AN INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY BERNARD O'NEIL WITH PETER GEYTENBEEK OF TORRENS PARK, SOUTH AUSTRALIA FOR THE PROJECT ON THE HISTORY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA. [THE INTERVIEW WAS CONDUCTED ON 18 MAY 2004.] [Square brackets incorporate corrections supplied by Peter Geytenbeek in February 2006.]

Tape 1, Side A

[0:20] Peter thanks very much for agreeing to be involved in the project. Perhaps if we could begin with the early part of your life.

I was born in Adelaide in McBride's Hospital on the 21st of April 1926, the same day as the Duchess of York gave birth to a child who became Queen Elizabeth. So on the 20th the Queen had ... My mother and father lived on a farm in the Mallee at Parrakie which was the farm which my father moved onto in 1921 after his war service and a period training. He took over this lot of 2000 acres, 4 miles north of Parrakie, it was in the sandy Mallee.

I was brought up on the Mallee farm so I've virtually spent all my life in agriculture. When I finished my primary school I came to Adelaide and lived in Adelaide for three years. Then I went on to Adelaide High for two years and qualified for a university entrance.

Had your parents sent you down?

I won a cadetship and some very kind relatives boarded me for that five years. I don't think I would've got my education, I know I wouldn't have, if it hadn't been for the kindness of others because my father and mother had six of us and they had a very tough time in the Mallee in the '30s. Just when things started to go right there was a drop in wheat prices, the farm didn't ever really do more than just keep them going. In fact, my father became insolvent, he was declared insolvent, but they kept him on the farm, which was just as well because the farms didn't need to be neglected.

Where were you in the order of the children Peter?

I was the third. I had an older brother and he did a technical education and went away to World War II as a pilot. It was while he was away in '44 and '45 that I went back, from having finished high school, to the Mallee and I farmed on my father's farm for 2 years.'44–'45 were about the worst drought years the Mallee had ever experienced, so I had an introduction to real drought. Out on the farm we had 600 sheep and 17 horses, 2 years later we had 3 horses and no sheep. We lost all but 19 of the 600 sheep: we sold those for a shilling a head. We sadly had to destroy our own horses because there was no market for them. I helped my father when he shot them and I helped him skin them. So I had an introduction to the tough times and as a consequence when I got to managing properties, I always built in a good drought reserve.

[3:50] We'll come on to that shortly. Just to back track slightly again to your education and the fact you won a cadetship. Were your parents interested in having the sons come on to the land?

I presume I did agriculture because I was the one who showed any interest in it. My elder brother did not and my two younger brothers – one became a schoolteacher and the other is a linguist. So I of the four was the only one who professed an interest in agriculture and Urrbrae was a logical place to go. I went to there. I had a great time at Urrbrae. I did something there that had a big effect on me later in life. In my third year there I was made president of the Junior Agricultural Bureau. That was my first contact with the State Department because Fred Richards, the Secretary of the Department, came out to Urrbrae and initiated our first meeting of the branch. I became president. Right throughout the rest of my life … When I went back on to the farm in '44 and '45, I joined a local branch of the Bureau. I asked a question at a conference and then …… Incidentally when I applied for the cadetship in the Department at the end of the war, the fact that Fred Richards was on the committee and he knew me made it … (laughs)

[5.30] We'll come on to that episode of joining but just going back on your education and you coming to Adelaide, to Urrbrae High School. What was your intention? That you'd go back on to the farm?

I don't really know. I've thought back on it and probably my parents thought, 'One of the boys will come back and stay on the farm'. I don't think there would have been too much selection on their part but because I showed an interest it would be me. I did the three years at Urrbrae. Then it was suggested that I had enough acumen to go ahead and I should matriculate. So I went to Adelaide High to pick up a language, which I didn't have, and to pick up physics and maths which I hadn't done. In my second year there I did the matriculation and got through. I had an agricultural learning because I did botany.

[6:45] At Urrbrae … could you have gone along to matriculate there?

No. Urrbrae stopped at Leaving: you couldn't do Leaving Honours. So I finished my matriculation and the war was on. My father was not well. He had no help so I went home to help out. In my first year home I was called up for the Army, or at least I had to report. They took my details and sent me a letter saying that it's more important that you stay on the farm. This was April '44. They had as many people as they could train, so I didn't see service.

So you said you spent '44–'45 on the farm …

Yes.

… and then …

At the end of '45 a friend of mine who I had known at high school was working in the Department. He came to get some practical experience. He said, 'What are you going to do?'. I said I hadn't really thought ... This was when my brother came back. He said, 'What are you going to do?'. I said, 'I don't know'. He said, 'Why don't you apply to the Department for a cadetship? They give cadetships in soil conservation, for instance, which you could be interested in. Why don't you apply?'. So in due course I applied. They only wanted two and

there were 23 applicants. I was lucky enough to get one of them, so I won my way into the Department as it were. I had to work for them during holidays and guarantee to work with them when I had finished. I also was told that if I failed my father would have to pay back the £200 that they were allotted. My father signed the paper, looked at me and said, 'You'd better pass – I haven't got 200 shillings!'. (Both laugh)

So this cadetship enabled you to go to ...

It enabled me to go through the university. I went to university for four years studying agricultural science for the Department of Agriculture – the agricultural science degree. You learn agricultural science, which I did and during vacations I worked with the State Department in soils, so that I met my obligations there. I passed without too much hassle. At the end of '49 I got a degree and was due to start on [2 January] 1950 with the State Department.

Your degree was through the Roseworthy College or …?

Not entirely. The degree people did most of their course in Adelaide but because there were certain suitable lecturers at Roseworthy, we went up there for two days a week. In our third and fourth year, we travelled to Roseworthy. We went up Thursday night, actually, on the train. Went out, had a light tea and had lectures there on Friday, Friday night, Saturday morning and then came back to Adelaide. We weren't qualifying for the RDA (Roseworthy Diploma in Agriculture), we were qualifying for the Bachelor of Ag. Science. We met many Roseworthy people and I found out [many] had made a life in the Department [later] because the Department took in [both] diplomats and agricultural scientists.

[10.25] But you already had some practical experience on the farm.

Yes. I had good farm experience. In fact when I went to Roseworthy and worked on a property, the first day I was doing the hay carting, the farm manager saw that I knew something about it and he put me in charge on the trolley. Some of the Roseworthy boys were a bit output. Even on the stack I was well … I remember Jack Daley said, 'You've been taught properly', my dad had shown me how to build a proper [corner] so it didn't fall out.

How many students were there in the year you went through?

It was the first year of the CRTS – the Commonwealth Reconstruction Training Scheme. We had over 20 returned men. There were over 30, I think there [were] 31 in first year, but by the end of the year there were only eight. Most of the rehab. people found they weren't able to cope. Two of my best mates coped. In fact, there was four of us started first year and four of us finished. The others either dropped a year or dropped out, so it was a reasonably tough course.

How did you find it?

I'd been away for 2 years. I found it difficult. I worked hard. I worked long hours. I knew I could not fail, I must not fail. I worked long hours. I dropped a subject in second year –

biochemistry. I had to spend my holiday working for Bert Kelly at Tarlee. There was very good soil conservation, they had a good property there. I worked with him and after the day's work and we'd done the dishes, I had to go and study every night for the 6 weeks I was there! But I got my supplementary exam. I learnt the hard way that if you dropped a subject or you failed well then you were in trouble.

[12:45] You mentioned Peter that you had to work for the Department during holidays and this experience with Bert Kelly and so on. What sorts of things did you do for the Department?

I went out with the [soil conservation] officers, with their staff. We were going to Clare and carrying the staff as contour lines were laid: level lines were laid through the hills for furrows to catch the water and stop it running down on to the arable land. I went to Booborowie in the [Burra] Hills there. I carried the staff while somebody else surveyed and we put in contour banks. I also had two very interesting trips to the northwest pastoral country with a gentleman who was doing a survey of the soils, plants and land condition. So we were looking at soil types, we were looking at herbage and in particular the impact of grazing animals on the saltbush and blue bush. That was very interesting work and it stood me in good stead and it gave me a knowledge of pastoral country that I had not seen before.

Was it different sort of country to what you had in the Mallee?

Yes. The bush was mulga and ti tree and open country and spinifex on sand hills but mostly salt bush, blue bush and all the other herbal species. The soils, of course, were different too. Of course, a totally different rainfall. We had all of this in about 6" of rain. We'd only had to turn on the Murray but at least we could get in crops. This was all pastoral country, non-arable.

[15:00] So a different set of experiences. You mentioned I think fruit fly at one stage?

That was quite amusing because at the end of my first year they said, 'You have to work for us in the holidays'. There was a mini fruit fly outbreak. I went out and worked for a couple of days on a little team with a supervisor and then [when they] realised that I was responsible, they gave me a team to supervise! I found myself at one stage with a team of eight medical students from the Year 4 and a second-year agricultural science student telling them what to do! Not a problem really.

The early fruit fly was good training. It also taught me a little bit about human nature because I'd been brought up away from the workforce, I didn't know anything of the city. I can remember having a man on the group and I said one day, 'This man's hopeless, he does absolutely nothing'. 'Fine', said [Jack] Harris, 'Sack him'. So that night they took him off the books. Two days later I saw him going off with another group. I said to Harris, 'That man's back'. He said, 'They come back in with a different name and they'll do another two days work before they're found out'. (Both laugh) I reached the conclusion, and we agreed, that many of

these people were unemployed because they were unemployable. They didn't want to work and they had no desire, which was sad, unlike today where there's lots of people working ...

They were coming on as daily paid?

Yes, coming on as daily paid. A couple of days pay was enough.

You were going around spraying properties?

Yes. We had to go onto the properties. We weren't spraying in those days. We were removing all the fruit, which was very difficult because they had to pick fruit whether it was green or white. A lot of us had to debate with each landowner and tell them, 'This is what's happening madam'. You had to go to the gate and get past the big dogs if you had to. I remember putting my hand through the opening catch and there was a huge spotted dog, he actually came out.

We had to carry out what was necessary, which was stripping the fruit. I can recall, it was just off my area down at Unley Park, a top magistrate, who might even be a QC. He said to the group, 'You can take the pears off this tree but don't you dare remove a leaf. You have no approval to remove a leaf'. You couldn't go up a ladder and not knock a leaf! So I had to call in Harry Kemp, the chief man, and negotiate with this very legal character. It was fun.

[18.05] How long did that go on for? A limited campaign?

I think it was only about a year or so, the first year. I did work briefly a second year, for a very brief period in Glen Osmond but not of any consequence I don't think.

These experiences, the casual work, the part-time work there, and Roseworthy College ...

They rounded off my understanding of agriculture but I learnt more probably when I had a period up at a property at Tarlee with Bert Kelly. He was an MHR and keen on soil conservation. I worked with him and helped him with his livestock work. I began to appreciate the management of crops and herds. He had cattle in the hills. He went away and he trusted me so much in the end that he and his wife went for a week's holiday and left me in charge of the place! Would you believe it, we had a big fire start over at Halbury and it was heading our way. I had the job of first moving the stock into safe areas and then being ready for the fire advancing. Fortunately, before it reached us it got held up on the Wakefield River and didn't get through to us. It was a bit of … a touch of responsibility. I was 20 by that stage.

It could have been nasty that.

Yes, it could have been difficult.

[19:40] These sorts of experiences, Peter, were they reinforcing for you that this was the sort of work you wanted to do?

Absolutely. I found that when I graduated and went in to the Department, although I was working in Soils I was always looking at soils and the plants that grow on them and the animals

that ate those plants. The whole ecosystem became part of my thinking. Indeed that sort of carried with me in Soils while I was there for 8 years.

I got many farmers involved in farm planning. This was essentially to control their erosion but we not only learnt about how to put in contour banks and furrows but we talked about rotation and we talked about sowing pastures so that when the land was lying out, the fertility was built up. So I got involved in pasture, fertiliser work and handling trash for burning.

I gave a talk on radio one Sunday morning called 'Smokescreens'. I talked about fire going up showing that somebody was burning their stubble, which we discouraged. So I always had this look of total property. Indeed, when I talked to farmers, I'd go out to a Bureau meetings (and this is where I used the Bureaus a lot and they used me a lot) I'd go to Bureaus to talk about soils and they would say, 'That's so interesting. I wish we could have some more'. So we developed in the Conservation Branch the concept of a soil school. Initially, I thought it would run for a couple of days but that was too much for a farmer. So what we did is we asked them to give up some of their meetings and we ran six consecutive meetings on soils alone. I ran about five of these on Yorke Peninsula and the Lower North and they were all very well attended. We ran them at fortnightly intervals: it only lasted 3 months. But that way you could start on terms you could use in soils, you could develop concepts so that the farmers could take them home and talk about them and come back next time. The soil schools did quite a lot to educate farmers because in the Department we had three roles: we had to prevent erosion by both wind and water; we had to educate people as much as we could; and we also, I say this a little fetchingly I suppose, were responsible for legal aspects because the *Soil Conservation Act* was designed to prevent excessive damage to the soil.

One of the first jobs I had was to travel [along a] railway line and delineate the places where sand might go over the railway because in those days in the '30s, thousands of pounds were being spent on clearing sand off railways and off main roads. To minimise that, the concept was go to the farmer and get him to stabilise the sand on his side of the fence, which we did by [sowing] rye corn and [superphosphate] … and we encouraged them to sow it. We then went back to see if it was effective.

The latter of those three roles you mentioned, Peter, the legislative aspect. Was the Department heavy handed do you think?

No, I don't believe we were at all but there was an Act that had to be cared for. The work we did … The other side of it was very important during the '50s because post-war there was a lot of land clearing in South Australia. The Soil Conservation Branch was responsible. Every person, before they cleared land, had to seek approval. We had to go out and inspect it and map out the areas which we believed should not be cleared. I found myself on the West Coast going

over a fully covered vegetated block but having to delineate the areas if they were cleared – they were generally the hills. You tried to leave the vegetation on the hills and put a clearing elsewhere. Some people had trouble with landowners. I didn't ever have that but it was just the luck of the draw.

Were there landowners who resisted these things?

There were landowners who resisted, particularly where they had very bad erosion which was creating a lot of trouble to resolve. I can remember down in the Meningie area for instance. There was quite a big property there that was drifting over the road in many places. The Department had a lot of problem with that. That man had problems: he couldn't stop them overnight. Of course, he resisted to some extent. He argued that he was doing all he could but ultimately, of course, the Department had the right through the Act that if they wouldn't clear it, go in and do the work and bill them for it. That would have been pretty drastic. It was an interesting Act and it still applies of course. We need to leave vegetation on the hilltops.

[25:05] And you were working from Adelaide?

Yes. I was working from Adelaide for a period, but then I was moved to the Mid North and I went to Balaklava. While I was there I worked the Mid and Lower North and Yorke Peninsula. Yorke Peninsula became my major territory because I did some very interesting water erosion work east of Maitland, in what became known as the Petersville area. There was an area there where water erosion was going down the highway and flooding the area around the Petersville Hall and the school and the shop and so on. We started working on one property at the top but then we realised there was a need to draw all these schemes together and plan the water flowing off these various properties so that it went in through an actual channel. We did a soil survey of the whole area and then got all the farmers together to agree. It actually became a scheme whereby all of our water was led safely out. That particular scheme, the Petersville watershed, was the first occasion in South Australia where a total watershed had been planned to handle the erosion problem. So it was an interesting area to be in. I made a lot of friends and got on very well with farmers because I had a big advantage having been on a farm for two years I could speak their language. I wasn't a raw graduate coming out with a lot of technical advice. I knew the difference between a plough and a cultivator. I could comment on arrival to the person: was it killing the weeds, how had things gone, what had the rain done, had it gone down far enough? I could talk the talk.

[26:55] It seems also Peter that the Ag. Bureau movement was helpful in getting farmers on side. They probably didn't see the Department as some sort of aggro government bureaucracy as much as a friend?

Yes, spot on because they invited me to go to speak at their place. They would nominate the subject more often then not, sometimes they didn't, but you'd go there at their request and

you'd speak to them and I always made a practice of keeping the day following clear so that if there were two or three queries, I could go and see them on their farm and see particular problems and deal with them straight away. That was the way extension work carried on. Of course, the Department ultimately found that they couldn't service people, they had to do it more through press and radio. Mind you, we did press. I hadn't been in the Department a month and they made my write up some results of some research I had done as a student. Actually, after the Maitland work I wrote the first article on salinity and coping with soil salinity in South Australia. I was only chuckling the other day because if you read some of the folk these days you'd imagine that care of soils and long-term agriculture had only just been thought about. Bob Herriot in the '30s set up the Soils Branch and gave South Australia a big lead.

On the publication side, you were getting the articles published in the …?

The *Journal of Agriculture* published those articles, yes.

So the information was getting out and about.

It was getting out. That was our way and through radio broadcasts through the ABC. The Bureau, of course, had district conferences. I went to district conferences and spoke on a particular topic. I remember going to one where all I had to do was answer a particular question but that was the way it operated. The other thing was that once a year the farmers and the Bureau people came to the city and had an annual conference and that was a big event with, generally, top-level speakers. When I was in the South East I subsequently came up and gave one of those: I was an invited speaker.

And you went along to the conferences?

I used to go to the conferences whenever I could because that's where you got the feedback and that's where you found out what they were thinking. Particularly when I was in research, it was important to know what they were thinking: I can remember being in the research field and setting up a whole lot of projects and people would say, 'Well what's the use of that? I don't want to know that. This is what I want to hear'. The feedback from Bureau meetings … I didn't ever refuse to go to a Bureau meeting. I went to Bureau meetings all over the South East, even when I was overseeing Kyby. [Kybybolite].

When I was in Soils, you went wherever you were. Kimba on the West Coast. I went checking out a place [in the north] called … [Yatina] one night. I drove out in the dark and just found the old hall and there was nobody there. I found out that they met on the first Tuesday following the first full moon of the month. They'd done this from time immemorial. Many branches did. That gave them light to come to the meeting! (both laugh) This night they didn't need to because they all had cars but in the early days they'd had horses or walked in. That was an interesting trip. I've spoken to branches where after the talk the president would say, 'Mr So &

So, would you give the vote of thanks?'. The fellow sat in his chair and said, 'I'm not giving the vote of thanks. I gave it last time'. (laughs) It was not very ...

[31:15] The nature of the people on the farm, the attitude and so on. You mentioned you were working in Balaklava.

I worked in Balaklava.

Was there an office there?

Yes. We had an office and a District Adviser. I worked the [Yorke] Peninsula and they set up a Soil Conservation Board and I was secretary of that board and made District Adviser in Soil Conservation. I had six groups and they were saying, 'This is how we are doing it'. They were then spreading the good news out and encouraging people. We had some very good farmers in that area. I learnt to work with a committee and write the minutes and organise the meetings and make sure we stayed on important issues and didn't wander.

You were also learning to be a bureaucrat in a sense that …

Yes.

… you've got to write your talks and handle dockets and liaise with the Head Office?

Exactly. I had a great time in Balaklava. I really only left it because a position became vacant at Kybybolite to run a research station …

[32.30] **End of Side A, Tape 1**
Tape 1, Side B

[0:05] … 6 years of working there.

So in 1956 you were going down to ...

In 1956 I went down to Kybybolite and I applied for, and got the position of Officer-in-Charge of the government research centre there. That had two graduate research officers and three field officers. The total on the property was 12 families so it was more of an old-style farm property. My wife and I lived in the old mansion, of course. I had the job then of running the wheat breeding program on [the Research Centre].

Was it a self-contained little village sort of?

Not really. The homestead was right alongside the township of Kybybolite so the centre was an important part because we provided quite a number of the children for the school. There was a school and a very good local community. Soon after I went down there, with the help of [Phil Young] who was a member of the Advisory Board and a neighbour, a soldier settler neighbour, we restarted the Agricultural Bureau and, of course, with the research centre there we took an active part. We kept the Bureau movement going from then on because it was a place where we could get our message from the research centre about the results of our [experiments].

Had there been a Bureau before?

There had been a Bureau, but it closed during the war. A large number of them closed during the war and some of them didn't open terribly quickly afterwards. The Bureau was an outlet and, of course, there were Bureaus all around the South East. I went up to Frances and I went down to 8 Mile Creek and Mt Gambier and all over the place, Millicent. The Bureau was a good source. I also had a very good … Every second year we had a big field day on the station and people came from all over the South East and from Victoria. Many Victorian people depended on the work we were doing because Kybybolite was typical of their red gum country. Our big field days would bring a lot of people. What we did do in the first one we held was the head of the Department of the ABC from Mt Gambier, a rural officer, he came up and took several tapes and then he would ring me every second month and say, 'Have you got anything to talk about?'. We'd have a conversation over the phone and then again two more weeks later. So I had to work and use the ABC, the radio, as a medium for selling our results and discussing problems.

[3:20] Just a side issue there Peter. You mentioned Victorian farmers coming over to field days and being involved at Kyby. Was there some sort of reciprocal arrangement with …?

Not really, but Kybybolite Station was only a mile from the Victorian border. All of that land, the red gum country, extended way over into the Western Districts. The people nearest were Horsham and Hamilton so we serviced in a way. Indeed, quite a lot of the people just over the border were South Australian settlers anyway because they tended to expand in that direction.

I was just wondering about that territorial notion of you've got a border.

It was territorial in a funny way because I went over to Hamilton on one occasion and I got a note back from head office saying, 'You didn't have approval to travel interstate', which was an oversight on my part. Soldier settlers from Victoria came here. They used to come and make casual visits sometimes. Quite a few of them belonged to our Bureau because they didn't have a similar farmer group. South Australia was unique in its Agricultural Bureau movement, set up by the farmers before there was a State Department of Agriculture by the way.

So the notion of us versus them, South Australia versus Victoria, didn't apply?

Not at all.

[5:00] Just going back to your move to Kyby. initially. What was your motivation? You touched on the fact that here was a chance to manage an operating farm of a type, but where did you see yourself going through this move?

Because of my work in soil conservation, I was finding that quite a lot of questions that I asked or the farmers asked we had no answers for. I could see that research had a part to play, but in the State Department they didn't have the funds at that time to do research. In fact, the Soil Conservator said, 'All the data you need are in the *American Journal of Soil Science*, the

American research work. They had done all the work on erosion control. Read that and you'll find out'. In a way he was right, but I still kept on feeling a need to get some data for our South Australian soils.

I also saw it as an advancement: it was a promotion. I also knew that within the Soil Conservation Branch at that time there was something like six people my senior. I couldn't see me getting to be head of Soil Conservation in South Australia ever. As it turned out, I would not have done. They had a bid intake of graduates in that immediate post-war period and I was about fifth in the list. I saw it as a chance to move up a little.

The Department would have been very hierarchical, in keeping with the times.

It would have been. Also, there was another factor. By the time I left Balaklava I had a wife and two small children and I was away from home a lot. I felt that I would like to see more of my family, although my wife was very happy going to Kybybolite as I'd be on the centre and I'd be home all the time, which was a big help bringing up the children and for our social life together.

Just on a personal issue there, was she an Adelaide person or from the country?

She was an Adelaide graduate in science. She did some wonderful work in bacteriology. She worked with Nancy Atkinson and she was a graduate. In fact, when she married me she gave up her career.

She didn't mind going to regional … ?

No, not at all because she came from Salisbury. Her farther actually had property right alongside the research station in the early days before she was born. In the early days the Salisbury people sort of moved down there.

So you went to Kyby.?

Yes into a new life. It was really exciting because there was a good establishment on the station. I had to learn to start to work with the men and help the foreman and assimilate what was going on. I remember in the first three months I just read all the files that were in the place and learnt the history of the place and carried out the research. Actually, I was involved in the fieldwork: whenever I could I got involved. I was also working at Struan so I had to go down to Struan one day a week and help the overseer there. We were putting in fencing and watering and subdivision, buildings and developing it as a cattle research station. So I had a development phase at Struan one day a week and four days a week on Kyby., plus the weekends when I had to … [Ewes and lambs] had to be handled, particularly in research. So it was a very full and active life. I had staff, but they all had tasks to do to. We had quite a good little program, mostly on sheep it was essentially by then. The pasture work had fallen back a bit. We did initiate pasture work while I was there, carried on for many years. It was soils and plants. What

do you do with plants? If you don't raise them, there's not much good standing and looking at a plain crop.

[9.42] You mentioned having staff, the human livestock. How did you get on with managing?

I had to do it. I enjoyed every … I never asked anybody to do a job that I couldn't do myself or wasn't prepared to do. I had a few friends because when we got there we had a big outbreak of foot rot and I said to the man in charge, 'I want to be one of the team for a month'. So I trimmed hooves and pushed sheep through the foot baths, helped bath them and do all the dirty work and that won me a lot of friends but it helped me to understand the problem and ultimately we got rid of the problem.

I had a little bit of fun on one occasion because later on my two ROs [research officers] – were both agriculture graduates and they were both about ten years older than I – they chose not to get on. So I had a lovely period where I had to separate them – not quite physically, but say the pasture side is this and the animal side is that. You've always got conflict between people who look after the pastures and people who look after sheep. I got on very well with all of those guys. I was happy working with people. My dad had a very happy attitude and I inherited that. You don't argue with people if you can avoid it and you never say anything harsh about people. If you can't find something nice to say then don't say anything.

Did the Department give you any assistance or advice on that issue?

No real guidance in managing, no. Before I went there we had had what was called an in-service training school at Roseworthy but that was largely about extension, how to get your extension work out. They didn't encourage you to understand staff because most district men only had themselves to look after. Some branches and centres like Jamestown had two or three but one of them was ostensibly in charge, and one typist for the three or four people and that was it.

What about your own situation in reporting to people higher up? You're now moving up the ranks.

There was a man from head office who came down about every second month. He just came in and checked and had lunch with me and we had a chat. He was my go between when I went to the director: I forwarded everything through him. He saw what went on but they were both senior men, both vets, and I got along very well with them and had no problems at all.

They were veterinarians in charge of you, so you …?

Because Kyby. with its sheep work and beef cattle, the Department had decided that somebody from animal health, the animal production side of it should be ostensibly the senior officer. He wasn't on site, but he was the go between, between the director and I. I mean everyone was responsible to the director. I had no direct contact with the director unless I did something wrong, which only happened once. (Both laugh)

[13:30] I'm inclined to ask you what was that? You might not want to say!

It was a very good case. I knew I had to consult or discuss things with Members of Parliament but we had put up a big case for higher pay for our farm hands. Unbeknownst to me, our foreman put up a similar case and submitted it to our MP. The local MP happened to be the father of a friend of mine in Kyby. he rang me up and said, 'I'd like to see you'. I said, 'Very well, Mr [Harding]'. I went to see him and he said, 'Look I've received this. Would you say this is correct?'. I read through it and I said, 'Yes that's very good. There's no false claims with that. That's fine'. All I did was say that the material he had was correct. Questions were asked in the House of the Minister by some other politician. It then came back that I got this information from Kybybolite. I got told by the Director in no uncertain terms that I'd broken the law. Subsequently, he didn't ever say so, I believe he realised how it had come about.

There were sort of protocols about …

Sort of protocols. I was in an awkward position because this man – he and his family – had supported this farm for 50 years. Interestingly enough, the other Member, the Member of [Parliament] at Naracoorte, happened to be a soldier settler and had a block alongside Struan Research Station. He and I often chatted. So when he spoke in the House it was likely to be coming out as something he shouldn't have known but he knew it because we talked together.

[15.20] Also I mean it was a different world then. Like the media: you could talk to the ABC just on your own initiative.

Absolutely, yes. I didn't ever approach a politician. I could have because Alan Hookings was a Member and I bought cattle off him. We had his cattle there, his beef cattle. I knew everybody but I was never involved in politics. I had no interest.

[15:35] I was asking about your relationships with your managers and so on and your directors. Kyby. itself: how did that fit into the Departmental structure?

Kyby. was established in 1905 when the government of the day purchased a property and said they wanted to put settlers there. This was part of closer settlement scheme. People said, 'That's where the sheep grazing has run since it was first settled by the Afflecks. We don't know what you can do with it'. They took on land and set up an experimental farm: the Kyby. Experimental Farm. It had been established since 1905. In the 1920s it did the most brilliant work in Australia on the use of superphosphate to increase carrying capacity and the use of introduced legumes to increase carrying capacity so that the natural country which carried a sheep to the acre, with superphosphate it would carry two; if they put in sub clover it would carry three; and if they put in sub clover and pasture grass it would carry 4 sheep to the acre.

This story – it was the Cook story, L.J. Cook who initiated this work and carried it out – they had and still have [plots] from when this program started. It had nil, 45, 90, 180 pounds per acre

of superphosphate per annum. These are historical [plots] now. Some of them have been used for other purposes but they've still got an inkling of traditional [plots] there. It established the sub clover, super–sub story for the whole of southern Australia. The CSIRO acknowledged this: the work went on over in Canberra and further research into … group but Kyby. was the beginning of it. Cook was the super and …, of course, Mr Howard in the Adelaide Hills discovered sub clover. He found sub and multiplied it and seed was produced and taken to the South East. A couple of farmers from the South East alongside the station used it as early as the station. This was the sub clover Mount Barker. However, the man's name was Howard.

Kyby., in terms of the Department as an experimental farm, was it attached to any particular group or area?

No. There were many research/experimental farms – Kyby., Turretfield, Parndana (post-World War II), Minnipa on the West Coast, Wanbi was established as a soil conservation one in the late '30s, maybe early '40s I've forgotten. The experiment farms were regarded as being places where local problems would be solved. The experimental farms were used largely for that purpose. Initially, they did a lot of growing wheat: which was the best variety for this area. They still do grow hundreds of varieties because Roseworthy College was set up as a magnificent wheat breeding centre and many of Australia's wheats were sent there. They were sent out every year to these stations to try out. You couldn't do better than trying it at Minnipa and Kybybolite – 12" rainfall country, 20" rainfall country.

Did these research stations, experimental farms have special status in the Department?

Not really. Some of the Departmental people would send their junior officers down every year or two. We had quite a lot of our so-called field officers come in for a year or two years and then come back to head office. It was seen as a training place perhaps. It had its value. I certainly know boys who came and worked for me at Kyby. and finished quite well up the track when they came back and headed the different branches. They would go into Soils or to Agronomy or the Plant Breeding or the Animal Section. It was a good background place.

[20.35] Some good training. Was there any liaison or any link up between the farms and centres?

Not particularly.

Did they operate as stand alone sort of thing?

No. Each OC, in my time anyway, ran the place the way he felt within the constrictions of (a) the budget and (b) the staff he had and (c) the program that he had taken on. The head office had some say in whether you could or couldn't expand. I couldn't set up a project, I had to get approval. There was a group of people who would look at them and say, 'Yes, we think this should be done' or 'No you haven't got the resources'. Basically we operated independently, the stations, although I knew the people in each of the other ones. We'd come to town in Show

week, which is when we used to go up to the Adelaide Show. This corresponded with conference week and the Bureau would get together sometimes. It was all very informal.

So would you come to town for a week or so for the Show, the conference?

Generally we came for a week at Adelaide Show time because the Bureau conference was on. If that wasn't on, the Soils Branch at one stage used to have their conferences in Show week too, so there was a reasonable chance to be in the city then.

[22:00] You were at Kyby. for ...?

I was at Kyby. for eight years.

Eight years.

I came away from Kyby. … I still had great interest in the work going on but I had children who needed some secondary education and ultimately tertiary. A position became vacant in the Department to which I applied and got. I came away from Kyby. to work in the Animal Branch, the Animal Production Branch.

Just before we get onto that aspect, Peter, to round out the Kyby. story: what are some of the particular highlights or memories of your time there?

Most of my work was related to sheep production. In the case of Merino sheep, we were particularly interested in the growth and survival of the animals in their first summer. My predecessor had started this work and I helped carry it on. This involved trying to find [why] lambs on dry summer feed lost weight and the flock developed a tail of … lambs … We had to find some way of 'What could we feed them on?'. One of the things turned out to be oats, which was a cereal we could grow to profusion on our legume-rich soils. Those using it as sub clover brought the fertility up to a stage in 1958 when I was there, a good season, we [produced] over 100 bushels of oats to the acre. With oats at 50, that's 5 kilos or tons – we're getting into trouble now! – about 5 tons per acre. I can't put them into kilograms.

About 5 imperial ton, so to speak, worth.

100 bushels, that's a fairly big crop and that's a lot because people used to talk about a 10-bag crop of wheat and that was a big yield. The fertility was there and that became one of the problems. If you plough that out, you're letting back all that nitrate solubles and you lost a lot of it. We had to find ways of cultivating and keeping that fertility as long as possible, that was where it followed after I left.

That sort of research work, project work, were you hands on with that?

Yes. Mostly I had ideas but I tended to get more involved with the sheep work myself than the cropping work. We were involved firstly in selecting the best breed for prime lamb production; we were interested in producing leg lamb. We used to call it fat lamb but that term fell out of favour and we called them prime and I think they now call them meat lamb. Then we had a

choice of which lambs, which new breeds, which lamb breeds, so we did a breeds comparison. We did a variation of what they had done before, it started when I was there.

The importance of timing lambing was shown that if you could lamb … Very often the Merino [Border Leicester] in the right time of year, that is in the autumn when she was most fertile and she therefore had a winter spring lamb rather than an autumn winter lamb, you could get 160 to 170% of lambs. We had twins all over the country. That was a very striking piece of work: later lambing had more lambs. Then, of course, you had to finish them but if you could finish them on your pastures that was great. We then got into an area of how to import. The lambs that weren't ready for market, what could you do with those? We did creep work and then creep raising into special feed lots. There was a lot of extra work done on that field.

I became very interested in the possibility of improving production by producing three lambs in 2 years. That's really my later work. More importantly, I initiated a trial on whether it was better for lambs to be stocked on one paddock and left there or to rotate them through a full paddock system because there was a lot of talk from New Zealand saying that rotational grazing was essential. Some of that stemmed from their dairy work which probably showed that it was. But with the sheep we were able to show that the reasonable yields of lambs from market through to market on the one paddock, which they knew and understood, the lambs did very much better than the lambs which were led through a full paddock system. So set stocking was better than rotational grazing. We also did it at three stocking: that's two, three and four. We were able to show that excepting one year in six, four sheep to the acre could be run quite happily. We could have run that four sheep if we put in adequate supplementary feeding. We were able to show that the pastures should carry a great deal more than they had been carrying. A lot of the South East was understocked.

Did those ideas get accepted by the farmers locally?

Generally, yes. We found people changing their lambing times. We found people carrying more sheep. You had to get the conservatives to carry more sheep, they like their sheep to always look in tremendously good condition and so on. But they were lowering the grass to dominate the clover and the clover was suffering. They were saying, 'We're having a problem with our clover'. We had a look at it and said, 'If you ate the grass off the top of it, the sun might get in it and flower and set seed'. It was in their interest where the men down there were about six sheep to the acre. He also harvested clover seed because he didn't have any grass: the sheep ate the grass as soon as it came up. He had beautiful clover and then he'd take the sheep off and harvest clover seed. He didn't need to crop.

He was on the ball.

Yes.

[28.45] You went through a couple of the highlights of your time. Were there any …

I suppose one of the highlights, or lowlights, was that we had several fires. I went to fires firsthand by going to them, which was what I really wanted to do. I learnt a great deal so that subsequently I was able to build good fire prevention or fire handling techniques into my farm management. I realised that you had to get to a fire quickly and get a lot of water to it as quick as possible, but you didn't need a lot of water: one rucksack in the first 5 minutes was worth a ton 20 minutes later, very often. So I learnt a lot about fires.

One of the interesting things was a very bad, wet windy weekend with high rain, very strong winds and very cold at shearing time and a lot of sheep died. I was in a lovely position because I wanted to know why and here were properties … I surveyed 17 properties in the area and was able to indicate what some of the factors were that led to high losses. People used to say, 'A couple of days off shears they'll be alright', but that was not the case. Any sheep from 0 to 5 days off shears, they died in much higher proportions than a sheep that had five days wool growth. Not necessarily the wool but the fact that they got back out to the paddock and got a belly full of tucker and they were able then to resist the drop in temperature. Most of them died of hypothermia. People even brought them in and covered them with wool and some even gave them brandy but you couldn't resuscitate a lot of sheep. Large numbers of sheep died. I wrote a paper which I presented to ASAP [The Australian Society of Animal Production] and they published it. In fact, when I went to Scotland in 1975, it was the only paper that Keith [K.L.] Baxter referred to. He said, 'It's very interesting work your post-shearing losses' because, of course, in Scotland with snow and so forth they lost sheep every year and they were interested.

That sounds like you took to that research work, doing the research and writing up results?

Yes, I was happy. I didn't write it up as well as I should have. The words are … you haven't got time to write, you've got to get on with the next experiment and so on. I enjoyed that survey. It's very easy to measure the effect but you really want to know why, what was the cause. The cause is really where you tackle a problem. So many of our problems, we look at the effect and say, 'What do we do about this?'. It could be anything, find out what caused it.

A bit of an inquiring mind?

You need to have that, don't you? Why? I can remember a physics teacher at Adelaide High saying, 'The trouble with you is that you always say why'. He said, 'Just accept that formula. Don't worry'. (Both laugh)

[32:20] Why then the Animal Branch in '64?

'64. That was the logical place to come because my predecessor in that had been a fellow called Dennis Muirhead who pushed and worked in the lamb production area and worked in cattle production. I had done both of those things so it was a logical progression.

[32.40] **End of Side B, Tape 1**
Tape 2, Side A

[0:15] Peter, the other tape ran out just as you were about to describe your situation in the Animal Branch and coming up to Adelaide. Perhaps if we just pick up on that again, you coming up in 1964 for a promotion.

Yes, there was a promotion. I left the beautiful South East for a very ordinary Adelaide office with very poor facilities.

Gawler Place?

Gawler Place, yes Simpson's old factory. There was no provision for a fire escape and very ordinary facilities. However, I found it useful. I had good contact with the industry because I was immediately put [on] what was known as the State Lamb Committee. I worked for them for two years. They included quite a number of people from the British Breeds [Society], who were interested in the Kybybolite lamb work. They also included people from beef cattle and they were interested in Struan. They were interested particularly in the State competitions: I was involved in the beef carcass competition, the lamb competition and the pig competition so I was spending quite a bit of time at the abattoirs. I was very familiar with the abattoirs because all our lambs from Kybybolite that were under trial used to come up and we would do all the measurements on them up there, so I knew the abattoirs and I had good friends there. The work in the State Lamb Committee was interesting.

These competitions: what was the intention?

They had been running for a number of years. They started off to encourage producers to produce better livestock. It was an opportunity to take animals on the hoof, live, and judge them and say that would be a good carcass or that won't. Then when you saw them in the carcass they could then be re-examined. This was particularly true with cattle more than lamb. The cattle … they weren't sure what cattle beef would look like when it was hung on the hook. Many of the breeders were breeding for Adelaide show standards, appearance. Most of those sorts of animals, particularly where they won prizes, when we slaughtered them we found they had excess fat. They were selecting show-type animals not good meat carcass. I mean the animal had the potential but it was overdone. This was really the background to all the performance work with cattle too. You've got to select the cows that produce the good calves, not the good-looking cows. The good-looking cows often would win a prize at the show and fail to have a calf. Sometimes they were fat because they didn't have a calf. More often they didn't have a calf because they were over fat, it affected their ovulation rate. The carcass competitions, and the same with pigs, they all had no idea what was under the hide of a porker or a bacon pig until you looked at them and measured them and then cut them and looked at the eye muscle. Did they have a small eye muscle and a large amount of fat or a narrow covering of

fat and a large eye muscle? You could only see that in the carcass. So carcass competitions provided a good extension area for those who were trying to help the producer to produce what the market really wanted.

Were they regular competitions, like annually?
Annual.

Annual. How many stock would be involved?
You've got me now because I'm not sure.

A small number or a …?
I would think in the beef carcass competitions we would probably initially look at 40 to 60 carcasses. People always thought they had some of the best beef in the State. If you could win the prize on the hoof and then win it on the hooks you really were right at the top of the tree.

These competitions, annually, were they in conjunction with the Royal Show or … ?
No. They were generally done at an appropriate time in relation to the season.

Right. That's what I was wondering. So the people would have to submit their stock from all over the State at that time.
At a particular time, yes.

And they'd be judged for appearances and then meat quality?
Judged for quality of beef. Then it became a test of the hoof judge, whether he could satisfactorily pick the one that was going to be right on the hoof because many of the good meat people knew when an animal was over fat and they wouldn't be buying them. It sorted out a few.

[5.50] That's most interesting Peter.
The State Lamb Committee led me into that area.

Here you were dealing with beef and pigs and so on?
I talked with the advisors in each of those areas but I wouldn't have a big role, I was just there.

Just to go back a step. I didn't see how the beef and the pigs came out of State Lamb work or was that more ...
No, sorry I beg your pardon. The State Lamb Committee was ... One saw some of the State Lamb Committee in the beef area too because some of the breeders, particularly around the Gawler River area, were into both sheep and cattle. They were only connected loosely.

[6:40] Perhaps then Peter we should go back a step to say when you came up to head office. What was your job?
My job was basically to service the animal industries, whatever – sheep meat, cattle meat, pork. I don't think I was involved in poultry.

As an extension type officer?

I had to do extension work, yes. I had to do extension work. I had to oversight some of the research staff on some of the centres and I had to be responsible for the Bureau requests that came in from producers wanting to hear of the work that had been going on in the animal industry. I took some of our Kyby. data and used it all over the State where it applied, particularly the lambs growing up and the lambs through the dry hot summer. I also, for a couple of years, wrote a regular article for the *Chronicle* on beef notes which was extension work. I wrote a major article for the Department on livestock and sheep management, grazing management, which only the other day I noticed had been recently rewritten. It became a 'how to' cope with problems of managing livestock.

Again, that would have been in the *Journal of Agriculture*?

Yes, in the *Journal of Agriculture*. I also tried to write up some of my research data but I found myself battling a lot of other paper work and I didn't make a very good fist of my research data I'm afraid. There was a good amount of work behind the scenes that you couldn't list: it was shifting paper from one part to another.

A major task I had in the second year was … The sheep and wool officers across Australia met annually in States in turn at which matters of research, administration, regulatory side were all discussed at top level. These were heads of departments. I had the job of organising the State conference. That was a secretarial type job. I must say that I didn't have any secretarial, or very little, assistance so it was a major task. The good thing that I took out of that was that I took from our State Lamb Committee and got incorporated into Australian language ... We did away with the word fat in fat lamb and talked about prime lamb. That might sound a small thing but because of the medical abhorrence of fat, it became necessary to get that word out of the language. If you said 'Fat lamb' people would say 'No'. The producers knew that and they didn't want it being called fat lamb so we called them prime lamb.

An important aspect of marketing I suppose?

Absolutely.

It also reflects an increasing emphasis on marketing in the '60s.

It did. It must have had a big impact because back in the South East they started to try and breed lambs which would have less fat and a mature body weight because lambs naturally wanted to put on fat. I won't say naturally. They had to pick breeds and try and select size and bring in dams that would produce a quick-growing lamb without too much fat.

[10:55] You're suggesting there from some of your comments Peter that you were getting more into the bureaucracy and more into the paper work and so on.

That was a bit of a problem. I had grown quite interested in it because when I was asked by the Minister and I got the job of answering the question, 'What would happen if an American company came in and set up a meat works at Murray Bridge?'. I had to go to all the meat works around (there weren't many other meat processors), but go to the various boards and producers and the abattoirs and find out where the lambs and calves were coming from and would they go elsewhere if there was another source. It was the most difficult thing I've ever had to do and I finally finished it. It was extremely hard and ultimately, of course, the meat works were set up at Murray Bridge. Subsequently, others were set up at Naracoorte and one at Bordertown. I'm not sure if American money came in but the Minister can ask a question and somebody has to find an answer!

So it's research work in a different way?

It was research work in a way but it was quite tricky and I had quite a difficult job. I did it. There was another … When you have … It was getting to the stage when the research and these other centres who were dependent on funds from the industry grants and we were having to make out very strong applications to get grants. That took a lot of time. It was useful with the general extension literature but we were getting into predicting what might the findings from this be worth to the whole of Australia's industry. You were getting into twisted words. I wasn't terribly good at that.

I was wondering how you coped with that transition from the South East into the city office.

The office itself wasn't too bad. I found that I was doing less and less work with the industry and more and more paper work. I was finding too that the surroundings weren't nearly as pleasant. I'd got used to the bush. I liked the bush. I was a farmer at heart. I was finding pushing paper from Monday to Friday … In fact, I finished up spending all Saturdays for a period trying to catch up. I'd look and I'd emptied those baskets but what had that achieved? I don't think it did much good. That's the frustration of Public Service. In fact, soon after I took the opportunity to get away because I couldn't see a single job in the Department that I wanted ahead of me. I didn't want to push paper and get involved in that sort of administrative work.

[14:15] Did you think of another department: Lands Department for example?

At that time the Lands Department weren't taking graduates, although their director was (he was an old friend of mine) but they weren't looking for people. A position came up at the Waite Institute from the University of Adelaide who were setting up a new research station at Mintaro in the Lower North. This was part of a bequeath from the Mortlock family who had helped the university many times over many years. They had left the land to the Waite Institute and the Waite decided that they'd like to set up a field station there. I had all the background for that and the desire. It was a wonderful opportunity to go to virtually a virgin area and say, 'Right,

this is how it ought to be designed and planned and so forth'. Back came my planning ... I then set up and ran the [Mintaro] Experimental Station for the next 20 years.

[15:25] So did you have to uproot the family to move to Mintaro?

No. The fortunate thing was that I didn't have to go to Mintaro to live there. They allowed us to get an overseer on the place. Mintaro was close enough for me to travel up: I drove up there weekly. We had an overseer and I would go up one day and come back the next; be away one night but I had my family and I still had that contact with my family.

When did you leave the Department Peter?

I left the Department in 1965 … it might have been 1966.

1966?

1966.

[16:15] 1966 and with the Waite from then on.

From 1966 to 1988: I had 22 years with the Waite Agricultural Centre and Institute as part of the University of Adelaide.

Quite convenient to here for you.

Very convenient. I could walk up to the Waite in 25 minutes: I used to in those days. They allowed me a car, a very good one, a departmental vehicle which I used to take to the field station. When I came home at night, if I came home after 5:00 o'clock I'd come home and take it back to work the next day. I did not have the freedom to use that vehicle as some people these days would use it to go here, there and everywhere but I could use it to go from Adelaide to Clare and back. So it worked out very well. I was close to the Waite. I used the Waite Oval for fitness classes and jogging. My children used to come and jog at the Waite Oval with me, run with me competitively.

[17:25] It sounds like those last couple of years in head office weren't terribly pleasing?

Not my cup of tea. I didn't like the excessive paper work and so much of it seemed to me to be not serving the industry that I had come to feel I had a responsibility to.

What about the people you worked with in the Animal Branch?

There were no problems there. My superior officer was the only one I had any close contact with. I used to see him daily. He was a lovely gentleman who liked to talk late in the day: if you went into his office at half past four you were likely to still be there at a quarter to six, so you learned a few tricks! But he was a very nice guy. He had a lot of background. He'd been in World War II – a vet. in the Light Horse – so he had a few interesting background stories.

What about Northfield?

No, I had nothing to do with Northfield at all. That was run quite separately. The only thing I did there was to negotiate to buy a pig from there on one occasion! (Both laugh) I'll tell you a bit about that, that's another story, later.

What about Northfield in terms of work though? Was it an option to move into that area?

No. I had no desire to go to Northfield at all. The people that worked there were basically dairy; there were very few sheep there. I wasn't particularly interested in the people who worked there. Northfield didn't appeal. None of the other research centres appealed. I'd been at the top one for 8 years, that was enough. I was lucky that the university had a property and wanted to establish a new research station … an experimental station.

[19:45] In a sense that's another story and, of course, we're focusing on the Department's story. In your time at the Waite, did you maintain any connections or have contact with the Department?

I did have contact with the Department because the Department had a Soil Conservation Committee, which was responsible to the Minister. The Waite Institute nominated me as their representative on that committee so I had regular contact with the Soils people because I was also, by then, giving some lectures on soil conservation that was appropriate at the Waite Institute too. So yes, I maintained that contact through that.

Do you remember the period you were on the Board, roughly?

I would think it was from about '75 to '85.

About a decade or so.

About a decade.

We can check out the finer detail. That would have been intermittent, infrequent contact?

Yes. It was infrequent and generally once a year we did an inspection of a particular area. One year it would be the South East and the coastal problems on the sand hills along the Coorong. Another year it would be the Mallee. Another year it was Yorke Peninsula. I remember going to the Flinders Ranges one year. So it was soil conservation problems.

What about in terms of the Mintaro Field Station? Did the Department keep an eye on that or ask questions?

We had liaison with the Department. One or two of their people did projects on the research station there. The State farmers came there; Bureau branches found there was a new place to call on and we'd have them there for a half-day or a day. I didn't ever lose touch with the Department but the Department didn't have a particular role in that university farmers were distinct from their own ...

[22.15] Perhaps it's appropriate then Peter to ask from the outsider's perspective, you've been talking a lot about your time in the Department but from an outsider's perspective how did you see the Department after you left?

My last year in the Department they were heading towards the economic aspects very strongly. Some of our Kyby. work, of course, could be built into programs quite well so I was happy with that thought but it did seem to me that there was an overemphasis on the economics. I don't know if that was maintained but I must say that from the outside I saw the Department being reorganised. I'd no sooner got an impression of how it was organised into divisions or departments then again it would be reorganised and somebody who I had thought was the head of the Department was now chief of a division or he'd been moved sideways. I might be totally wrong because over 20 years you expect administrative change, but it appeared to me that they could never quite get their structure right. It seemed that whenever there was a new top executive they wanted to reorganise. I don't know that the rural community achieved a lot out of that. As an outsider I can't really say but it did seem to me that … Some of their district people, of course, were very well trained. I must be quite haughty here and say that I trained quite a lot of them through 20 years of teaching at the Waite Institute. People doing ag. science, many of them flowed into the Department so I saw some of my ex-students there. Some of them did a very good job, particularly in the rural areas.

I wanted to ask you about, apart from your official links with the Department, what sort of personal contacts, if any, did you maintain with individuals?

I guess after 20 years at the Waite I formed a new group of immediate friends. I did for a few years play golf regularly with two of them but then they went and played elsewhere. One or two of them I would see intermittently locally, but I didn't retain a lot of friends from that period.

[25:15] Apart from the Soil Board, the soil conservation lecturing and so on, and then your day-to-day activities at the Waite up to '88, since then have you maintained any connection with the agricultural field of any more than a passing interest?

No, only a passing interest. By the time I retired even the university administration was getting top heavy. I was not unhappy to resign, I resigned just short of 65 years. I had a serious illness and that suggested to me that I would be happier out of the university. I was able to come out at a convenient time and invest money soundly. I haven't gone back to the Department because having 20-odd years away from them I felt I was not really a Department of Agriculture person anymore. Because of Kyby. and then Balaklava, I wasn't in the head office so I didn't have that intimate contact with many people. No, I haven't maintained contact really with the Department of Agriculture people.

Nevertheless Peter it's been very interesting to hear stories from an inside perspective but, as you say, some of it was out in the sticks and a different slant on things. You've passed on very useful observations in our session today. Perhaps it's appropriate to bring it to a close unless there's any final thoughts you'd like to add?

The important thing for me always has been to help the rural producer, the man on the land. I know that my father needed help when he was on the farm. When I was on the farm we desperately needed help. We couldn't get superphosphate so we couldn't grow crops and we

couldn't keep our livestock alive. I always say my early work in the Bureau, I sensed that that was the way farmers could get information. When I got on to Kybybolite or when I got on to the Department myself, I felt the need whenever I could to go out and share my information with the rural producers.

If I criticised the Department at all, it would be that their approach has from necessity been away from the word of mouth. That probably sums it up. I was in the era when word of mouth was possible. Today perhaps it can only be done by radio and press release. I did plenty of both, but I found that the producers liked to have someone with whom they could have a one-on-one conversation.

Like today, they would have learnt a lot and I've learnt a lot. I'd like to thank you very much for sharing the information with us.

My pleasure.

[28:50] **End of interview**