were horrified.

HC This is after you'd been there ten years?

**CRANN:** That's right. They said, "What are you going to do now?" I said, "Whatever comes up." I wasn't quite so blasé about it, I was really worried about it. I wrote for appointments and I just went from place to place. Fortunately part-time jobs were very much the essence in 1959. So 1959/1960 was a turn in life for me. The Lambretta took me from insurance policies to door-to-door sales with vacuum cleaners. That was a real big education; actually it helped me a lot as an actor, I met all sorts of people in all kinds of different diverse locations. You suddenly realise that Victoria Park wasn't the whole world, there was also Mount Lawley and Fremantle and Melville and something else. You got to know the whole place.

HC Did you sell in Vic Park though?

**CRANN:** No, never in Victoria Park. No one could afford vacuum cleaners. I think we only got our first vacuum cleaner somewhere in the middle sixties. The big thing then of course was saving up for the television set, but it was going to be a long way off. Meanwhile you stood outside shop fronts and looked to see what was happening on the screens of those places. Getting work then was paramount; but the Lambretta and with that change to doing all those odd jobs – I grew up fast! I had been fairly sort of cocooned; I was quite safe, that job, my home, my family, my theatrical interests etc. It seemed complete. But when the job went the whole thing just shattered. I had to change.

At the time as a result of meeting these people, I got to know the religious side of Victoria Park. I suddenly realised that what was prompting much of the artistry was coming out of the Catholics. These people I used to associate with. My mother used to say to me, "Do you realise you are mixing with Micks - you know that do you? They're all left-footers - do you know that?" So I said, "Yes." She said, "I've seen them walking past here – do you think they're the sort of people you should mix with?" So I said, "This is Victoria Park. I'm just interested in what these people do and I am just amazed that it seems to me that much of the cultural things seems to be coming them." Not to say that its exclusively there because I noticed that Mr



Todhunter and his musical background was coming from the Uniting Church side of things. There's a mixture then.

I was studying voice and theatre with a Catholic lady based in town, in Perth, Colleen Clifford. She was running the Theatre Guild. All the people in that set-up, Heather, all amounted to something significant nationally. There was Ken Hitchcock, Shirley Sims and Fred Petersen and Joy Mulligan – nine of ten of them, all eventually went on Channel Seven, Channel Two; the Eastern States. Pam Bradley, who everyone would know from that time, was associated with it also. They were all significant in some way and this religious link was there all the time. I went into town and I was taking the classes and Colleen Clifford would say to me, "You realise of course as far as Perth is concerned – and you've been living on the perimeters – that it's either the Jews or the Catholics, or the Methodists, who seem to have the cultural outlet for doing things. Not to say strictly, but mostly them." Then she rattled off some names, Colleen Clifford, Coralie Condon, Frank Baden Powell, Nita Pannell, Margaret Ford, all Catholics. Then on the other side there was Sainken and Sainken and Dorothy Krantz, they were all Jewish. You say to yourself well that's what's happening. Well Patch was all workers and the repertory was all bankers, so that's the difference; the class distinction between those two people. Not to say that they were better, it was just that one lot had a lot more money and they could afford to go to Europe every second year and see what was going on and come back. She [Colleen Clifford] said, "You must have noticed surely that when you watch people walking down St George's Terrace, they look different to the people walking down Hay Street, who look different to the people walking down Wellington Street or Murray Street. Have you not noticed that?" "Well I said, "now you mention it, yes. When you walk down the Terrace they're definitely well-dressed and they're carrying briefcases and they look they're going to..." It was all insurance offices and banks etc., and politicians and the rest, or churches, because there were a lot of churches along the Terrace at that time, very different to what it is today.

HC           What about the people walking down Albany Highway over here?

**CRANN:**     When you mentioned that you came from Albany Highway ... Even the Premier David Brand, he said to me, "Ah you're from south of the river. They all think

that they on this side are better off than you are, but it's us who keep them going, but we allow them to be snooty about it. If you are from Vic Park you are working class."

When I was working at William Adams I looked around and there was a cross section of people. At that time they were expanding, so Carlyles and Atkins and Littles and Batemans and the chap who owned this building<sup>27</sup> who started the Sara and Cook business, he started right in this building.<sup>28</sup> That's where he started from. He was just a local greengrocer who built it up to doing something much bigger.

HC           Where in Vic Park did people have these cultural experiences; where were the concerts, where was theatre, where were the live shows centred, in Vic Park?

**CRANN:**   Well most of the time in that same Library Hall I was telling you about, or the Town Hall. It was very hard getting a string of bookings in the Town Hall; you had to actually bargain with other people – ask the rose people if they'd move to this thing so that you could get three days or four days.... We used to try very hard to get two weekends, a Friday and a Saturday, or Thursday, Friday, Saturday, so you could perform in the Town Hall. But you had to keep negotiating with all the other groups in order to get three days in a row and you had to give up one of your spaces in order to do that.

HC           Tell me about the Library Hall, when you first knew it; what was the building like?

**CRANN:**   Actually you wouldn't notice it straight away. People still don't notice it, but actually from the history it was quite imposing, set back from the street with four Corinthian columns and a small rose garden in front. They filled the rose garden in with two shops because they wanted an income from it. Then you had to walk up two marble stairs, up to more marble stairs and then you walked along the passageway until you came to the hall. Then after the hall was the storage space etc., the kitchens. The toilets were that way. That's where all the activity was. Its door faced

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<sup>27</sup> 47 Kitchener Street, Victoria Park.

<sup>28</sup> Wise's Post Office Directories indicate that Lionel G Sara commenced running a mixed business at 47 Kitchener Street in 1947, taking over from Henry E Fenwick.



the Broken Hill door – poured out of one door and poured into the other. That's how it was, so you poured out of there and walked across to the Broadway Cinema or you went down the block to get to the Town Hall<sup>29</sup> to go to the big dance that was being held there. Dancing was continuous; it was there all the time.

HC           What about the Town Hall; what was that like?

**CRANN:**     That was quite magnificent. It was an 1897 building, a magnificent facade, quite imposing as a building; a bit tatty at the back. The library was situated in a building attached to the back of the Town Hall<sup>30</sup> where the vandals used to break in and get a hold of the magazines and tear out all the pictures of aeroplanes and ships etc., to take to their homes. The actual hall itself, I think it was quite a large hall about four or five times bigger than this and about three times as wide. Very popular. Very difficult to get a booking in it at all. There was always eisteddfods, concerts, recitals, flower shows, bird shows, fish shows, meetings of ratepayers, music groups, people giving lectures, elections. It all happened there. It was probably the busiest, so the two were compatible.

Thursday night you usually got paid so you paid off your rent thing and the money you'd borrowed and you thought well now I can go to the movies or I can pay my lay-by whatever the case might be. You'd either go dancing on a Friday night and you'd go to a movie on Saturday or vice versa as the case might be. If you were lucky they used to have afternoons at somebody's – 'at homes'. They were very fond of 'at homes' in those days – you don't hear about 'at homes' now.

HC           What did people do at 'at homes'?

**CRANN:**     'At homes'; you went along and someone played the piano – every second house had a piano. You sat around the piano and you'd sing songs – popular songs of the day. The popular diet was cheese crackers. Grated cheese on top of

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<sup>29</sup> Wise's Post Office Directory of 1914 lists the Victoria Park Public Library at 179 Albany Highway, Victoria Park, and the secretary as J B McCreagh. The Victoria Park Town Hall is listed at 132 Albany Highway, with Walter J Cohn, Town Clerk. Wise's POD of 1949 shows the Broken Hill Hotel at 314 Albany Highway and the Broadway Picture Palace at 330 Albany Highway.

<sup>30</sup> This was before the construction of the Victoria Park Public Library Hall.

biscuits with a tomato sitting on top. Lamingtons. Vanilla slices and sausage rolls, lots of sausage rolls.

HC Did you have 'at homes' at your place?

**CRANN:** No.

HC Why not?

**CRANN:** Because my mother didn't think it right to go into other people's places. She had quite a few friends who came across occasionally. She visited just occasionally, but we grew up with the rule that you don't go in there unless you are invited and they don't come in here unless they're invited. We don't want you saying anything or hearing anything that you shouldn't hear and repeating it.

HC Did you kids get invited to 'at homes'?

**CRANN:** Oh yes. We didn't tell her whether we'd been invited or not, we simply said, "Oh we're going to rehearsal," and go to the home. After I'd been, I'd tell her where I had been, she'd say, "Oh was it in a home?" "Yes, it was in a home." So she said, "At home, or in a home?" And she'd want to know who was there and she thought they were all Catholics. I said, "It's got nothing to do with it when we go to a home; when we're there we're singing songs, we're talking about work, we're talking about who won the games. The girls would talk about fashion; they'd talk about who's going to get married and engaged and whatever the latest elopement is. That's the sort of stuff. Usually the older members are playing cards, sitting in one corner and playing cards.

HC What songs did you sing at 'at homes' David?

**CRANN:** Everything from the musical comedy. Right from the very top would be things like Jeannette McDonald and Nelson Eddy were the big thing. Then of course, just then the rock and roll thing started so, '*One, two, three o'clock, four o'clock....*'



that came in in a big way. A lot of jazz. Very, very Catholic, very wide. Jim Tondut<sup>31</sup> was the generation slightly before me. From his end he would sing *The Old Spinning Wheel in the Corner*, which he always asked for and everyone sang dutifully for him. I loathed that song. Somebody else would sing something that they just heard from Chubby Checker or Johnnie 'Cry' Ray. Some of them thought they were going to be Johnnie 'Cry' Ray The other chap who sang at that time with a strange voice – he used to yodel – Ifield, Frank Ifield<sup>32</sup>. They could all mimic all those people; every one of them could sing Al Jolson or Eddie Cantor – or [mimics] 'a dink a dink, a dinka do, a dink a dink, a dinka do'. Who was that? Jimmy Durante! [Laughs]

HC Did gramophones then take over from the piano?

**CRANN:** Not very much, not very much. Records were so expensive, very expensive. I can distinctly remember my late brother-in-law... On my 21<sup>st</sup> birthday I got the first ever portable radio that also was a gramophone. I could only afford to buy two records. He came on my 21<sup>st</sup> birthday and he presented me with a twelve-inch and it was the sextets from *Lucia di Lammermoor*. My sister looked at it and she said, "What did that cost you?" He said, "Twenty-five shillings." "Twenty-five shillings! You're taking that back, you're not buying a twenty-five shilling record. That's a quarter of our week's wages!" It was a very unusual gift from him, I never expected. He was a very decent sort of man.

HC Was there a shop in Albany Highway selling gramophones and TVs and all this...?

**CRANN:** Yes, yes, there were two or three shops like that. Wyper Howards<sup>33</sup>, JB I think, as I recall. There were four or five shops doing it. When the portable radios came in, they came in in a big way. They were huge; they were virtually suitcases in those days. Actually I've got one of them still in the room there, which I kept. When

<sup>31</sup> Possibly Jas E Tondut, listed in Wise's Post Office Directory 1949, as living at 29 State Street, Victoria Park.

<sup>32</sup> Chubby Checker, an American singer widely known for popularising the twist dance style in the 1960s.

Johnnie Ray was another American singer - songwriter and pianist, who was extremely popular for most of the 1950s. Frank Ifield was an English-born Australian singer who often incorporated yodelling into his performances.

<sup>33</sup> Wyper Howard Limited. Mr Crann said later that the shop was in Albany Highway near the corner of Duncan Street.

we [Patch Theatre] started touring I used to just use that because it was easy enough to pack up and take with you. We played records; we didn't play them very often because they had a tendency to stop conversation. While there was singing and they were moving around and making groups and harmonising and doing skits etc., they were very good - very, very good. I couldn't believe how clever they were. Peter Dean, he's a radio announcer, he came from that same group also. Buddy Clarke was in that same group. Not your ordinary sort of people. There weren't the opportunities in those days, but they all rose to the top, every one of them.

There was that, then of course there was the staid three-piece orchestras. One was three-piece and two were four-piece. They played regularly at either the Salford Street RSL Hall, or they played at the Band Hall, or they played at the Town Hall and the Library Hall. So there were four places you could dance. If you danced – this is very much like the India idea – if you danced during the week in that local place you had to go and dance on the weekend or the month end at the Embassy. By then you had enough money to get into the Embassy or Anzac. You wore your best clothes and by then you'd paid off your lay-by and you had your suit that you could go and make an impression with. You had to pay to get in. That was the thing, to get in there because it was a big ballroom and dancing, with all sorts of people that you might have read about or heard about and that was the attraction, going to town.

HC            With those little bands around Vic Park, were there any personalities in them that stand out in your mind?

**CRANN:**     Well Todhunter was the most significant. There was also Trenberth, that was the second one. The third one was called – I am just trying to think of the name now. There were three groups. There were other groups – I mentioned the Isaias, the Isaias were four brothers, three of them played the accordion; they were very much in demand, but they tended to play mostly for Italian functions – not strictly, but mostly. There were more actually than just the three; there were others - sort of specific groups who played for a specific reason. A lot of piano teachers, a lot of piano teachers. They'd all got to the stage they were playing in churches. The most famous lady pianist in town was Rose Farley, Cyril and Rose Farley. He had a



superb baritone<sup>34</sup>. His wife was a magnificent pianist, absolutely superb, who played the organ at the Uniting Church, which was Methodist in those days. She was one, but I think there must have been about ten or twelve. All the years of the Southern Review work we had five different pianists who played over those years. When they got together someone would just strike a few chords – well Nola Obleis, for instance, she was one of the Vic Park families, and she got, [taps the table and mimics beat] bom, bom, bom, boomba, boomba boom. Everyone got up and everyone's moving across the floor. It was still early days and very quickly became a conga line, so that become boring. When I first arrived it was Pride of Erin. I sat there for half an hour trying to absorb how you did this turn around twice and change partners and go to the next one; Flirtation waltzes. That was the mix coming and we were at that cusp where you're changing out of that period into the next one.

HC Did you play a musical instrument?

**CRANN:** No, no, never did. Well you had to pay money for it. When I was in boarding school I remember writing to my mother and asking, but she didn't have the money to pay for it. I had to make do with singing in the choir, but that was all right. At school I spent a lot of time working with people on the piano, helping them with exams. The job where you have someone who stands by you and you call out the exercises.

HC With all the cinemas and the Embassy and all that social life going on, how did you find out about it? Through newspapers? Did you find out what was on at the cinema through newspapers?

**CRANN:** Oh yes.

HC Did you have any newspapers in Vic Park?

**CRANN:** Oh yes! When we started a newspaper we acquired the name *Vic Park Post*, because it was previously called the *Vic Park Post*. Jim Tondut, bless him, he

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<sup>34</sup> See also pages 27-29 this transcript.

used to write the write-ups. He'd produce the plays and then wrote up the plays and flattered everybody and told them how brilliant they all were and all that sort of stuff.

HC            So there was an earlier newspaper called the *Vic Park Post*?

**CRANN:**    Oh yes, yes.

HC            Was that going when you first came here?

**CRANN:**    Yes, yes. That wealthy combination Hancock and Wright. Wright started an independent newspaper and he started in Vic Park. Tom the Cheap Grocer had a newspaper as well. There was also the *Catholic Record* that came out every week. There were four or five newspapers and there were two or three that you weren't supposed to be seen reading – *The Daily Mirror* (it was a divorce paper and that sort of thing). Oh there was lot. *The West* used to come out and do photographs, but most of the time we took our... somebody would come and do the photographs and we'd put them into our own paper, write our own articles – or Jim did at any rate.

HC            So there was an early Vic Park Post?.

**CRANN:**    It was absorbed into all the *Gazettes*, the Community Newspapers, back in 1996. We revived it because we were concerned about the state of Victoria Park, so we revived the paper in order to make people aware we were trying to bring back what Victoria Park had.

HC            Tell me about reviving it David, who was 'we'?

**CRANN:**    There was Ross, the late Ross Kendall. There was also about fifteen people. We had started off from here. We found there was no venues to go to, so we [Patch Theatre] were mostly performing out in libraries and going to all the other places around, even country tours as well. But when we came home and we saw more and more shops being boarded up, more and more graffiti on the walls. Everything that had made the place tick had all gone. The flood of shopping centres



dragged away all those things like street-side stalls and Red Cross people and WVS people. They'd go into the shopping centres because that's where people were congregating. After a while they got tired of it and they don't have that any more. We were just looking around and thinking this is sad. So we went to an early Vic Park meeting, we spoke to the Commissioners (they appointed Commissioners first)<sup>35</sup> spoke to them about the state of the thing and what could be done. He said, "It has to be people motivated. If it's going to work it's got to come from the grass roots." So we went through to the associations – there were three or four associations – the Vic Park Association, Carlisle Association and there was a third one – ratepayers' associations. They were led by some very, very active people. One of whom is still around. Among the things they tried to do at that time, Heather, they were going to change the name of Victoria Park to Shepperton. Peter Lesiter led that; he was President of the Carlisle Association. Because we put up our hands and decided we wanted to do things the Council went out of their way to block and they succeeded in some instances. Peter got us all together. We went out and we stood on street corners and we got 12 000 signatures that said, 'No, it stays Victoria Park. We do not want to be called Shepperton.' Mick Lee was saying, bless him, "It's a new generation and we're going to a new century so you should have a different name. Vic Park is too old-fashioned." We thought that Vic Park was its identity, that's the kind of people who are here. The shopping centre was rundown and graffiti was a problem, endless graffiti.

HC            Did you start the paper as a lobby medium?

**CRANN:**    Yes, that was the purpose. It displeased some people, but the average person liked it because we featured only things to do with what was happening with people themselves; what they were doing and having a go at the Council about - certain things had not been done or were proposed and didn't seem to be being advanced. We formed a Retailers' Association. I actually went from shop- to-shop. I must have walked the Causeway to Welshpool Road at least once every day, sometimes twice, calling shop-to-shop and talked about street fairs. We used to be

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<sup>35</sup> In July 1994 the Town of Shepperton (later renamed Victoria Park) was proclaimed under the 1993 Perth City Council restructuring act. A commission council was instituted which, in May 1995, was replaced with the election of eight councillors and a mayor. See Victoria Park Local History timeline at <http://www.victoriapark.wa.gov.au/Around-town/Facilities/Library/Local-History/Local-History-timeline>

dressed up in costumes and on a different day for no reason at all we just went around giving people apples; because they were on the cheap and we could afford them. Walked in and said, "It's happy day, here have an apple today," and leave an apple on their counter. Just anything to keep them talking about the place. We started the Art Group. We found people who could paint – not locally mostly, mostly from somewhere else, but they were interested in coming here because they liked the look of the place. The idea of a town that had churches on two hills and a pub in the middle and a little town hall down there. Then came the threat of these cars. The Town Hall was demolished for John Hughes car yard<sup>36</sup>. Look at the car yards now; he's got them all over. The whole place is still full of car yards. We fought high rises, said we didn't want high rises; we wanted to keep the ambience. We went to Council meetings. They talked about lifting the railway up in the air and put it above our heads. We said, "No thank you very much." We organised art exhibitions, found poets who could write and I've kept most of those poems to this day<sup>37</sup>. We worked on that stimulus, so Retail Association, Art Association, Music Association. We started a Horticultural Society; opened the market garden. Ross Kendall painted murals and poetry all over the five layers of the car park. We painted out all the graffiti. We were told by the graffiti people if you put something in its place they won't touch it, they won't mark it, so we carefully painted it out and promptly did something artistic in its place - or write a poem in its place. It survived; it's still there. That was the overall power to lift the place.

HC            You mentioned the loss of the Town Hall, what sort of impact did that have at the time.

**CRANN:**     Well I think it had drifted down slowly. For a long while before it actually was demolished people had stopped going there because the television had made inroads into the people who were actually. When television came everyone was so smitten with it, nobody came out. It's still quite bad today.

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<sup>36</sup> The Victoria Park Timeline indicates that the Victoria Park Town Hall was sold to Mr Oliver Strang Snr in 1983 and resold and demolished in 1985. According to John Bissett it was sold by the Perth City Council to help fund the Park Recreation Centre. See <https://johnbissett.org/town-history/historical-photos/>

<sup>37</sup> Phillip Slalom was one of these poets. A later poet, Mick Ryan, wrote a poem about David Crann, 'Sundays Play', published in *Truth is a Walker: selected poetry of Mick Ryan*, Edited by David Crann and Ross Kendall, Victoria Park Post, December 2005, Victoria Park. Copy attached to this transcript.



HC            So the Town Hall was not being used?

**CRANN:**    Not very much, no.

HC            What about the Library Hall?

**CRANN:**    The Library was being used because they had these groups who met. Their numbers were coming down, but they still met and they still do and people still got married and they still had functions and the library<sup>38</sup> was always there. The various unions met there. When they had elections people would choose that point to have their election meetings at. That was still very active. It continued being active even right till the time we [Patch] left it, it was still active, until it was converted into a restaurant.

HC            Are there any library staff that stand out in your mind?

**CRANN:**    Yes Alice Longson.

HC            Tell me about her.

**CRANN:**    How shall I say? Think of a Margaret Rutherford looking lady – do you remember Margaret Rutherford, the actress, with a beehive hairdo – lots of hair that sort of piled up in a bun with things sticking through it. She was a teacher for a long time at the East Vic Park School. In retirement she took on as secretary of the Library Hall. She organised the bookings for all the functions and she organised the books – not terribly well because she was a very kindly soul... We'd been down in the theatre at least five or six years and people were still coming back with their shopping trolleys with six or seven books that they'd borrowed and never brought back again. Our two good ladies, Mrs Parham and Mrs Hills, they undertook restoring the library, so they had to go through all the shelves, throw out all the books that were too badly gone and put them on a table out front and they were sold

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<sup>38</sup> NB The library being referred to is the Victoria Park Public Library, run by volunteers, not the Town of Victoria Park Library.

sixpence each or something, or given away. We made the emphasis on culture, art, theatre and drawing. That was gradually built back up and became a very beautiful library eventually. Miss Longson still lived quite close, she lived up in King George Street, in a lovely cottage, it looked like she and the cottage were one. When she came out of that place it made me think of [sings] *Little Old Lady Passing By*, that kind of thing. A nicely built lady, charming, very English, Miss Longson. When I discovered that the other people called Alice I thought that was very charming too. She was the librarian, I think at that time the only librarian that we had before they introduced the state library which is way up in Mint Street.<sup>39</sup> They had identities. Mr Larter, who was president of the Library Board<sup>40</sup> and Mr McGilvray were significant because they met with all the other groups who came there to use that hall, therefore they spoke to them all the time. What was interesting – I’ve told you when I got to their records and right at the beginning it [Victoria Park Public Library Board] took a small sort of honorarium, probably ten shillings and sixpence. Towards the end they were taking thirteen and fourteen and fifteen pounds. That’s why when it came our [i.e. Patch Theatre] turn to use the library they said, “We would like you to succeed us. You must be tenants at will.” But they didn’t tell us that there wasn’t any money in the bank and the place had not been repaired in fifteen years; it was in a terrible state. Well Alice, in order to save money used to clean the toilets and wash up the dishes. The floors used to be swept with sawdust soaked with kerosene, that’s how you could get the dust and the cigarette butts and all that up together. That got beyond them, they couldn’t do all that, they were too old. I’ve now got to think about handing over my trusteeship because I am now at the same age Mr Larter was when he gave it to me.

HC            This is the voluntary library run by volunteers?

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<sup>39</sup> The Town of Victoria Park library was first opened to the public on 14 June 1966 at its original location at 2 Mint Street. It subsequently moved to the Park Centre and in then to Sussex Street in November 1994. This library administered by the Town of Victoria Park should not be confused with the library being discussed by Mr Crann which is the Victoria Park Public Library, instituted in 1913. This library was originally based and operated from the Victoria Park Library Hall. It is administered by Trustees and is not under the auspices of the Town of Victoria Park and has no relationship with the Library Board of Western Australia. Mr Crann is currently a Trustee of that Library.

<sup>40</sup> Mr Crann is referring to the Library Board which ran the Victoria Park Public Library only, not the Library Board of Western Australia which was set up under the Library Board Act to manage and control the State Library and to provide and manage library services in conjunction with local government bodies.



**CRANN:** That's right.

HC Where does it operate from now?

**CRANN:** From here.

HC From your house?

**CRANN:** Yes, the library's back here.

HC Is it still used?

**CRANN:** Oh yes, oh yes, used a lot. When Patch came into it, we made the actors, the students, become members of the library, because we couldn't get them to read enough. We asked them to choose from what we had. So we chose books like plays and magazines of that nature, which prompted them to read about the plays that they were going to do.

HC So David, why was there a need for a voluntary library, when there was a public library?

**CRANN:** Well that came much later. There wasn't any public library for years.

HC But there is now, but you're still running the voluntary library?

**CRANN:** Oh yes, we're still running the voluntary thing but the emphasis is on art and on cultural things. Glenn Barnes used to live next door and before he left he gave me 150 books on philosophy and politics which came into the library.

HC And has your library and the organisation got a name for the library?<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> For the story of how Victoria Park Public Library, the Patch Theatre and 47 Kitchener Street became closely associated, see pps. 59-62 of this transcript.

**CRANN:** Just Victoria Park Public Library, we kept that name. VPPL. Not many people come to this library. The people who use this library are usually people who have been associated with the theatre. There's no computers in here.

HC So your library here – the Victoria Park Public Library – is used mainly by people learning about it by word of mouth.

**CRANN:** That's right.

HC And how many borrowers would you have?

**CRANN:** Oh it varies. There's a consistency of about between 80 and 100. They tend to all borrow at the same time. We usually have a bit of trouble getting books back. Neville Brown has thought about offering his services as a librarian for this library. He's going to include World War I and World War II records, into the library as well. He plans on converting this room into a reading room. That's the plan for the future.

HC I think for the record I should say that your house used to be a shop and the room we are sitting in was the main room where the shopping was done, so it's a rather large room.<sup>42</sup>

**CRANN:** There's been rehearsals in here. The second occupant after the shop was let was a lady who did art works. Art in a sense that it was... she knitted, so shawls which were popular then – we're talking about the sixties, seventies - crochet, embroidery. She was here for about fifteen years. The next one who came was the Braille Society who were next door. They sold all these second-hand clothes in here.

HC Sort of a recycling boutique?

**CRANN:** That's right. Recycling wasn't the 'in' word then, you virtually needed clothes and you came here to buy the suit that you couldn't afford to buy in town.

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<sup>42</sup> 7.3m x 3.6m.



They were here for a long time – about fifteen years. The shopkeeper who was there before – and he was twenty years here – so twenty years, fifteen years, fifteen years, and we've been here twenty-five years<sup>43</sup>. I converted that into a theatre. That is the original Library Hall piano sitting over there and we used to have performances here. I could seat thirty people here. One of the things we were given were the seating and tables from the North Fremantle Primary School that were built in 1920, so we put them out so people could sit here. If there was a function we used to spill out there into the railway garden<sup>44</sup>, put people out there. There have been all sorts of people in here, Geoff Gallop was in here and Don Randall came here. Mayors, you name it. All sorts of people when you're having meetings, all that revolutionary thing, trying to get Vic Park going, all happened in here. I think the Causeway Cultural Centres is the name we gave it, so all the things people created would have that emphasis. Two of the people here were actually Perth City Council Mayors. One was a dentist called David Cole and his wife<sup>45</sup>. They came here. We used to have performances here, meetings here, started a historical society. We used to do oral histories all the time, we used to get people from... the blind people because they were all that age group and take down their oral histories and have them here as well. Then we used to have afternoon teas in the old 'at home' type of way. People would have a talk. We formed a confederation of residents and ratepayers and we also started the Victoria Park Markets and we also performed religious plays in churches, taking over from the Therry Society. For seventeen years we did something like 137 performances in various churches around the metropolitan area and we still have some here. I still have the gear inside there.

HC            Who's we; who were the other people?

**CRANN:**    Well it varied over the years. I was just talking to one yesterday who was here twenty-five years ago, but while she was here... she was in the theatre for twenty-four years before that. Usually it was company members.

HC            People from Patch?

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<sup>43</sup> See attached listing of occupants of 47 Kitchener Avenue, Victoria Park, taken from Wise's Post Office Directories, 1930-1949. All the occupants except one were listed as running a mixed business.

<sup>44</sup> The front of the old shop faces the railway line.

<sup>45</sup> Dr David Cole does not appear on the listing of City of Perth Council Mayors on the City of Perth website.

**CRANN:** People from Patch. So we'd be running ads for actors and you'd train them for three to six months in how to do our performances. So all the basics. They'd learn how to do all the children's plays first up. Then they'd learn how to do what we call aged persons' play, *Youth, Love and Spring, Tell me a Story, Tell me another story. Tell me another song*, which is meant for aged care. We worked in aged centres a lot and we used to do it minimum rates, sort of \$50 or something like that. Then we'd do the schools and the libraries with the children's stories. That changed every year, but we had a repertoire of thirty-seven children's plays that we could perform, all the way from *Three Little Pigs*, all the way up to *Arabian Nights* and in between.

HC This is after you took over Patch.

**CRANN:** Yes, you're in Patch now.

HC As far as I understand it after you were a door-to-door salesman for vacuum cleaners and various other things, you went over East and had reasonable success eventually in the Tivoli Theatre and then you were asked to come back her - who asked you?

**CRANN:** The trustee of the Patch Theatre. I'd been attending Patch for about eight years and in fact I'd been quite active in quite a number of productions. I only left in the first instance because I was told to leave – I'd become too big a fish for a small pond, is the director described me at the time.

HC What did they mean by that?

**CRANN:** Well I suppose in two years I played in about eight different plays, which was above the norm. The usual thing with their membership was that you were lucky to get one or two parts a year and to find someone who played six parts in one year, they thought was a bit much. The counter argument was if the public likes watching that actor well why not? I worked for her in both her productions, she directed me in *Death of a Salesman* and in *The Crucible*.



HC           Who was this?

**CRANN:**     Her name was Mary Senior; she was the Trustee/Director of the Patch Theatre at the time. A very famous teacher. She introduced the Cuisenaire method of mathematics into schools. She was a very practical down-to-earth lady. I was horrified when she said it – I'd just finished a season of *Gigi* and she said, "I think you should think about moving on. You've become a very big fish in a small pond." Well that was quite a shock. I thought - I had a temporary job - I don't have a likelihood of another one and I don't have this in the theatre, so now's the logical time to up and go somewhere else.

HC           And that's when you went over to the Eastern States?

**CRANN:**     When I went to the Eastern States.

HC           During that time you were over there your father died<sup>46</sup> so your mother was left here alone. Who approached you to come back?

**CRANN:**     The succeeding Mr Parham. Actually he and his wife both. Mrs Parham, bless her, was always very supportive. She used to write to me quite frequently and tell me what was happening with the theatre and they were interested to see what I was doing. It was quite surprising to find it didn't happen to everybody. There were quite a number of other people from Western Australia who went to the Eastern States who didn't quite do as much as I had done. I found the difference was that they had saved a lot of money and I didn't have any. I was really on my bare backside; I was down to looking for leftovers at Coles' cafeterias and stuff like. If I got a cleaning job I used to go into their kitchen, have some coffee and one of their biscuits or something of that nature. I had to make a go of it; I wasn't going to admit I missed out.

At that time I continued my instruction in the Catholic faith. I'd been staunchly Anglican before that, but I think the constant influence of the theatre and the people I

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<sup>46</sup> David Crann snr died on 3 August 1965. Metropolitan Cemeteries Board.

knew and my mother's background and the way I grew up in India, which was essentially a Catholic place; this all played a part in it. I was very impressed and people I usually admired did have a Catholic background.

HC           Aside from that did you espouse to the Catholic view, religious view?

**CRANN:**    Oh yes, yes. I actually intended to be a priest.

HC           Is this when you were an adult?

**CRANN:**    Yes. I didn't just.... those ten years I used to go to Wesley, Trinity, St George's, St Mary's, Lutheran – just to see what they were all saying. I just found that to me, personally, I needed something that was an everyday relationship and I found that amongst the Catholics more so than the others. I associated with the Hare Krishnas for a while. While I was in the theatre I always encouraged all these people like Mormans and Hare Krishnas to come into the theatre. They did lots of good work in the theatre – painting the place, restored it, cleaned it. It was the Mormans who taught the children in my class to sing Australian carols. The thing I remember saying about the Beebys<sup>47</sup>, there should not be any bias of any sort, you've got to keep it open, it's got to be 'patch'. Patch simply means contributions from everybody irrespective of background.

HC           Was it when you came back to manage Patch that you started to get serious about Catholicism?

**CRANN:**    While I was away I became serious. I started my conversion here before I went. I was introduced here, baptised in Melbourne and I was confirmed by Cardinal Gilroy in St Mary's Basilica in Sydney.

HC           What was your mother's reaction?

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<sup>47</sup> Edward and Ida Beeby, founders of Patch Theatre in Bon Marche Arcade in 1939.



**CRANN:** Her first reaction to me was, "I'm not going to tell your father because he's a Mason and he'll be terribly disappointed." I told her, "It just for me it feels right." We didn't talk about it anymore; no one mentioned it any more.

HC So you decided that after you'd been in the Tivoli and had a reasonably successful theatre career in the East, the alternatives were to go to England or to come back to Vic Park and manage Patch.

**CRANN:** It wasn't in Vic Park; it was in Perth at the time. That was 1966. I came back. Things were pretty dire here and I had a real fight taking up the directorship - they made all sorts of conditions on me.

HC Was it a paid position?

**CRANN:** No, no, no. I paid them. I paid them. They were in debt. They hadn't paid any rent and they hadn't paid for any advertisements and they hadn't paid any water or electric bills for a while. I borrowed the money and I gave them \$800 and I didn't get paid. I got another cleaning job. When I came back here I got a cleaning job cleaning windows in St George's Terrace. I worked at that until I could start building it up. I must have worked for about three or four months and then the classes started again, so I opened the children's classes and youth classes. I used to teach on a Saturday from nine o'clock in the morning until about six o'clock in the evening, three different groups. Then go into rehearsal, then open the performance. I changed the format of what they were doing. A lot of people had drifted away. We started bringing some money in. The agreement was if I brought some money in they would pay me \$40 a week, so \$40 a week was where I started. I didn't get much higher than that even to the day I finished - I think I got to \$60.

HC So how did you support yourself in that time?

**CRANN:** By always volunteering to work somewhere in between times. We got so busy with the income from performances; 1966 was the crucial starting point. I introduced the Hyde Park Holiday, did that for three years. I introduced High School Festival, Boorabilla for Governor Stirling. I introduced the Broome Festival of the

Pearl. I introduced Catholic students to performing in State drama festivals. In exchange for that voluntary work they booked out the theatre and that's how we got paid. That paid the rent and took care of the debt. Gradually I paid off the rent, the backlog of the rent.

The big thing in '69 I opened the students in a production that toured of *Julius Caesar and Out Town*. We did the *Importance of Being Ernest*. Then we opened *Oedipus the King* in His Majesty's. Out of all that we only just broke even, but we had five productions running simultaneously using 302 volunteers all round. We were doing quite well, but in 1970 there was a fire and we lost the whole bloody lot, everything went, the public went and all the students went. Nothing left. We had to start from scratch again. I had begun the beginnings of a touring company, a permanent touring company, a small group.

HC           After the fire did it then become focussed on Vic Park?

**CRANN:**     Yes. I spent eighteen months searching for a place to go. I went on my Lambretta from right up as far as Gingin down to Fremantle, out to Midland, looking for places that we might find to convert. It was a sheer fluke on my way home to Vic Park I saw the Library Hall. That's where I met the gentleman who remembered me as from Vic Park. He said, "We'd like to see your [Patch Theatre] constitution if your constitution bears a relationship to ours [Victoria Park Library Inc.], we want you to consider the likelihood of your taking over the trusteeship of the Library Hall." So I got the constitutions compared; the decision was made and Patch took it over.

HC           So your first base here was the Library Hall?

**CRANN:**     Yes.

HC           And at this time you were doing this work for Patch, who were you responsible to?

**CRANN:**     No-one, just me.



HC Did you manage the finances as well?

**CRANN:** Yes. What my producer called jam-jar economics. Very simply I collect the money and I put it in the bank. You give me a bill and I'll pay you – after you give me a discount of course. There was Ross Kendall, Jennie Orsi, Wendy Ailey, Adele Hills, John Hollywood, myself. Mrs Parham, Mrs Gill. Those eight – and we started again.

HC And were you still working to support yourself?

**CRANN:** Yes. Cleaning, always cleaning.

HC Tell me how you went about developing it once you got the Library Hall.

**CRANN:** It was very hard because we hadn't been there very long and we discovered there was... what they hadn't told us was (1) there wasn't any money in the bank (2) the Public Health descended on us. Because we'd been burnt out we were very suspect. They came in and they said there had to be changes made before we could convert it to a theatrical use. The fire was in 1970 and we moved into the Library Hall in 1972. Before that we had a spell at St Mary's in West Perth. The Anglican Church was very sympathetic and they let us have it at a peppercorn rent to use the old St Mary's School in West Perth. We used the school for a theatre and built it up from there. I still went on looking for other buildings because we knew it was going to be short term, they were going to pull it all down, so I kept searching until I found the Library Hall. So we started in '72.

We discovered very soon afterwards that it required \$7 000 to restore the building because the guttering was all falling off, the floor was sagging, the piano hadn't been touched for a long time, all the wiring had been eaten away by rats. The exit lights were actually kerosene, so you can imagine how the Council felt about Patch Theatre inside a building with kerosene lamps. That door is still there. It was a speakeasy; we kept it like that. Inside the door was a little window, so when you went there whoever was meeting would go, "Yes?" "I am so-and-so...." "No you can't

come in you can't come in, you have to come back at ten!" or "Oh yes, come in." It had that quaint look – don't get all grandiose and make it look all spectacular because there were two attempts to do that and it all folded, part of its charm is it is quaint; it's done by voluntary effort. It's things that people can afford to part with.

HC Is that building actually owned by the Council?

**CRANN:** No, it's privately owned now. Plaques have been put in front of other buildings and there is the most important building for the life of the place and there is nothing to say it.

HC Who owned it when you started there with Patch?

**CRANN:** The Victoria Park Public Library owned the building <sup>48</sup> The thing that most people don't know about it is that people made voluntary contributions; it was built by the public for the public. The same with the Memorial, the public built it.

HC Did you pay a rental?

**CRANN:** No, we collected rentals from the others, but the rentals were so minimum, a shilling or sixpence, and it wasn't enough. When the time came and we were told by the assessor that we had to find \$7000 to do all the repairs we had to go to all these people. I had given an undertaking that I wouldn't change anything; I'd keep it the way it was. They had never done any repairs. I said, "It has to be repaired or it will be closed down." We told the dancing school who were a large user, they used it every day, and the society, that from now on the rental will be double or treble what it used to be. There was a choice of doing the renovations or moving out.

HC It was actually managed by Trustees then?

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<sup>48</sup> Not to be confused with the Town of Victoria Park Public Library. According to the third edition of the Local History Timeline of the Town of Victoria Park, the Victoria Park Library (Inc) was established in May 1901



**CRANN:** Yes Trustees. Miss Swanson was one of them. So there was Mr Larter, Charles McGilvray, Fred Haylock, Tom Uren and Miss Swanson, the five of them. They ran the whole thing. I think it got too much for them.

HC So how did you manage to resurrect Patch over there?

**CRANN:** By simultaneously working at the touring company – the touring company was the lifeline. I started the classes again, the classes became very popular. So we had children's classes, youth classes and adult classes. I reintroduced the amateurs so that when we were on tour the amateur theatre would take over, so they would play Fridays and Saturday nights. We didn't play those nights because we were usually on the road or we were coming back from a tour or something. The children paid their normal class fees and people paid memberships. From the parents and the members they made up committees to run the place when we were not there, so it ran quite well. We eventually managed to put in 100 seats in there and make it into a theatre. Then we also worked hard on building the library because we knew that the library was the while reason why the building existed. So we built a very handsome library. Adele worked at that, very hard. Beautiful gold-mesh doors and books of all kinds.

HC How long did that go on for, how long were you at that library building?

**CRANN:** Eight years. We had to move after a while because we'd outgrown it and other people wanted to use it and it didn't meet Public Health standards. They kept reminding us – there wasn't enough parking, everything had to be constantly maintained all the time. Gutterings had to be renewed, drainage had to be redone, painting had to be done. We discovered a vacant warehouse down here in Burswood and we thought it was big enough to accommodate all the things we wanted, so we leased the Hall out and used the income from that to pay for the leasing of the other one and we built that up. But in the recession that we had to have (thanks to Paul Keating) we lost that, but we didn't lose it entirely, we leased it off to somebody else which helped us to come into this.<sup>49</sup> We had to hunt for this for quite a while and as I

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<sup>49</sup> 47 Kitchener Avenue.

walked past to go to the station I saw it was empty. It had suffered a big fire. There was a garage up the back, where house is at the moment and it was gutted. It belonged to the Braille Society, so we made an approach to them to see if we could purchase this. We got this started again. Then subdivision had started to come in, so we subdivided, built a house on it, sold it. That allowed us then to buy the next proper Patch place in Albany Highway again – 443. So we leased a suite up there, so all the performances were moved to that because this was becoming too congested along with all the other things that we had started in the interim. That led on to the formation of all these little societies, which is part of the rejuvenation of Victoria Park and all the things that I have been describing to you. There wasn't an audience big enough to do something here – our audiences were bigger elsewhere. We used to go up as far as Darwin and we were so busy in Darwin – sometimes we would do ten performances in one day – ten. But to do that distance with the cost, the only way we could get up there is that the airways gave us one free flight and two half tickets to get there. Then we decided we couldn't go on doing that indefinitely because there were lots of places in between the flight paths that we had to miss, so we took to driving. We had a caravan that we towed along and took stuff along with us and stopped accommodated actors on the way up. They used to be hosted by people. Either the company would get a house or someone in the town who was interested in the theatre would host us for the two or three days we were there. It was a hand to mouth existence, but it got better, it got remarkably better and we became quite popular. I think one of the papers in the north referred to me as 'the Olivier of the North'. I thought that was a bit grand. Ross Kendall became very popular with his performances because they remembered him as Catweazle. So for years afterwards every time he went north they used to say, "Here's Catweazle." That name stuck with him for a long time. Prior to that he had been popular as the Pied Piper. So that rebuilt. We're talking about changes of people on the way of course. Two years was more the average time that they could stay. They would join up, they were madly enthusiastic about the first tour, not so enthusiastic about the second tour, because getting up very early in the morning because the only vehicle we had was an old PMG vehicle; its fastest speed was 40 mph. We had to travel from an early time in the morning. Getting up at two, to make certain that you could get to the next place and set up the show, do the show and take it all down and drive to the next one and set it up and take it all down, do that three times a day. At first



it's quite exciting, but the second time around it loses some of the feel for some people. To me I always thought it was fresh fields and pastures new. That was my way of looking at it.

HC            Were the people that were volunteers, were they Vic Park people?

**CRANN:**     All kinds. There were some Vic Park there were some elsewhere. When we were in town the people there were from the north. When we came this way the people gradually came from here. When we first came here and were touring *Waiting for Godot* and *Hamlet*, someone said to me, "*Waiting for Godot* and *Hamlet* in Vic Park – I think that's a bit steep!" So we changed it to *Oklahoma* and then it worked. That was at the start – this brings you in. Now we'll take up one more and gradually we eased their tastes up to get back to the classics as much as possible.

HC            So you had a set-up where you had a building in Albany Highway, where you ran classes and things and you still had this building where the library could go. Then what happened, or is that the current situation.

**CRANN:**     That's the current situation. Ross Kendall had a plan to build a theatre and there was a vacant lot – a multi-layer car-parking, the top one was vacant, called quarter acre. He had his eye on it for a while, so he decided he'd like to build a theatre there. We thought the money from this [sale of suites 30 and 31, 443 Albany Highway and the purchase of suite 32], would pay for that. But that turned out to be much more difficult. The person who rented the building was a senator so they were paying very good rent, which means we could afford to run the newspaper, pay our rent and start saving the money to build the proper theatre, because there was always a desire to get back to having a theatre.

HC            So that's the current situation, you are working towards having your own theatre?

**CRANN:**     That's right.

HC And are you still doing it as a volunteer?

**CRANN:** Almost. [Laughs] Slightly better. I can afford to get mince more often!

HC What has Patch meant to you over the years?

**CRANN:** Oh my life really, it's become part of me. To me being Catholic and being in the theatre is simultaneous; it's the same thing. When I am asked what kind of people we get by the religious community I say, "Surprisingly the ones that we find that are best performers are people who have been Catholics." They said, "Do you know why that is?" I said, "Yes, it's because when they go to mass they keep seeing a drama all the time, it's constantly impressed, and they feel it. Also they're in schools that have drama and music etc., so therefore they naturally get drawn into it."

Ross also, after about eight or nine years also converted to Catholicism. In both instances we were alienated from our families because of that choice.

HC It seems to me David that in Vic Park you found Catholicism. By some unfortunate circumstances of fire you actually got Patch in Vic Park. What does Vic Park mean to you now?

**CRANN:** Oh this is home, this is home. Even when I am in Sydney or Melbourne or anywhere else I am thinking about here – I am always thinking about here, but if I don't go away, we don't tour, we don't work. I find it necessary that I should be with the company.

HC So with the lack of money there's no possibility of the volunteers becoming professional rather amateur.

**CRANN:** Oh it happens a lot. It has happened a lot.

Mrs Beeby insisted that it be called the School of Dance and Drama; she insisted that the people had to learn how to dance. They've got to learn to move – their bodies must function. You don't want people standing on stage and talking heads,



they're got to look as though they're in it, so she insisted they dance. The rule was they must dance and I've kept that rule going.

HC Do you see Patch as a training ground for professional artists?

**CRANN:** Yes, yes. Adele left here to go to Curtin and then she left there and she went and worked in London. She got interested in psychology and eventually studied there and had just retired from Sydney's Western University as the Vice Chancellor, so I said, "That was because you were an actress."

HC How do you see the future of Victoria Park?

**CRANN:** I am a bit sort of ambivalent. I have feeling that somehow it will become just part of the city in general. The arrival of the Casino and the indifference of the University... UWA makes an impact on Nedlands, you think of them as being one. You don't think of Victoria Park and Curtin being one. Curtin tends to think it's more South Perth than it does Victoria Park. The Casino, well they pay millions of dollars in rates and that's the only attractive thing about it for Victoria Park.

It has the opportunity and it has just began - they've suddenly started to get culturally-minded. They are in danger of losing who they are. Until they put that cultural aspect back, it's not going to happen. I am hoping that if it does become part of the city it has a better chance. My constant plea for twenty years - I've just written to Ben Wyatt and told him, just like I wrote to his predecessors, all of them - and federal predecessors - and the mayors - nothing comes this way. We have a Festival of Perth and a Fringe Festival, but nothing comes here. Do you know why? No venues! Nothing, no choirs, no bands, no actors, no dancers, no nothing! We've got John Hughes, Ben Wyatt and the Mayor, that's it.

HC David thank you very much, it's been a most interesting interview - you've had a fascinating life - and you're still having one! Thank you very much.

**CRANN:** A pleasure.

**END OF INTERVIEW****SEE ALSO: FOLLOWING ATTACHMENTS**

Listing of occupants of 47 Kitchener Avenue 1930-1949

Additional notes provided by David Crann

Poem about Mr Crann: 'Sundays Play', published in *Truth is a Walker: selected poetry of Mick Ryan*, Edited by David Crann and Ross Kendall, Victoria Park Post, December 2005, Victoria Park.



**LISTING OF OCCUPANTS OF 47 KITCHENER AVENUE, VICTORIA PARK,  
1930—1949. Taken from Wise's Post Office Directories, 1930-1949**

1930-1932	Vacant shop
1933-1934	Eric F Balme, mixed business
1934-1936	L Armstrong, mixed business
1936-1937	Mrs B M Nolan, mixed business
1937-1938	W M Kelly
1938-1941	R M Jones
1941-1942	Arthur G Grimes
1942-1944	G H Lundy, mixed business
1944-1946	Henry E Fenwick, mixed business
1947-1949	Lionel G Sara, mixed business

**ADDITIONAL NOTES ON VICTORIA PARK** provided by David Crann

Victoria Park 1940-1960

Billiards, boxing, cycling, parades, unions, processions, stalls, Churches, cinemas, theatres, bands, Friendly Societies, door-to-door salesmen, Rawleigh, Fish, sharpening, boots, vegetables, bread, milk, meat, haberdashery.

Piano teachers, choirs, eisteddfods, flower shows (3 annually), aviary, aquariums.

Concerts, recitals, Anzac Day, Remembrance Day, Flower Day, Labor Day, Good Friday, Foundation Day.

WVS, Red Cross, Hibernians, White Sceptre of Scotland, Masons, Buffaloes, Oddfellows, WA Anglers, Politicians - Federal and State, school fetes, church fetes, New Years Eve, Christmas, carollers, Salvation Army.

Methodists, Anglicans, Catholic, Salvation Army, Congregational, Four Square, Christadelphian, Baptist, Jehovah's Witness, Seventh Day Adventist, Pilgrim Brethren.

Doctors, Lady Gowrie, Sister Kate's, Mofflin House, Edward Millen, Nursing Homes, Fire Brigade.

Bakers, Butchers, Tailors, Dressmakers, Piggeries, Orchards, Beekeepers, Pigeons, Greyhounds, Horses, Candle-makers, Dairies.

Names

Todhunter, Baker, Read, Martyr, Hall, Sheedy, Tendut, Sands, Langoulant, Johnson, Davies, Coleman, Harrold, Walsh, Farley, Pisich, Isaia, Blacks, Strang, Flynn, Fledy,

Wilson, Shurer, Corry, Grogan, Wolinski, Kieran, Woods, Woodhead, Peat, Kerrs, Bubb, Walkemeyer, Oliver, Foley, Maguire, Toussaint, Higgins, Peacock, Kendall, Pawseys, Taskers, Grogans, Lester,

Artists: Rose Toussaint, Hartley, Holden, Bradley, Fountain

Italians, Irish, Scots,- the Catholic bond is strong if unnoticed.

Fruit, vegetables, restaurants, milk bars - the eternal pizza.

Maria and Casimer lived next door in the second home of four they built in Victoria Park, each more striking than the other. A trait found in families from Abrucci and north Italy.

Anselmo "Andy" Palermo, a cement factory worker, later school gardener who made discreet loans to hard-up teachers whose cars wouldn't start because they had run out of petrol.

Francisco la Rosa – a cement factory worker raised four children and with his wife worked and saved to build homes they moved into and then rented out. Franco's gift was gardening, 47 Kitchener's is a hymn to his creativity – olives, cactus, mulberries, oranges, lemons – he would establish trees and this small wry slightly built man with a serious face that occasionally lit up with warmth and enthusiasm when he was recognized on the street. His wife, now Frank has moved to an ecclesiastical garden, when we meet, reminds me of the tree – the South African Dragon Blood Tree that stood at Swan Portland – moved to Burswood by the Council at great cost only to die – waterlogged. A replacement tree purchased to replace it – Council has avoided time and again.

Anselmo, big bluff and hearty – who observes people from his Sunday slot at the Rotary Markets where he sells, repairs and shows second-hand bicycles beside his clever and carefully wrought wooden cases, palazzo, toys carved by hand from timber left on road verges.

Hemcar – the recently arrived African migrants have problems with bicycles, which Andy laughingly repairs for nothing – when they return the following week with another insignificant fault he repairs again then leans across to one of a neighbouring stall and says "Cuckoo" his finger waving above his head.

Gabriel from Africa, an avid Christian, tall, handsome Hollywood African, is mortified that Andy says his "Cuckoo" – laughing uproariously.

The Italians in Victoria Park, a strong community, public spirited with the best examples of civic pride and involvement. Isaia, Palermo, De Laurentis, Bongiovanni, from Italy's centre and south. St Joachim's Church, the four Italian palazzos, the La Tenda Nite Club, devoted to their Catholic faith and eager to assimilate while maintaining their Italian character.

Maria Isaia, the daughter, with four brothers in the family's wine and liquor business. As with all families working together. Rocco Isaia senior arrived in WA started work in Lieutenant Governor of WA Sir James Mitchell's potato fields near Harvey. Mr



Isaia slept on the rails so that the approaching first morning tram's vibrations on the railway awakened him.

Worked to open his first fruit and vegetable market joining with fellow Italians to supply vegetables to the growing population. His family, wife, younger sons and Maria followed him out, and here continues the story of hundreds of Italian citizens. Families, menial tasks, saving, working together, building homes, raising families, participating in Australian life, the Depression and War. Their uniquely Italian houses and courtesy.

Victoria Park following the downturn of the gold rush in Kalgoorlie owed their resurgence to this Italian migration from Fascist Italy.

Maria and Mrs Isaia, arms full of flowers, attending the St Joachim's, the stained glass window memorial to their forebears. Maria in the lovely Isaia house attended the family, supporting her parents. On their passing, served her brothers in their business and managed a shop of ornaments and religious figures and diversity till the eldest brother ended his time, the others retired. Maria now gave all her time to her greatest love, her God and the Church. Twice daily, three times Sunday prayer meetings at her home and pilgrimages to Italy, the Pope and Padre Pio.

Sweet-faced, hair always coiffed under her lace mantilla, her rosary in her hand, always moving rapidly. Under five foot, dressed soberly, and so, always courteous to all and sundry – even more courteous to priests and religious. Sweet smile, eyes lowered, white complexion. And the utter surprise of hearing a beautiful contralto voice singing her own compositions of love and praise to God. Gave up her home and moved to aged care at the Little Sisters of the Poor where she passed away to eternity in 2013. RIP.

Mrs Bunning, Elizabeth Blair Barker, wife of Charles Bunning, head of Bunnings – WA captain of industry and prominent in Perth society of the early twentieth century – of Sandovers, W J Lucas, J E Ledger, Chamberlains, Forrests, Mitchell.

Mrs Bunning as Elizabeth Blair Barker – one of the daughters of Australian WW1 leading doctor Blair Bunning. Attended theatre regularly, enrolled in classes, generous donor and a leading artist in Perth Society of Artists.

Bunnings Timber in Victoria Park built three fully timber ships designed to withstand Japanese navies in shipping routes of WW2.

Elizabeth, underestimated by her society friends with her love of arts, dance, theatre. Mrs Bunning to the Vic Park Patch members was involved in most of Perth's creative arts. Victoria Park's Patch Theatre saw her in impressive performances – a hard untrustworthy Spanish servant, an eccentric medium, a street lady with a passion for McDonalds; an embittered Southern mother, the Welsh *Under Milkwood* lady, her famous erratic sister of the murderous woman in a hoop skirt that wouldn't stay down when she sat in a chair.

Perth had actresses of note professionally and amateur – but none with her record of thirty-five characters on stage over 40 years 1958-2002. Her painting of Perth's, in her estimation, significant citizens in Perth's community – writers, dancers,



journalists, artists, actors. She undertook the first large scale exhibitions of local artistic work in the three Hyde Park Holiday Festivals 1968-69, 70. Opened Cremorne Gallery. Played Giselle's mother in the WA Ballet season at the Festival Sunken Garden Season. Wrote an original satirical play *The Royal Ball* in which Perth society attending the function during the Queen's visit at Winthrop Hall in the hessian fenced off pond enclosure. The guests were represented as vegetables – cabbages, zucchini, onions etc meeting the Queen and Duke, salt and pepper., the Governor was sauce, the Mayor a cauliflower.

Plays in her beautiful garden overlooking the Swan River where members of her family and friends appeared in her productions of her comedies and dramas.

Never missed a rehearsal and founded the Wearne Theatre. An inspiration and shining example to all ages. She was in her element as the Grandmother of the small Greek children in Hasso Kalmaras' *Little Eros* 1995. RIP.

2 April 2017 Sunday. Mass at St Joachim's

Attending Italian Masses to end and begin the weeks. The people crowd in on feast days, weddings, funerals, confirmations and baptisms. This morning they numbered thirty. – my generation and some who having met my mother – they were forever fond and respectful. Maria and Casimir, our neighbours in Mackie Street introduced the Cranns to Italians that had replaced the older generation Australians, British and others.

Maria learned English from my Scots mother and used my mother's Glasgow phrases frequently. Cas – a building finisher (cementing over the second-hand bricks and rendering the walls – childless as the result of Cas's injuries in WW2) he cut our hair, saving us money. The ladies swapped my mother's famous brawn and steamed puddings for Maria's Neapolitan pizzas – long before pizza became a national staple. Maria referred to me as Mrs Crann's son. Her Italian relatives and friends also said Mrs Crann's son.

Maria. Handsome Italian features, big smile, worked hard, house spotless, garden vegetables abundant because she sang to them daily – a loud, tuneful rendition of *O Sole Mio*, *Funiculi Funicula*. They housed new arrival Italian friends a family who were stunned when she would say, "No tha noo" in a Scots' accent instead of 'not just now'. Or 'ahm awa the noo' – 'I'm on my way.' My mother never acquired any Italian.

Maria and Cas the salt of the earth. Silvana Mongano the film beauty singing in the rice field with movie. Butter, rice, caused a stir in the cinema when in her own loud whisper she exclaimed 'That's our Maria from next door.'

Italians in Mackie Street were a microcosm of Italians in Victoria Park's life.

At mass this morning the three senior Arrdizone sisters sat in front of me – they are first cousins to the angelic devour Maria Isaia. They all share with me the pain of the loss of ones close and dear now passed away.



On a happier note. It came to mind that in recounting the Isaia legacy their contribution was understated.

Mr Isaia with his Vic Park and many Perth compatriots brought at was estimated 476 new Italians to WA. Found them accommodation (Winterbottom, Morris and Austin British cars were shipped in large wooden boxes).

Resourceful Mr Isaia purchased the boxes and assembled them on neighbours' vacant blocks to house 46 men. Daily he arrived with his compadres and taught them by example set by the compadres to lay bricks (Mr Isaia held the WA record for laying the most bricks in the shortest time), lay pipes, plumbing, making cement, carving limestone and planning gardens, carpentry and irrigation. Mrs Isaia and the Vic Park ladies prepared food, coffee and fruit. Of an evening Mr Isaia and friends transported them to Leederville Technical to learn English and trade essentials.

Maria and the industrious mother collected and washed the men's clothes, wrote letters home to the wives, parents and children they left in Italy.

Enrolled in unions and found work with builders, masons, carpenters, stonemasons – he located homes that would board them thereby helping two families. The Italian masses, union meetings, social gatherings in homes, Vic Park Town Hall, Library Hall, Church Halls. The arrival of their wives, parents and families the community found rentals, boarding and then purchased blocks where they built their homes. This period between the War and Depression, post World War II.

Mr Isaia and four sons were closing or Mr Isaia's vision. A large metal drum – summers in Crawley Bay turned a merry-go-round while the sons forming a band played and sang and manned stalls. Mr Isaia fashioned plaster into toys, religious items, animals and gave them as prizes to the Americans and their girlfriends, Australian families enjoying the hot springs and beach.

Mrs Isaia and Maria did exquisite needlework, fashioned cloths for the planned new St Joachim's Church and made napery, embroidered cloths and clothing out of the hard to get linen and parachute silk that was available.

Ever resourceful –summer over – the merry-go-round dismantled and the drum carted back to their Miller Street home (central Vic Park). Here it is assembled in a large tank where the harvest of olives was poured and crushed – drained into containers for a small return returned to the grower. The drum in season crushed the grapes, the grape juice was drained collected and prepared to fulfill Mr Isaia's dream Isaia liqueurs and wines. Home and fulfilled.

He had left his family vigneronns to come to Australia for this dream – God had blessed and provided.

St Joachim's was built, the altar cloths fashioned by Mrs Francesca Isaia and daughter Maria who at the liqueur store supported their four sons and brothers who of an evening had engagements to sing at social event – the youngest on a scholarship sang at St Mary's Cathedral choir – like an angel said adoring sister Maria of youngest brother Rocco.

Mr Isaia had influence, supported the Labor Party, hosted Prime Minister Gough Whitlam on his election visits. This was Victoria Park's zenith- prosperous Italians in every field of endeavour and industry, strong church fellowship – all assimilated and embraced by both Australian and Italian.

With Father Jesus Bello in the pulpit rendering his sermon first in Italian (very poorly, he is from Spain and much loved) and then in English – when the short translation is rendered in the shortest possible time – well, it is an Italian Mass.

Why not go to the 0.30 am? It hasn't the quality, bon home, ardour and the family ardour. Mrs Crann's son sees the commonality of the Scots and Italian industry, fervor and love.

The Italians give generously to both collections – it's their church; their home. They are all related. Maria and Cas Panceri, God rest them, would be happy to see Mrs Crann's son in their church today.

Robert Kerr, the born and unfortunate disabled

He arrives after mass begins and leaves as soon as Father Bello and sacristans leave the church or the final blessing.

Stooped forward from the waist, occasionally partly erect to the shoulders at six foot seven inches. He's tousled growing hair atop his rugged face etched with lines from a lifetime of plodding – yes plodding in heavy footwear, his head below his waist. He seldom speaks, lives alone, the family – father, uncle, brother all passed on before him. The church knows him, Archbishop Emeritus, Rev B Hickey sees him at regular intervals.

He, while grimacing acknowledges fellow parishioners, exchanges of the sign of peace. He seldom shakes hands just nods. Attends mass on high days to avoid the stress of children and strangers. Robert Kerr is of Scots' descent – the family farmed and on retirement like many others chose close to Perth semi-rural Victoria Park in 1960s. All devout Catholic.

The boarders at Franciscan House – the large beautiful house with its superb chapel sold to social welfare when the Franciscans as with other orders declined in the winds of change 60s.

Clontarf, Castledare, Lady Gowrie, Sister Kate, Burswood House, Devenish Lodge, Richmond Fellowship surround or are close to Vic Park and have houses the disabled since the turn of the century.

Workers, destitute and impoverished new arrivals in the close proximity of Perth found a modicum of succor and support from Catholic, Anglican, Methodist, Baptist churches. The Great Depression of the late 20s and 30s wreaked havoc among the poor. Victoria Park had its disabled, abandoned and often widows who were unable to support their children gave them to institutions.



Downs Syndrome, sight impaired, disabled, kept in their family homes until the guardian deceased or could no longer maintain them. Most of them- the ubiquitous them – defeated by circumstances, life or despair found shelter in Franciscan, Devenish, Burswood – the addicted came later. Fed, clothed, bathed, sheltered and a bed – very still or endlessly walking Vic Park, Causeway to Welshpool and back daily – Belmont, Redcliffe and scuffing along streets, picking up scraps, hurrying back for meals or closing time. Today Robert, intelligent and self-supporting, looks to see the shuffling, sun-burnt silent figure of a heavy man of disputable background – who lingers around St Joachim's, the Central Shopping centre with others from the 'homes', occasionally smiling and greeting but mostly silent.

Robert notes the street gentleman's religious fervor – his visits to Our Lady's Grotto, attendance of Mass – in place before the service – walks to the Lady Altar, prays and moves out, returns for the Mass. Today for the first time I nodded in recognition as he nodded back. There but for the Grace of God – I recall the others over the years. Rose Miller, David George Moir, Annie, Doreen, Chris, Max, Evan, St Peter (St Peter thus named as his thick, brown hair and beard and gracious smile resembles the genius painting of Michelangelo, Rubens and Caravaggio – smiling in adversity. Big Andrew, 'thump kerplunk, thump kerplunk' as he lurches along with the backs of his shoes butting the pavement. Blonde, blue-eyed, good-looking, unshaven, who wherever will always say 'how are you going to sit and smiles rapturously when the greeting's returned.'

Unfortunately spontaneous gifts of money and food or drink has ceased a) economic downturn b) embarrassment t being accosted c) they will keep coming back-loathsome feeling.

The betters in India are professional – my mother, like Father McMahan bless him in Broome in the early 1970s would keep little piles of rupees and annas (India) dollars and cents (Broome, Australia) on a sideboard. A line of eight to ten piles earmarked for the clear singing blind Indian Christian who arrived at noon every Sunday. Or Pugh, big Foolish looked but very kind Indian boy saving to buy a licence to carry a basket as a coolie for ladies.

This David said to Father McMahan the Red Den – red of hair and politics is for folk who knows it's for them – you don't have to supervise. They will come to the kitchen – open the fridge – make bred, butter, vegemite sandwiches and a cup of coffee with condensed milk and sit outside – they won't speak to you – your assisted.

That came to mind as I said to a Hail Mary for Father McMahan, remembered that Ross and he had long exchanges about Collingwood and Carlton – which they enjoyed as fellow Melbournians in Broome.

It's only a question of time, place and humanity under God's sun.



Poem about Mr Crann: 'Sundays Play', published in *Truth is a Walker: selected poetry of Mick Ryan*, Edited by David Crann and Ross Kendall, Victoria Park Post, December 2005, Victoria Park, pp. 60-61.

## SUNDAYS PLAY

How typical of this patrician  
to defend my honour thus  
to lecture and direct  
in his usual ways  
all the world a stage  
and he in charge of our mores  
our feelings  
showing ours  
protecting his  
as he always did it seems  
a contradiction in tweed and trilby  
proper that's the word  
proper and precise  
unlike I who followed my heart  
to the sky and beyond  
driven by adventure  
my writings  
set the feelings free and follow  
like my sister  
like my family  
those who drove their world  
on horse and foot  
across Australia  
a civilisation searching for their  
rightful place  
a home  
that would be bigger than many a country  
but home no less  
our worlds met upon his stage  
a strange melding of cultures and hues  
Shakespeare meets natures Othellos  
we were all better for the meeting  
it added a dimension to our lives

rather than changing any course of history  
for man is man  
this was a gentler time when hearts and blood could mix  
history may prove the folly of the moment  
but lest I lose the illusion  
for it is all illusion  
he showed me that with others' words  
made live though phrase and gesture  
illusions he gave to my own words  
and made himself part of my mind  
through interpretation  
to see him today first scolding then  
teaching upon the bench the youngsters  
who would clamber upon my  
image in the park with the  
simple joy of the moment  
first the sombre look recalled perhaps  
from some played part  
to slowly change  
to add the sparkle to the eye  
that gives lie  
to the lecture  
for those who care to see  
and children see  
this he has always known  
it is his charm and his protection  
what better guardian for one's bronzed likeness  
than one who would be the same in life  
to frighten and capture them to entrance  
the childish mind  
it was my joy to see last Sundays play

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