

# Giving voice to Melbourne's radical past

## Paul Ormonde's audio archive about Jim Cairns

Melinda Barrie

University of Melbourne Archives (UMA) has recently digitised and catalogued journalist Paul Ormonde's audio archive of his interviews with ALP politician Jim Cairns (1914–2003).<sup>1</sup> It contains recordings with Cairns, and various media broadcasts that Ormonde used when writing his biography of Cairns, *A foolish passionate man*.<sup>2</sup> It also serves as an oral account of the Australian Labor Party's time in office in the 1970s after 23 years in opposition.<sup>3</sup>

This article describes how Ormonde's collection was acquired and the role it has played in the development of UMA's audiovisual (AV) collection management procedures. It also provides an overview of the Miegunyah-funded AV audit project (2012–15), which established the foundation for the care and safeguarding of UMA's AV collections. Achievements include improved control and description of the holdings, and the development of AV-specific collection management procedures. Later audio-archival projects, such as the work carried out on the Germaine Greer audio recordings in 2016–17, highlight the complexity of celebrity and the difficulties encountered when attempting to make audio recordings accessible to researchers.



UMA first started collecting records about the peace movement, political organisations and grass-roots activism in the second half of the 1970s. In celebration of its collected history of radical life in Melbourne and Australia, in 2013 UMA mounted an exhibition called *Protest!*.

I do not know whether Jim Cairns and Germaine Greer ever crossed paths in life. But what is known is Greer's recognition of the 'international importance of the Australian labour tradition and its influence on her own student generation via figures such as University of

Melbourne economic historian and federal politician Jim Cairns'.<sup>4</sup> Greer's respect for Cairns' contribution to social and cultural life in Australia is further corroborated in her speech at the launch of *Protest!*, in which she expressed her concern about not finding any trace of Cairns at the university, and asked about the whereabouts of his archive: 'I have looked all over the place and the name brings up nothing ... you can't afford to forget him'.<sup>5</sup> Fortunately, Paul Ormonde offered to donate his collection of taped interviews with Cairns not long after Greer's speech.

During his long and notable career in journalism, Ormonde (b. 1931) worked in both print and broadcast media, including the *Daily Telegraph*, *Sun News Pictorial* and Radio Australia. A member of the Australian Labor Party at the time of the party split in 1955, he was directly opposed to Bob Santamaria and his faction known as The Movement.<sup>6</sup> Throughout his career Ormonde was interested in the links between politics and religion in Australia and has written and edited several books on this topic, such as *The Movement* (1972) and *Santamaria: The politics of fear* (2000). He was associated with the Catholic peace movement known as Pax Christi, and the anti-Vietnam War movement in the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>7</sup>

Ormonde's collection includes 53 unique recordings of his interviews on audio cassette. These arrived at UMA neatly stacked and arranged in Ormonde's battered black briefcase, along with boxes of correspondence and newspaper clippings used in researching the biography. His handwritten inscriptions on each audio cassette record the name of the interviewee, the date and in some instances the subject matter.

The interviews with Cairns were conducted at the Cairns family home in Hawthorn, where the ambient rumble of passing traffic and the sounds of Gwen Cairns making cups of tea can be heard. Ormonde's low-key interview style encouraged his interviewees to speak freely

*Jim Cairns farewells Rolf Heimann, 5 May 1974, photograph by John Ellis. 1999.0081.00193, John Ellis Photograph Collection, University of Melbourne Archives.*



about Cairns and the events that helped shape Australian politics at that time.

Ormonde's 1974–75 interviews with significant federal Labor figures, including Cairns, coincided with the controversial events that shaped Cairns' career in federal politics as they unfolded. Later interviews with Cairns between 1976 and 1981 document his 'personal transformation from politician into a guru of alternative society'.<sup>8</sup> Conversations between Ormonde and his interviewees evoke the tumultuous period in the 1970s when the public started to question the authority of the Australian government on matters such as the Vietnam

War, and gender, with Cairns at the forefront of peaceful demonstration and public scrutiny. Events of note discussed in the interviews include the 'Morosi affair', the 'Khemlani loans affair' and Cairns' eventual sacking from the front bench of the Whitlam government only months before its eventual deposition on 11 November 1975. Ormonde's collection of audio recordings, papers and reference material creates a portrait of the extraordinary life of this remarkable and complex man.<sup>9</sup>

During a visit to UMA in 2015 to discuss the significance of the tapes, Ormonde described how his interest in Cairns could be traced back to 1955, when Cairns was first elected to parliament as the Member for Yarra: 'The media became interested in him because he always had an interesting viewpoint'.<sup>10</sup> Ormonde also credits a young law student, Garry Sturgess, as being his primary source for knowing whom to interview about Cairns' life and how to make contact with prospective interviewees.

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s Cairns' strong stance on topical issues such as sexual liberation and the Vietnam War often brought him into direct opposition to members of his own party. His impassioned public speeches and media interviews about peace and the war frequently polarised national public opinion. Ormonde stressed the importance of his recordings as a source of direct audio evidence provided by those who were closest to Cairns and knew him best. Interviewees mentioned by Ormonde as significant in illuminating crucial aspects of Cairns' career include Labor politicians Tom Uren, Gough Whitlam, Bill Hayden and Clyde Cameron. Uren was the most important figure in Cairns' political life, as both a colleague and close friend.<sup>11</sup> In his interview with Ormonde, Uren described Cairns as a charismatic individual 'who could have been the alternate leader of the Labor Party'.<sup>12</sup> Ormonde also interviewed members of Cairns' immediate family, academics, and members of the

Examples of cassette tapes in the collection. 2015.0044, Audio Recordings of and about James Ford (Jim) Cairns, University of Melbourne Archives. Photograph by Melinda Barrie, 2018.



Communist Party of Australia. Authenticity and factual accuracy were important to Ormonde; he explained how, after each interview with Cairns and other interviewees, he would contact Gough Whitlam with a string of questions to verify what had been said. Ormonde was also strict with Cairns about seeing drafts of his biography, with no changes or edits permitted.

UMA staff, in conversation with Ormonde, asked if he knew whether Cairns kept his own archive. Ormonde responded: 'He threw everything out! It was really quite extraordinary there was nothing that he kept!'<sup>13</sup> Despite this lack of a formal archive, Jim Cairns' legacy lives on in Ormonde's audio recordings, and in Cairns' self-published books, archival footage, cabinet records and papers housed in our national collecting institutions.

Evidence of Cairns' political activities can also be found in a variety of UMA's other political and community collections. In the mid-1970s he appears in an image in the John Ellis Photograph Collection (opposite), attending the farewell of anti-uranium activist Rolf Heimann as he sets sail for the French nuclear-testing ground. He is also mentioned in the transcript of Malcolm Fraser's electoral radio talk about the 'Loans affair'.<sup>14</sup> In his biography, Ormonde documents Cairns' links to the activities of the Congress for International Co-operation and Disarmament, and of the Communist Party of Australia, whose collections are both held at UMA.

### University of Melbourne Archives

For most of its collecting history since 1960, UMA has acquired audiovisual records and other non-paper formats as an adjunct to its paper records. Evidence of UMA's keen pursuit of paper-based collections can be found in its internal acquisition files. A 1961 advertisement in the university student newspaper *Farrago* appealing to 'all clubs, societies and other student associations for ... any old

minute books, correspondence, diaries, books of accounts and working papers' is further confirmation of its early collecting zeal.<sup>15</sup>

In recent years, UMA has slowly shifted its emphasis from active collecting to digital preservation. This shift can mainly be attributed to the availability of new technologies that have enabled UMA to connect with its users online and establish processes to preserve collection content in digital form. Developments in systems technologies have also given UMA staff opportunities to work collaboratively with University Library colleagues to improve online visibility and collection searchability.

### AV audit project 2012–15

Until 2012, data documenting UMA's AV holdings was in summary form only. This meant there was little detail on an individual item's condition, format, rights holders, metrics and control. In addition, the preservation of UMA's AV in its analogue form alone is no longer feasible, due to the deterioration of formats over time, such as the magnetic-particle layer in magnetic tape.<sup>16</sup> An audit of the entire collection followed by a program of digitisation has now been acknowledged as the solution to the imminent threat of physical deterioration, format fragility and playback-machine obsolescence.<sup>17</sup>

In recognition of the resources and specialist skills required to carry out urgent work on preserving its AV collections, UMA successfully applied for internal funding through the Miegunyah Fund. This financed the creation of a three-year AV archivist position, the aim of which was to comprehensively audit the holdings, appraise the physical condition of items, identify all formats, and carry out rehousing work where required. During this time UMA formed a project team to devise an instrument for assessing the significance of its AV collections. Important considerations when assessing AV include:

- fragility of media, and obsolescence of playback equipment
- uniqueness of the material
- cultural significance and research value.

Much was accomplished during the three-year project, which was described in a 2015 article in the *Australasian Sound Archive*.<sup>18</sup> That article outlines how the audit revealed that UMA had amassed a much greater number of AV items than first thought. The final total was more than 11,000 items,<sup>19</sup> which far exceeded the 2,000 estimated before the audit began. These items, in 30 different analogue formats, highlight the rapid pace of change in AV technologies in the 20th century.<sup>20</sup> The audit also revealed a treasure trove of AV material documenting university life, student activism, protest movements and industry innovation.

### AV preservation and access

The looming threat to the long-term preservation of Australia's AV collections has been widely communicated via the National Film and Sound Archive of Australia's discussion paper *Deadline 2025: Collections at risk*.<sup>21</sup> Digital preservation now dominates national and international conference programs for the care of AV collections,<sup>22</sup> and is recognised as a priority by responsible institutions. In response to the urgency for preservation of its AV holdings, UMA now digitises selected collections when funding becomes available. This has led to the development of AV format-specific item description using the ISAD(G) standard,<sup>23</sup> and workflows to accommodate the preservation of analogue items, their digital preservation surrogate and access copies. This work is far from finished, but what has been accomplished is the adoption of preservation format standards for audio as described in IASA TC procedures,<sup>24</sup> a process to verify integrity of the digital item, and the embedding of a schematic set of technical and core data into

the preservation copy. Currently, UMA does not digitise its own AV items, but works with AV digitisation service providers for the transfer from analogue to digital formats.

Notably, Ormonde's tapes were the first to receive resources to digitise the whole collection based on its 'intrinsic value'.<sup>25</sup> It was also the first AV collection to be catalogued using the ISAD(G) descriptive standard.<sup>26</sup> Before the acquisition of Ormonde's collection, individual AV items were only digitised upon request, which as a consequence has created part-digitised, part-analogue-only hybrid collections.

In the years since our AV audit, UMA has developed and implemented procedures for access and time-coding. This was mostly inspired by a project to digitise and catalogue Germaine Greer's audio tapes and make them available for research use.<sup>27</sup> Some of Greer's recordings contain commentary about what she observed as she drove through the Australian countryside, as well as snippets of broadcasts she was listening to on her car radio.<sup>28</sup> These tapes, along with the collection as a whole, generated several copyright and privacy concerns. UMA worked through these issues, which resulted in an access procedure for use by prospective researchers.<sup>29</sup>

As a protective measure, to minimise risk and physical harm to its analogue AV holdings, UMA has now restricted access. Researchers are directed to the university's Reading Room in the Baillieu Library,<sup>30</sup> where they can lodge a request to listen to a digital copy, subject to availability and access conditions.



In this brief article I have presented an overview of University of Melbourne Archives' achievements in caring for its audiovisual holdings. While much has been learnt from working with the Ormonde and Greer collections, work continues on refining processes for access and preservation of unique and high-risk holdings.

Melinda Barrie is archivist, collection development at University of Melbourne Archives.

University of Melbourne Archives is one of Australia's largest research archives, and is used for teaching, research, exhibitions, publications and community activities. For further information see <https://archives.unimelb.edu.au/>.

- 1 This article is based on a presentation made at the Australasian Sound Recording (ASRA) conference held in Sydney on 7–8 November 2018.
- 2 Paul Ormonde, *A foolish passionate man: A biography of Jim Cairns*, Melbourne: Penguin Books, 1981.
- 3 The Australian Labor Party, led by Gough Whitlam, won office at the Australian federal election in 1972.
- 4 Katrina Dean, 'Why Germaine's life in letters is one for the archives', *The Conversation*, 1 November 2013, <https://theconversation.com/why-germaine-greer-life-in-letters-is-one-for-the-archives-19625>.
- 5 University of Melbourne, 'Germaine Greer—Protest!', Archives from the University of Melbourne, 20 February 2013, *YouTube*, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=ppRX1XuCO8w](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ppRX1XuCO8w).
- 6 The 1955 split of the Australian Labor Party led to the formation of the anti-communist Democratic Labor Party, which continued to wield considerable influence and power over Australian politics until the late 1970s. Refer to Xavier Connor et al., *Santamaria: The politics of fear; Critical reflections*, Melbourne: Spectrum Publications, 2000.
- 7 Biography of Paul Ormonde sourced from University of Melbourne Archives collection record 2015.0043, Research Papers of Paul Ormonde, <http://gallery.its.unimelb.edu.au/imu/imu.php?request=load&irn=89629&ccatalogue=on&view=details> (viewed 30 January 2019).
- 8 *Telegraph*, [Obituaries]: 'Jim Cairns', 13 October 2003, [www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/1443974/Jim-Cairns.html](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/1443974/Jim-Cairns.html).
- 9 2015.0044, Research Papers of Paul Ormonde; and 2015.0043, Audio Recordings of and about James Ford (Jim) Cairns, University of Melbourne Archives.
- 10 Melinda Barrie, Emma Hyde and Nicole McGrath, interview with Paul Ormonde, 23 January 2015. Held with University of Melbourne Archives internal documents.
- 11 James Walter, 'The transformations of mateship: Autobiography and politics' [review of Bob Hawke, *The Hawke memoirs* (1994), Tom Uren, *Straight left* (1994), and Graham Richardson, *Whatever it takes* (1994)], *Voices: The Quarterly Journal of the National Library of Australia*, vol. 5, no. 3, Spring 1995, p. 116.
- 12 Tom Uren, in Paul Ormonde, 'Tom Uren', 23 January 1976, 2015.0044.00031, Audio Recordings of and about James Ford (Jim) Cairns, University of Melbourne Archives.
- 13 Barrie, Hyde and McGrath, interview with Paul Ormonde.
- 14 John Malcolm Fraser, 'Dr. Cairns, Labor Government', July 1975, 2005.0072.00132, in 2005.0072, John Malcolm Fraser, University of Melbourne Archives. Available online: search digitised items using 2005.0072.00132 at <https://archives.unimelb.edu.au>.
- 15 *Farrago*, 'Have you any archives?', 22 June 1961, p. 7.
- 16 IASA (International Association of Sound and Audiovisual Archives), 'Magnetic tape', [www.iasa-web.org/decay-polymers-information-storage-carriers/magnetic-tape](http://www.iasa-web.org/decay-polymers-information-storage-carriers/magnetic-tape) (viewed 1 July 2019).
- 17 'Priority 1: Digitise the national audiovisual collection'. NFSA, *Corporate plan 2018–19 to 2020–21*, Canberra: National Film and Sound Archive of Australia, 2019, p. 6, [www.nfsa.gov.au/collection/curated/nfsa-corporate-plan-2018-19-2021-22-0](http://www.nfsa.gov.au/collection/curated/nfsa-corporate-plan-2018-19-2021-22-0); Thomas Oriti, 'Archives race to back-up tape records', ABC Radio National, 27 October 2018, [www.abc.net.au/radio/programs/am/archives-race-to-back-up-tape-records/10436684](http://www.abc.net.au/radio/programs/am/archives-race-to-back-up-tape-records/10436684). In this interview, David Fricker, director-general of the National Archives of Australia, discusses the frantic attempt to digitise NAA's holdings before 2025. See also Perla Olivia Rodríguez-Reséndiz, 'Digital preservation of sound recordings', *Investigación Bibliotecológica*, vol. 30, no. 68, supplement, January–April 2016, pp. 173–95.
- 18 Emma Hyde, 'From audit to sound practice: Audio visual collections at the University of Melbourne', *ASRA: Australasian Sound Archive*, no. 40, 2015.
- 19 This figure was current in August 2014. UMA has since acquired further collections containing significant quantities of AV, such as 2017.0007 Spinifex Press, and 2017.0003 Bernie Taft.
- 20 Hyde, 'From audit to sound practice', p. 24.
- 21 National Film and Sound Archive of Australia, *Deadline 2025*, 2019, [www.nfsa.gov.au/corporate-information/publications/deadline-2025](http://www.nfsa.gov.au/corporate-information/publications/deadline-2025) (viewed 9 March 2019).
- 22 Rodríguez-Reséndiz, 'Digital preservation of sound recordings', p. 181.
- 23 International Council of Archives, 'ISAD(G): General International Standard Archival Description—Second edition', 2011, [www.ica.org/en/isadg-general-international-standard-archival-description-second-edition](http://www.ica.org/en/isadg-general-international-standard-archival-description-second-edition) (viewed 18 February 2019).
- 24 Technical preservation format standard is 24bit, 96kHz, BWF files.
- 25 Leslie Waffin, 'Intrinsic value', International Association of Sound and Audiovisual Archives (IASA), 2019, [www.iasa-web.org/selection/intrinsic-value](http://www.iasa-web.org/selection/intrinsic-value) (viewed 9 April 2019).
- 26 International Council of Archives, 'ISAD(G)'.  
27 See for instance Sebastian Gurciullo, 'Germaine Greer interviews three Italian artists', *University of Melbourne Collections*, issue 21, December 2017, pp. 24–7.
- 28 Kate Hodgetts, 'Outreach: Engaging new ears', *Australian Society of Archivists Victoria Branch Newsletter*, 24 August 2018, pp. 4–5. [www.archivists.org.au/documents/item/1304](http://www.archivists.org.au/documents/item/1304).
- 29 University of Melbourne Archives, 'The Germaine Greer collection', 2019, <https://archives.unimelb.edu.au/explore/collections/germaine-greer#access> (viewed 9 January 2019).
- 30 *University of Melbourne Reading Room*, <https://library.unimelb.edu.au/readingroom>.