Borrow Collection

Microcassette 001M, Box 1

Mrs OA Hardy as to CP Mountford


KT Borrow speaking to Mrs OA Hardy - Well I have with me Mrs Olga Hardy and the date is October 1992 and she will just say a few words about how she became associated with Mountford’s books as an artist. You were actually in the building behind the Art Gallery in South Australia, weren’t you, when I called on you.

Mrs OAH - Yes, but we started in a small two-storey home in Kintore Avenue which has been demolished. It was a charming little house and a few of us were engaged part-time to collate all of Mountford’s collections from the year 1925 of all his journeys over aboriginal affairs, and customs, and general knowledge that he had picked up over the years and there were a vast number, thousands and thousands of prints and negatives which were reprinted and then they were all filed and cross-indexed and captioned. Then later on we moved behind the Museum in the old Armoury, was it the, the old Barracks and that was a charming old building, it had ghosts, I felt it did.

KTB - You would have known Ainslie Roberts then.

Mrs OAH - Yes, quite well, yes.

KTB – Well how did he become a friend of Mountford.

Mrs OAH – They collaborated on those first books ‘Dreamtime’, ‘Dawn of Time’ and the third one. Mountford’s myths and aboriginal stories were portrayed by Ainslie Roberts and they agreed that, well Mountford said, Dr Mountford I should say, agreed that they were a good interpretation of the basis of a lot of aboriginal law.

KTB – Did you ever go to that study of Mountford in St Peters in the basement?

Mrs OAH – Yes, yes I did. (41)
KTB – That was an unusual place.

Mrs OAH – Yes, a lot of treasures there. I believe most of that has gone to Canberra. That was willed to Canberra.

KTB – It was built in a pug hole, wasn’t it?

Mrs OAH – Yes, that’s true, there was what we used to call the drain going down St Peter’s Street, was it, across from Payneham Road down the, all the avenues and it used to be an open drain and each avenue had a bridge across it, we kids used to play there but I think there was, yes it could have been a small creek or something diverted back into the drain because there was a definite basement rooms were on, though the ground floor was ground level, one did go downstairs into this quite a big area as you would know it, full of books and treasures.

KTB – I can remember he had various carved wooden figures and things there, I can’t remember what they were, but I made a recording there you might remember. Mountford told about his early difficulties.

Mrs OAH – Yes, that’s right. There were message sticks …

KTB – What about that picture you showed me in the photo I photographed here? What was the story behind that?

Mrs OAH – Well it was Cave Hill in the Musgrave Ranges, a very, very remote spot out from Alice Springs and he never ever got there but many of his friends went and women of course were never allowed in. I can tell you later on two anthropologists who did go and have produced a book on aboriginal portraits or children, and various people had these slides which I had to project and try, and though it was three dimensional, to form it into a painting. It was in a very limited space in his office and it was projected onto a tiny screen and I had the good fortune in later years to be able to charter a plane and go and see the cave myself and the aborigines now are allowing anyone to go in but they have over painted the section where the circumcision and initiation ceremonies took place and they thought that was for themselves but from now on tourists could go through at a fee. So we went on a real old
jalopy which I think was almost like a T-model Ford and I had a little piccaninny on my lap
naked and one of the tribal elders came out from the Musgrave Ranges and I was delighted to see the whole thing that I had only worked on in my own mind and with slides. (95)

KTB – Had you done much painting before?

Mrs OAH – No.

KTB – Well how did you learn all this?

Mrs OAH – Well I always loved it, I love anything with my… wherein I use my hands, but I followed his instructions and I had had a lot of experience in retouching and spotting a lot of his old photographs. I presented a lot of work for his publications that I had really had to retouch because of the poor photography and he, as you know, would work all day in the field or doing fieldwork and then at night he would develop and print the day’s photographs which I think is quite remarkable.

KTB – What sort of camera did he use, do you have any idea?

Mrs OAH – He had a whole shelf of wonderful cameras but not being a photographer myself in those days to any great extent I didn’t notice.

KTB – They would all be large, no doubt?

Mrs OAH – Large and he did carry separate gear for his flashes and his timing and it was all very large and heavy.

KTB – He must have had quite an eye for photography judging by that ‘Black Men and Brown Sand’ and I can remember the film …

Mrs OAH – ‘Brown Men and Red Sand’.

KTB – I was surprised, I heard it once and I realised the voice was Professor Cornell, that soundtrack.

Mrs OAH – I don’t know, he did a great many things and I wonder now just what has happened to them all because, yes he was a brilliant photographer but he was such a great
lover of nature. He saw beauty in so many things apart from the natives and the portraits he did of them, in trees and in … (127)

**KTB** – Who were the Mountfords, his family, does anyone know?

**Mrs OAH** – Who were they? Ah, hmmm…. 

**KTB** – You said his wife was related to the captain on the River Murray(?)

**Mrs OAH** – Captain Johnston, yes, yes.

**KTB** – But he was connected with telephones.

**Mrs OAH** – Yes, they lived mid north, I don’t know, his father was quite a simple man. I’ve forgotten now what his occupation was.

**KTB** – He wasn’t a religious person, was he?

**Mrs OAH** – I think his father could have been a lay preacher, I’m not sure, but Mr Mountford was not. We had some lovely arguments about that.

**KTB** – What did you think of the biographies of Mountford? You’ve got one there, Lamshed, isn’t it?

**Mrs OAH** - Yes, yes. That wasn’t his best. This was related to Lamshed in his declining years. There is a lot of really good material, some things were of better quality than others, but he still was an interesting man and led a very interesting life.

**KTB** – I was once taken to a meeting of the Anthropological Society in Adelaide and they were electing new members and I can remember Mountford was being extremely difficult about some person that he didn’t want elected. He must have had a side that came out, he was most difficult. I knew nothing about anyone who was there but he was determined this poor unfortunate African was not going to be elected. You know, he said until we know him and this and that, very stubborn.

**Mrs OAH** – Oh, he was strong-minded, yes, usually pretty fair and friendly. There was a lot of jealousy amongst anthropologists and as he had seen native life in such an early stage, I think he resented things that he considered were not true and though he had travelled
practically all over Australia and had this marvellous collection of cave paintings and rock poundings etc, he wouldn’t have known all tribes, that would have been impossible. So, some of the information that others had possibly was true, I wouldn’t know. (163)

KTB – Spencer and Gillan were a lot earlier.

Mrs OAH – Yes, but he quoted them and worked with their material very happily as far as I know.

KTB – Mountford’s photographs were striking.

Mrs OAH – Yes, yes.

KTB – They had (Traplex?) cameras. Their photographs were very good judging by the books I’ve seen.

Mrs OAH – Oh yes, and then he went with the National Geographic Society too. He’s led a couple of expeditions and wrote articles for the National Geographic. They funded him of course. Well, his photography has been published all over the world.

KTB – Well, you had this family background yourself, after all you wrote the book yourself. What led you to write that?

Mrs OAH – Oh that was admiration for my grandmother and researching my own early family in Germany. Certainly he stirred up interest in aborigines. I had known them as a child because we always had poor kids from Mission Stations as servants as I was growing up.

KTB – Did you ever go there, to a Mission Station?

Mrs OAH – My father had to go on a steamer to Koonibba which is now near Ceduna, isn’t it? It was near Ceduna. Koonibba had a big Lutheran Mission there when I was a little girl, or even before then I know.

KTB – Killalpaninna, you never went there?

Mrs OAH – Oh no, no, much to my sorrow.

KTB – And that’s in the picture by Jacks, isn’t it? (190)
Mrs OAH – Yes, Kenneth Jack painted the ruins but now it is all covered with sand. It’s more accessible but there is nothing there but the graves of a couple of missionaries, that’s all.

KTB – And nobody has ever found letters and traces of them anywhere, or have they?

Mrs OAH – Oh yes, when I visited Germany I went to the Hermannsburg Mission there and all my grandfather’s letters about aboriginal affairs and disruptions I’m afraid, also. They were all recorded in the Library at Hermannsburg Mission.

KTB – Did you look at them?

Mrs OAH – Beautifully written, yes, but it was the old, very old and finely written and it had been photocopied and I found it impossible to read and when I asked experts they said it was a very tedious job.

KTB – Were there any pictures? No pictures?

Mrs OAH – Oh no, I don’t think photography was even used much in those days in those conditions.

KTB – No drawings, or anything?

Mrs OAH – No, just the odd thing. Lutheran Archives have quite a lot of good material on the home and the missionary.

KTB – Have people put much time into looking into these things, latterly.

Mrs OAH – Yes, yes, increasing interest and many people are submitting a lot of valuable stuff including aboriginal discoveries and photographs, things that are coming to light.

KTB – That would have been in east Germany?

Mrs OAH – Not Hermannsburg Mission, no.

KTB – Where’s that then? (215)

Mrs OAH – Well, it was car’s journey from Luneburg which isn’t, well it’s somewhere within a few miles of Hanover in northern Germany.

KTB – This is the heath.
Mrs OAH – Luneburg heide, yes, yes.

KTB – This is what [inaudible] talks about?

Mrs OAH – Oh, well there is heide heather, there are many places in Germany where I suppose as in Scotland you get this wonderful time of the year when everything is purple with the heather, but yes, Luneburg is really noted for that and Hermannsburg now is a large Seminary and my grandfather attended that Seminary and the parts of the old buildings are still used, the dining rooms and classrooms. It’s a whole village.

KTB – Well, how did you get to Hermannsburg?

Mrs OAH – I was staying with relations and we did day tours in the car.

KTB – Were they friendly?

Mrs OAH – Who, my relations? Delightful, spoiled me badly, very generous and kind.

KTB – Well, I suppose Mountford never had anything to do with Strehlow.

Mrs OAH – He had a lot to do with him.

KTB – Did he?

Mrs OAH – Yes.

KTB – They must have been a very different sort of people.

Mrs OAH – Very, very and they didn’t agree very much. I don’t know why. I don’t know why but …

KTB – He didn’t have any disciples in the sense that there was no sort of successor to Mountford?

Mrs OAH – No. No. There were people like Rodney Weathersby who did it as a hobby but he has a glass of wine. I didn’t [tape cuts out briefly] his grandsons and his son didn’t continue in that research at all. (242)

KTB – Well, I was at school with one of sons, or his son, I don’t know.

Mrs OAH – One son, yes, he had Joyce and …

KTB – But he wasn’t connected with aboriginals in any way, was he?
Mrs OAH – No way, no, he was a banker.

KTB – Oh well, thank you very much, it was very interesting. (248)