

Norman Ralson Interview Transcript.

20th of June 2026. Port Phillip Heritage Centre Oral History Studio.

Interviewer: Norman, you worked on St. Kilda Library after not too long, after it opened. What were you doing?

Norman Ralston: We were just doing a bit of add-ons. You know what I mean? In other words, there were certain things that weren't quite up to standard as far as health and safety goes and what we have now, like walkways for people who were disabled and stuff like that. So we added a few things in. There was a big pond area. And I'm a bit of a horticulturist. I wanted to put some lilies in it, just to make it look nice. But someone knocked them off. That's okay.

But may I say it was a pretty rough area. And I mean pretty rough. I mean, I come from Port Mel when I was born in Glasgow. I'm as rough as you can get. Trust me, you know I am. But it was a bit dodgy. We had to watch our tools, we had to watch our stuff. And when the library opened, the people who worked in the library were a little bit tense because of what was going on. It was that type of place.

St Kilda wasn't really flash back in 75 to 70 to 1980. It wasn't, you know, Fitzroy Street and blah, blah, blah. So we should get a lot of them, they'd just basically come to the library just to have a bit of a nap, basically, and they'd muck around with the computers and that, whatever. But it's a shame because that's the way it was. Now, working there was okay. We just did our job, but it was very uncomfortable.

Interviewer: Did you have much interaction with people while you were working on there? As they were walking by?

Norman Ralston: We did, yes, we did. A lot of them just thought it was a waste of money. Seriously, thought it was a waste of money.

You know, like, and they would give us a bit of a, you know, a bit of abuse that we should be doing more for homeless, you know, stuff like that across the road.

And I agree with them, totally.

But this is to me, a library, for me now, is one of the most important things you can have because it does, it stretches your mind. It does.

And I've been involved in libraries, as you know, for a long, time.

And I think libraries are fantastic. And if they ever go, it'll be a sham on the government or the council, whoever.

Interviewer: What did you think of the building? Because it's quite an unusual design that was different.

Norman Ralston: I couldn't believe it. I've been in, well, in those days, I'd probably been in the building trade for about 20 years in those days, and it looked like something that dramatic, sort of just basic, no, just concrete, you know.

Like, you know, I can't think of what it's called now.

It's called, it's got a name, but it just looked pretty boom, boom, boom, you know.

And there was no finishing, like if you know what I mean.

There was none of this nice carpet area or nice area.

It was pretty, pretty hardcore.

But the guts of it was I took my children there and they used to go in the computers and it was good. It was good for that aspect. But it was still a dodgy area.