AN INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY BERNARD O'NEIL WITH MR TOM MILLER OF ERINDALE ON THE 1ST OF OCTOBER 2003 FOR THE PROJECT ON THE HISTORY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA.

[Square brackets incorporate corrections supplied by Tom Miller in March 2005.]

[0: 20] Tom, thanks very much for agreeing to being involved in the project. A good point to start with, of course, would be a bit of your personal background and follow that through up to you joining the Department.

Okay Bernard. I'll try and do this as quickly and as sensibly as I can. While I have been living in South Australia now for many years and very much have the interest of South Australia, I am actually a West Australian. My name's Thomas Miller, usually called Tom Miller. I was born in August 1917 at Mount Lawley, which is a suburb just 2 or 3 km out of Perth in Western Australia. My father worked in the railways at Perth. He went from Sydney to Western Australia when they built the railway to the goldfields and stayed there. He was an ordinary railwayman. My mother had been a nurse, that was her career ...

Was that Western Australian Railways or Commonwealth?

No, that was Western Australian Railways, WAGR. There is a WAGR engine on the Pichi Richi railway at the moment.

A little historical connection for you.

But they were ordinary people, because you never had money in those days. In fact talking about that, I was a teenager when the Great Depression was on which is completely forgotten about now but it was very important in those days. My dad remained in service in the railways throughout the whole depression. They were retained in service on the condition that they forfeited one quarter of their salary. The staff were told, 'We'll sack a quarter of you, we have to, or you can all reduce your wages by a quarter and we'll keep you all on'. So that's what happened. So there were was not much money about at that particular time. Now I ...

They were tough times, the Depression years.

They were very tough, yes. I was just old enough to remember but I wasn't old enough at that time to appreciate the problems that we had. My mum and dad never owned a motor car, they hoped to own a motor car. Now, I went to the ordinary State school. At the age of 12–12½, I got a scholarship to Modern School, which was a very special school in Western Australia for a better class of students, and was there for five years. When I think about this, I think how wonderful it was: we had had no problems, no drugs, none of the things that cause troubles these days.

You said Modern School: was it a secondary school?

Secondary school, yes. It took you up ... [to university entrance]

The scholarship was to go from the primary to the secondary?

From the primary to the secondary and then five years in the secondary ... great years for teenagers to develop – no misdemeanours, no drugs, strict reasonable discipline and we mixed. In our classes there [were] pupils who came from all over the State. The scholarships were granted anywhere and people came from 500 miles away. You suddenly mixed with different people. In normal school you were always with your own small little group.

Would you have gone on to secondary school without the scholarship?

I think so, yes. Would have had to: it was compulsory education but I'd have gone to Fremantle Boys School instead of Perth Modern School.

But would your parents have encouraged you to continue all the way through to complete the secondary school?

Yes, they were very keen on education.

Did you have sisters and brothers?

Only one brother. He was older than I am and he remained in Perth. He went to the Fremantle Boys School not to Perth Modern School. Now that took you up to matriculation, the Leaving exam as we called it. Then normally you got a job. But my family was keen that I went on to university. The headmaster at Modern School, who was our guidance person in those days, he said, 'Go on to university if you can possibly do it'. Except for that, we'd have gone to work. Commonwealth Bank, an insurance company or as a school teacher – they were the three openings. I actually got a job in AMP which I didn't take up. I got a job in the Commonwealth Bank which I didn't take up. I got a job as a school teacher where I worked for one day as a swimming instructor and then the decision was made I would go to university so I didn't take that up. Went to university and did science: maths, physics, chemistry, geology – four first-year subjects. Second-year subjects – maths, physics and chemistry. During that year the Department of Agriculture in Perth advertised for cadetships, I think it was six cadetships. They hadn't put on any staff for 13 years because of the Depression. So here was a policy to adjust the Department of Agriculture over there. The same thing happened over here. In fact, in every State: they suddenly began to realise they had to have a continuity of officers.

[7:45] Get some new people in, get some new staff in ...

Oh yes, they had to because ... At any rate, what had happened in horticulture over there, there had been a [problem in the apple industry]. The apple industry of Western Australia was very important. It was a big exporting for those days. The disease of black spot of apples had suddenly been noticed in Western Australia. Now this is a very serious disease. Every apple orchard has to be sprayed several times a year for black spot. Western Australian orchards had never had this problem. All of a sudden it cropped up. So they decided to put one of the cadets into horticulture to work on this problem. I was the one that was chosen for that. I didn't

[apply]. We were all in those days oriented towards agronomy, or cereal growing, and sheep. But they wanted somebody in horticulture to do this job on black spot. Without asking for the job that was the one I was given after I graduated. I'd switched from science to agriculture and finished up with a Bachelor of Science in Agriculture.

Was that still a three-year degree?
No, it's four years now.

It's four now. When you did it, did you have to do an extra ...
Yes, three years study and one year practical. I went straight out and did practical at the Beverley Research Centre in Western Australia. Actually I did biology externally while I was doing my practical year. But even from the Beverley Research Centre, which was wheat and sheep, I still went into horticulture.

[9:55] What did the cadetship mean, Tom? That you were bonded to the Department … working ...
Yes, you were paid. I was paid 25 shillings a week in my first year. Went up 2/6 a week each year. I was then bonded to them for a period of time. When I was appointed went on half salary for six months and then on full salary at the end of that time.

And during the time you were studying, that was full-time at university …
That's right.

… but you'd work in the Department during holidays or …
That's right, correct. That's right, exactly, yes.

Standard sort of provisions?
That's right, yes. I guess it was the same in most States.

What sparked your interest in doing the Bachelor of Science initially. I can see why you changed to agricultural science with the cadetship, but why were you interested in sciences?
Because I did science at school. We were channelled at Modern School into either arts or science. Your first three years up to the Junior Certificate were everything: you did languages, English, geography, history, maths and then in the last two years you were channelled and I went into Science Four and Science Five, where we specialised in science subjects. It was just really that boys went into science and girls went into arts. It was as simple as that.

It was a pretty clear-cut choice in those days.
That's right. When I went on to university it was just like going on continuing school.

Did you have any expectations of a career using a science degree: thinking maybe of teaching science or working as a research person?
Not really, no. We were not guided in that respect at all. The headmaster of the Modern School was keen on children he liked going in for teaching, but no other guidance at all. We spoke

vaguely about analytical chemistry but I didn't even know what analytical chemistry was. No, you just did a degree, hoping that something would turn up.

Well, something did turn up and … into agriculture

Well, it turned up differently. I switched to agriculture. I was interested in agriculture, but I had no family agricultural background.

Just to put a timeframe on it. You're talking here in the mid 1930s would it be?

My scholarship was 1929, which was Western Australia's centenary year. Five years at school and then I spent five years at university. So that was '39. I completed my courses in '39. Graduation was actually early 1940.

[13:35] And, of course, you were then working for the Department.

I was in the Department and in the Horticulture Branch surveying down at Manjimup for this black spot disease. Manjimup is where it had been seen on two properties. They wanted to determine the extent of that disease. I found another 21 properties, much to everybody's surprise. What they wanted was somebody with a good pair of legs and a good pair of eyes.

A strong constitution to walk around inspecting …

That's right. This was actually a wonderful experience because I met a lot of fruit-growers. I realised that you do your university degree and then having got a job after you've done your degree, you start to learn your job.

So 1939, 1940 we're talking World War II.

That's right. I did my bit trying to get into the Forces, that's what you had to do, but they had a very strict policy in the West that we were to grow food for England. I would have had to resign to join the Forces. In looking back I must have thought, 'Well I don't resign, I've got a job and I stick to it'. So that kept me out of the Forces. I was what was called in those days – you were manpowered – because I was in the food industry.

Restricted manpower?

That's right, yes. Don't know whether it was good or bad, but that's the way it was.

Probably quite a number of people would have been in the restricted manpower, working in agriculture just for that very reason you mention, you've got to keep the food supply going.

That's what they thought in those days. It would be very different now.

[16:00] So you'd begun working in the Department. What – it would have been the Horticultural Branch ...

Yes.

What were your expectations? Were you thinking … I mean it's wartime so who knows what is going to happen but did you have any idea of a career?

Just a career in the Department. You really didn't have any choice. You were put where the boss wanted you. I was a bit lucky. Being the first employed [there for 13 years], there was only two other graduates in the Branch, both 13 years senior to me – that was the boss and his assistant. I was used as a fill-in for several years and I had experience in inspection work, research work, advisory work and administration and that proved to be very good and probably directed me as I went on. I wasn't specialised as a research officer, I wasn't specialised as an advisory officer, but I did a bit of each.

A fairly broad range of experience.

A very broad range, which doesn't happen often I might say.

People tend to get pigeon-holed into ...

They want to get pigeon-holed. The later ones, the university graduates that I employed when I was in the Department of Agriculture here in South Australia, all knew when they came out of university what they wanted to do. Entomologist, pathologist, storage work or something like that, which is good up to a point but it is a problem when you're running the show. But at any rate I had a very, very broad background for those few years. I had been out in the country and had very good experience amongst farming communities.

Then Australia received a letter from the Government of the North West Frontier Province in Pakistan asking for a horticulturalist to go over there to advise them on the development of the fruit industry. At that time I was acting in charge of Horticulture, my boss had gone overseas for a year. I circulated this letter around amongst the staff. It went to the staff of all Departments of Agriculture in Australia. Nobody was interested. When I was filing this letter away about six weeks later, thinking, 'Well I've got no response', I suddenly thought, 'What's wrong with me? I fit in with the category that they have asked for'. They wanted somebody not too old, because of the rigours of the country and the climate, broad experience, and they happen to grow the same crops as we grow in Australia; apples, citrus, peaches. So I put in and eventually was appointed. Having expected to go over there for a period of six months and put up a report advising them what they should do to develop the industry, a cable came back from the government over there to our Prime Minister Menzies saying that Miller had been appointed as Director-General of Agriculture and we would like him to start in mid March. Now there's a quote. Now, nobody knew what this meant, nobody knew what this meant at all. They simply said at home here that this is the way they are handling it in Pakistan. So I went over there with the wife and two kids ...

So you had married by this stage.

I didn't know what I was to do. I went by boat *Stratheden* because there were no planes. When I went to Thomas Cook & Sons and said I wanted a ticket to go to Peshawar, they said, after much conferring in the back room, 'We have no idea how you get to Peshawar'. They said, 'Take a boat to Bombay and ask your way', which is virtually what I did.

You had married by this stage?

I had a wife and two young children, just took them with me, without a thought. Had I known more I wouldn't have gone. (both laugh)

To clarify one thing, before finding out more. You said a telegram came through appointing you as Director-General so you hadn't actually gone over at that stage?

No, no. This would have been probably January and they wanted me to start in March. I didn't actually go until May because this was a matter of winding up the work I was doing and catching a boat that would take me from Fremantle to Bombay.

What year was that Tom, do you remember?

1950.

When you went over, were you then the Director-General?

Yes. They had a Department of Agriculture which was rather surprising. Very similar to the ones in Australia. But I suppose that was not strange because the development was done by the British in both places, so it was the same development. In Pakistan, which only seceded from India one year before, it had a Department of Agriculture very similar to the one that I was in in Western Australia. It wasn't as difficult to fit in as one would have expected. In fact, it was easier to fit in to a department than it was to go over there as an individual and set yourself up and do your report which I anticipated in the first instance.

But despite this appointment as Director-General, were you still expected to go for six months or so.

In fact, I was told by my Department I could go for six months and then I had to come back.

So you had leave from the Department?

Yes.

How did that pan out in Pakistan, how did it ... ?

It was one of the highlights. I stayed for 3½ years. The government said to me, 'Don't you worry, we'll sort out the Australian government'. That became government to government. The Colombo Plan – which was advanced countries assisting Asian, undeveloped countries – came in at exactly the same time. That was probably 1950 when it was initiated. After my six months, Menzies wrote back. He wrote two letters, one to the Department, to the government of Western Australia and said that Miller had to stay over there, and the other was to the Pakistan government saying that under the Colombo Plan Australia would reimburse Pakistan the full

cost of myself and my family while I was over there. So everybody did well out of it. I was probably the first Colombo Plan person ever to go overseas. But I wasn't sent over in the Colombo Plan. I went over as a volunteer and they asked me over there, 'Do you wish to stay as a volunteer or do you wish to be put under Colombo Plan?'. I said, 'No, I'll stay as a volunteer. I keep my job and you can organise what Australia will pay you, it is nothing to do with me'. So I continued. A lot of these decisions were – I only made them out of ignorance, but they were the right decisions as far as the Pakistanis were concerned.

What about your colleagues in Western Australia? Were they getting letters back from Miller saying he is going to stay a bit longer and wondering what the heck is going on or ... ?

They didn't like it all, they didn't like it all. But no it was the way it was. The fact that I went over there with a wife and two kids without asking any questions was a good thing. They set me up in a very good house. It went very, very well. And I was too young to expect too much, and that was a good thing too, so I just joined in amongst the – it was 70 Pakistanis in the Department, and virtually worked with them. And they loved that, because for 200 years they'd been [ruled] by the English, they were English-speaking people, and all of a sudden they had somebody who didn't think he was any better than they were. And this was quite an experience.

[26:50] So working with them to set up a Department?

No. The Department was set up ... just to see that I was just made … There was a Director there and Assistant Directors. I was made Director-General above them. They were embarrassed, they didn't like it, personally, but they had to put up with it. I didn't expect too much from them – no we got on very, very well. Did some good things.

A good experience.

It was good experience because eventually I came back. I came back because of my family. I had two boys and a wife who belonged to Perth and wanted an Australian education. We had them on correspondence from the correspondence schools in Western Australia but it wasn't as good. They weren't with people of their own. In the fourth year they said, 'Will you stay on?'. I said, 'I'll stay on for the final year (In fact that was the third year, I stayed for another 18 months) on the condition that you don't ask me to stay any longer. That's my only condition'. So I wound up and came back to Perth. But it would have given me a lot of confidence. In fact, it should have because it was a very unusual thing to do, particularly – that was 40 or 50 years ago now. When I came back I had to try and fit in again to my old Department. But I must have been a much more experienced person then when I left.

Had you kept in contact with the Department – apart from ...

Yes and no.

… keeping up with the work that they were doing... ?

No, not very much, except at the end of the second year I said to Pakistan, 'I want to go home for a month to freshen up, talk to other officers over there to keep myself up-to-date, so I'm more use when I come back for the last year and better for me'. So, yes, I did keep some contact but not close contact. I don't do that sort of thing. When I left Pakistan, I cut off from them, I didn't … They started to write to me saying, 'What'll we do about this and that?'. I said, 'No way. Forget me. It's your country, your job'.

You'd done your bit.

But, mind you, while I was over there I complained once about the way the government was treating the Department. They said to me, 'Well alright. You sit down and give us a blueprint of where this Department should go'. So I wrote a report on the future of the Department of Agriculture over there. Now when I went back 30 years later, they were still using that.

So you did go back!

I went back on a holiday trip with my family because I had two more boys born in Australia, one in Perth and one in Adelaide, and they had never heard of Pakistan. There were the two brothers that had been in Pakistan for 3½ years, two that had never seen the place. I took them all back, just for a week or two.

…

Yes.

See what had changed and some things had stayed the same, using the same blueprint.

Incredible, yes. They said if it was on my recommendations the government accepted it forthwith.

But you moved back to Perth in 1954?

Yes, probably '52, '54. I was there for two years when in the second year the position of Chief Horticulturalist – in Perth you were Superintendent of Horticulture; in South Australia you were Chief Horticulturalist – became vacant because Geoff Strickland was appointed to be Assistant Director of Agriculture. They were reorganising – this was under Dr Callaghan – they were reorganising the Department into divisions. It had been in branches before that: something like six branches according to the agriculture of the country – sheep, cattle, dairy, fruit, agronomy, soil and so on had been branches. Callaghan put them into two big divisions and he wanted two divisional leaders. Bob Herriott was one, doing soils and extension; Strickland was the other doing agronomy and horticulture; and there was a third one, come to think of it, which was under Marshall Irving, doing stock, dairying and stock [veterinary].

So three divisions.

Three divisions that's right.

[33:00] **End of Tape 1, Side A**
Side B, Tape 1

[0:04] Well Tom, we were just leading into your move to Adelaide and you were describing some of the re-organisation under Allan Callaghan. So we just need to explore that a little bit more: both things, firstly, your move and the re-organisation.

Yes. Strickland I think he'd been here 28 years (perhaps it was 28 years) when he died. He died on his 65th birthday, didn't actually retire. But he was Victorian and they looked towards Victoria to supply a Chief Horticulturalist over here because Strickland was very close to a lot of the Victorian people. But they didn't get the applications they expected. I heard about the job and applied, and interesting because of this Pakistan trip that we have just been talking about, I had been sent across to Sydney on a citrus job, and called through Adelaide on the way home. I called into the Department here. I had never been to Adelaide in my life. The Public Service Board heard that I was in town. They called a special meeting of the Board and interviewed me because I was an applicant for the job as Chief Horticulturalist.

Tom, just about the position becoming available and being advertised: how did you hear about it?

Well I heard about it through Syd de Beaux who was a Commonwealth Fruit Export Officer stationed in Canberra, an ex-West Australian who came over [to WA] on a visit. He said to me, 'Are you in for that job in Adelaide?'. I said, 'What job?' and he told me. So I wrote over here and said 'You haven't advertised this over here but are you interested in an application?'. They said, 'Yes of course. We just didn't think that anybody over there might be interested'. So I put in an application.

Were you having any particular problems in the Western Australian Department that ... itchy feet ...

Yes. I have often said to people, having gone to Pakistan and had a good time and a successful time, it proved to me that if you travel as a family and you are prepared to settle in, you could be happy anywhere. Western Australians usually stay in Western Australia. Actually South Australians usually stay in South Australia. It's a very small percentage who move for work or anything like that. I'd have been happy to stay in Western Australia. But I'd started the move and could see that you could go on. And in those days in Western Australia you thought if you were moving towards Sydney, you were moving up the ladder for some reason or other. Now it would be the other way around.

You mentioned it was the first time you had been to Adelaide when you called in here on your trip. Had you been to other places – Sydney, Canberra? Had you been required to travel?

Not very much, no, not very much. I had gone to Melbourne on this black spot work because all the apple trees planted in Western Australia came from nurseries in Victoria. It was expected that the black spot had been taken through to Perth on young fruit trees from Victoria so I was sent over to Victoria to go through their nurseries, as I had gone through the orchards in

Western Australia, to see if they had black spot in their nurseries. I might say, if you're interested, that the Victorians said, 'You're wasting your time. We haven't got black spot'. But within 10 minutes of walking into the first nursery, I found black spot. Showed them the symptoms and they were shocked because they'd spent the week before removing all the symptoms from the nursery (laughs), which I found out because I became very friendly with the Victorian departmental people after that. They told me this, that they were …

They'd cleaned up the place.

They had tried to clean it up. They were surprised that I found it so quickly but I'd learnt how to find it.

[6:15] But that leads me to ask, Tom, what sort of contact or connections did you have with other departments? You mentioned the man in Canberra told you about the Adelaide position but was there a little bit of a network amongst, at your level ...

Not at the time, but there was later, yes. If you want to know about that now … Not only did the Chiefs of Horticulture do horticulture work, that is research and advisory work with respect to the horticulture industries (all fruits and vegetables) but they also did plant quarantine for the States and plant quarantine for the Commonwealth. That meant anything coming through on ships to Adelaide was my responsibility. And in Perth and Melbourne and Sydney, the same. This was directed from Canberra. Also, the other job we did was the examination of fruit on a basis of quality for export. So apples or any other fruits being sent away from Adelaide were inspected by my staff. You were quarantine officer and you were also fruit export officer. Fruit export and quarantine were Commonwealth jobs. The Commonwealth government paid the State department for the time you spent on that work. Now Syd de Beaux came over as a Commonwealth officer doing his work from Canberra ... The Commonwealth used to get us together every year and we had a fruit export conference. All the chiefs were there and so we suddenly found ourselves talking about other horticultural issues. So we requested the government and were authorised to start up a Chief Horticulturalists Committee. So after the Commonwealth meeting doing export fruit, we would then usually have a quarantine meeting doing importation of plant material and then we would have a Chief Horticulturalists Meeting which was purely State issues. Now one issue, for example, that was important in those days was fruit fly. Fruit fly had arisen in 1947 in South Australia and that wakened up the fruit fly issue that fruit fly was spreading throughout the whole of Australia so that was one topic we could regularly talk about. But there were many other issues as well. We had this annual meeting amongst the Chief Horticulturalists which went on for nearly 20 years, and we became [close and friendly]. We used to then, after that meeting, go for a short trip for one or two days in the other State that we happened to visit. We had these meetings organised so that we would have one in Canberra, one in Sydney, one in Brisbane, one in Melbourne, one in Hobart,

Adelaide and Perth. So we all went to every other State some time, and were taken around by our counterparts and their staff. Yes, from Cairns to Perth I knew all the research centres and a lot of the staff of other departments. Mind you, I was there for quite a long period of time, and I was still fairly young – young enough to become friendly with these people. [It gave me] an extremely valuable and deep background of other departmental work.

[10:45] Do you remember when those meetings commenced? You said they went for about 20 years.

Well they were going in 1950. What initiated this was during the war years, which we spoke about, there was a Commonwealth Apple and Pear Board set up. Its job was to acquire all the apples and pears in Australia and to organise export and organise delivery [of the apples and pears] within Australia. That was still continued for a year or two after the war was finished because shipping still had to be organised at top level: it was organised from Canberra and capital cities. So that's what initiated these Chief Horticulturalists getting together. They continued with this. So it started in the war with the Apple and Pear Board meetings, because each chief was on the Apple and Pear Board: Strickland was on it, and Powell from Perth was on it and somebody from Tasmania and Sydney were on the Apple and Pear Board so they always used to go. That started that up. When I came to Adelaide we simply continued with that and it developed in to quarantine. We always continued to export fruit because we had common interest in exporting fruit from Melbourne or Hobart or Perth: was no different from exporting from Adelaide, we had common problems. Very valuable discussions periods we had then. We continued with those right through until about the time I retired, whenever that was: 1978 they were stopped. There was a change again in Commonwealth policy but they were so successful to the Chief Horticulturalists that the Chief Agronomists then asked could they have one. So they set up a Chief Agronomists Committee, which also would have finished up about 1975–78.

[13:45] Were you aware of anything similar in, say, the animal field, like a Chief Vets?

Yes. They always used to get together. They were always closer knit than the others, than the other agriculturalists, from some reason or other – common degree I think.

Maybe that and a bit of a carry over from the 19th century with the spread of cattle disease around the country and …

Yes, well pleuropneumonia was a big, all-Australia program. Yes, they had more Commonwealth [problems] … they regarded themselves as Commonwealth people.

Did you detect any … I know you're at a certain level in the department both in Western Australia and here, but did you detect any attitudes or feeling in regards to Commonwealth–State relations. I mean that the Commonwealth's being too intrusive ...?

Yes. In fact, after I retired they wrote and asked me would I do a history of the Commonwealth Horticultural Committee, which I did, which is somewhere, I haven't got a copy, it's not very

long, but I did that, and I made the comment in that, that – it was at the time Dunstan was trying to bring Monarto in and the Commonwealth was [involved] … We had allowed Commonwealth people to sit in on the Chief Horticulturalists Committee. This was because of the relationship with export fruit, and quarantine. I don't quite know why we did that but the Commonwealth were keen to do it. We let them sit in, really as observers, but with the right to comment at all, very free and open. The Commonwealth, over that period of time, suddenly started to try and take over State jobs. In fact, there was a very strong background that the CSIRO would take over all State [Agriculture] departments and this was quite strong. This is probably related to the Commonwealth financing the States. There was a change in Commonwealth–State financial relationships: States didn't [collect] income tax, Commonwealth did the lot and dispersed the money to the States. The individuals in the Commonwealth government had the feeling that this gave them the authority to [interfere]. It's Port football team all over again: [Allan] Scott thinks he runs the club because he gives them half a million. The Commonwealth reckons it runs the States because it provides the finance. But I am romancing on that because I don't know. But there was a very strong individual feeling amongst people. The Commonwealth officers, many of whom I got to know very, very well, from Canberra used to come around regularly and they were certainly promoting their own strength in the fields of horticulture and agriculture generally. Then it stopped.

It seems in those early days, in fact all the way through, that strong practicality notion that it is in the interest of the States to have someone on the food export side of things, it's in the interests of the Commonwealth to have someone, why have two people when one body can fund the other to do it. You mentioned pleuro, brucellosis and with the plant diseases trying to get national control … And you've also alluded to that strong very Western Australian, South Australian state-based mentality …

Absolutely, yes. So, yes, there was – it was [all] good-humoured.

[18:45] You were working in an area where there's a common goal – prevention of disease or improved quality of produce, whatever: you can actually have a similarity of goals across the States and the Commonwealth.

That's right, yes.

[19: 00] We've got away a little bit from you coming to South Australia. We'd better get back onto that because we haven't got up to 1955 yet, in one sense. (laughs)

Right. The point I was going to make when we broke off onto something else was that when I was interviewed by the Public Service Board here, they were intrigued by the fact that I had been over in Pakistan. I mean everybody was. Pakistan was a brand new country. A country of 40 000 000 people … much bigger [population] than Australia. These are the shocks that you get when you go to countries. You find their railways, their roads, their bridges and their population and their production is so much greater than Australia's that you wonder how Australia even registers in the world. I found that Pakistan, West Pakistan where I was, grew so much more wheat than Australia and yet we were selling them wheat. But at the Public Service

Board interview they got on to the subject of Pakistan. I gave them a talk on Pakistan. We talked a lot about that and I reckon I talked myself into the job.

Was this a formal interview or more of a ...?

Yes, it was a formal interview. [All] of the board, and I was there at the table in front of the board. But they enjoyed that and they must have thought that I knew where I was going or something or other, but at any rate they appointed me. They probably didn't have any other applications, I'm not sure.

Maybe the records will reveal you are being a bit modest.

If you like, if you like.

That was in '54 or '55 when you were being interviewed? You said you were on your way back from Sydney, and you took up the job in '55. I don't have a start date for you. I suppose it's on ...

It would have been in the year I took the job up, because I came over here in October.

So 55 then?

Yes.

Not all those files on personal type matters are kept these days.

No.

Certainly the Public Service list gives dates of appointment and ...

Right.

What was your interest in taking on the job? Means uprooting the family and coming to Adelaide.

Silly thing to do. I'd only built a house that year. Didn't live in it a year and I had to come over here. No, simply personal progression. The boss in the west was only 13 years older than me, and I would have to wait for him to die to get his job. This was a quick progression, the right thing to do. No special interest in South Australia, In fact, I didn't know anything about South Australia.

You alluded to the experience in Pakistan as to opening your eyes to the possibility of moving whereas most people stayed in the one State.

Yes, that's right.

But you knew nothing about South Australia from the …

No, not really.

So it's a bit hard to ask you if you had expectations of what you were going to be doing for South Australia or for South Australian agriculture.

No, I didn't have any expectations at all. I didn't know there was a Murray River. I didn't know it was like it is. Couldn't believe it when I saw it. Never seen a river like that. Well I had

because the Indus is like that. But West Australia has no rivers really … The horticulture along the Murray was starting to develop quickly at that particular time and it opened my eyes.

So you had to go on a fairly rapid learning curve?

Very, very much a learning curve because of the importance of irrigation in horticulture, which did not apply in the west.

Does that mean you were going out to see parts of South Australia, when you took up the job?

Yes, I travelled a lot when I started and spent time with all the district advisers, started to learn the job. Everybody was very nice about it.

Meeting new people. The re-organisation you referred to, of Callaghan creating three divisions, that had already been put in place.

That had taken place, yes. I fitted into the vacancy left by the appointment of Geoff Strickland as the Chief of the Division of Plant Industries, that's what it was called, yes.

Tom, perhaps we can pick up a little bit more on the nature of the position you were appointed to and what was involved in being the Chief Horticulturalist. What's some of the expectations or the demands of the job? You've already alluded to the need to travel around to learn about South Australia. You had to learn about South Australian agriculture and ...

Yes, I certainly had to pick up the information about that. We had a very strong apple industry in the Adelaide Hills and a very viable export apple industry. We had a very strong citrus industry in the Riverland and the mixed horticulture industry in the South East. So I had to familiarise myself with these. I found that the staff at the Horticulture Branch here was very well organised and they were very well trained, academically. The Department here had put on five or six new graduates as research officers in horticulture. They were very keen and very, very smart people; no question about that. We had nobody like that in Western Australia; we'd put on a couple in the west, but nothing like they'd done over here. So we had a very good organisation here with the State divided up into agriculture areas – Renmark, Berri, Waikerie, Barossa Valley, Adelaide Hills, South East – with an excellent district adviser in each one of these. They were so much better informed than I could possibly have been on South Australia, that they helped me through my learning curve. I began to realise that they didn't want a technical person. They wanted an administrator. The technical people were here. This would have changed my attitude when I came here. Possibly this is why the Public Service Board knew this before: they saw that I had been administering in the west and in Pakistan, and that's what they wanted, rather than a top technical horticulturalist.

That notion of agricultural areas of the State being divided up and so on with district officers: was that something similar to Western Australia …

Yes, yes.

… and elsewhere in Australia?

Yes, every State up to that stage was divided up in the same sort of way, yes.

[28.30] You mentioned having some graduates. I presume there were some cadets, cadetships, going …

No. There were no cadets over here but they were appointed as graduates.

So you had a couple of those in your ...

There were more than a couple because in those days Horticulture did entomology and pathology as well as horticulture, and they were just starting up a lot of research on post-harvest handling of fruit (marketing and storage), so that was an important issue too. Somebody was appointed to each one of these. Then there was a viticultural officer as well. Horticulture had a very broad and important place in South Australia. Mind you, South Australia was mainly a sheep and wool and cattle State, but horticulture was also quite important. But it had to vie, departmentally, had to vie with those big major industries.

Following on from that aspect of graduates and so on, how big or how small a Department was it? How big or how small a Branch that you were heading up?

It had been very small until that stage and then it suddenly doubled in size with these appointments. There was something like half-a-dozen district advisers and then half-a-dozen research officers – all graduates. Couple in the administration. There was inspection staff at Mile End and Port Adelaide – half-a-dozen people at each of those. That was probably the extent of the Branch.

We must remember that in 1947 this fruit fly outbreak started. When I came over here, this was something I knew absolutely nothing about. It had never been reported in Western Australia. We lived with fruit fly over there. It had always been there, so we advised people on how to control fruit fly in Western Australia. Over here it was a program of eradication taken over by the government and put on to the Horticultural Branch to do. This meant that when a fruit fly outbreak occurred [it was an emergency situation] … It didn't occur in my first year: they used to talk to me about this and I couldn't believe what they told me about it. The next year we had an outbreak of fruit fly in Adelaide. The next thing, within a matter of days, we'd have 70 extra people on the staff and a dozen motor vehicles for the staff. They were searching for fruit flies, searching for infested fruit, stripping fruit, destroying fruit. In the early years of fruit fly [almost] the entire Department ... [was deputed for work on fruit fly eradication for a period after the report of an infestation].

End of Tape 1, Side B
Tape 2, Side A

Well Tom you just referred us to the little booklet from PIRSA-SARDI, *50 years of fruit fly eradication in South Australia 1947–1997*, so thanks for showing me that. You wanted a couple of comments you wanted to make, not so much about the book itself, but about the fruit fly eradication?

Yes. I was little bit disappointed in the book that it didn't give proper time to the early years, which were … You've got to applaud the government and the officers of the Department on the decision that fruit fly would be eradicated from South Australia. Purely political decision, protective of the industry. Nobody realised that 50 years later that program would still be going. They thought … In fact, Geoff Strickland was given an OBE for eradicating fruit fly 45 years ago. There is probably still as much money being spent on that eradication per year now as there was then. Fifty years ago, Adelaide was very different from what it is today. It was a fruit garden city. When I came over here it was still a fruit garden city: housing had started to take over, but there were orchards everywhere.

Small suburban blocks of orchards?

Yes, but they were up to several acres in extent and there were big vineyards, like the one that's still up at Magill, that spread down here. In fact, that Magill one was just being sub-divided the year I came over because Strickland was telling all his research officers, the young fellows, or had told them all, 'Buy a block of land', and they had up here. And that was vineyards that were being disestablished at that time.

They must have been quite extensive given the more recent sub-division at Magill there in the '80s, late '80s, that Penfold Estate area. It must have been quite a large area before.

Oh yes, a big area coming down into Magill, big area. Mature fruit trees were left growing in the home gardens as people bought and built, and they left the trees there. Many more were planted. There were vacant allotments on which fruit trees flourished. There were [plums], apricots, peaches, nectarines, loquats and oranges: these thrived. There was an enormous production of home-grown tomatoes. So this fruit-fly outbreak involved all of those. They had to be protected and at times some of them were in the fruit fly quarantine area.

The people there, the sense coming through, were much more self-sufficient, growing their own fruit, they might grow their own strawberries, their own apricots, their own lemons, whatever.

You mean then or now?

Then.

Yes, that was the aim. This is why the government then decided then they would compensate people for the loss of fruit and vegetables that were stripped by the fruit fly people, because it was part and parcel of their way of life. Nobody expected to buy a table grape and nobody expected to buy tomatoes. We had a big tomato industry under glass out Virginia way, but that was supplying tomatoes more to Sydney and to Melbourne than to Adelaide. Then you had apple and pear-growing prospering in the Adelaide Hills, which was only 5 to 20 miles from the city. You had the developments going along the Murray River from Renmark to Waikerie.

These had to protected from fruit fly. So it really was a very important issue. I'm so glad the government of the day realised it, thanks to Tom Playford being a fruit grower.

He would have realised the significance.
That's right.

It's interesting to me that it's 1947 before you get the outbreak, and you said earlier that Western Australia had fruit fly ...
Since the year ... [since 1900 or earlier].

... whenever.
Whenever, yes.

And in that sense it seems so late to have been introduced to South Australia.
Well, the end of last century … See there are two fruit flies – the Queensland fruit fly and the Med fly: the Med fly in the west, and Queensland fruit fly in the east. The Med fly was in and around New South Wales at the end of last century. Then the Queensland fly came in and the comment had been made, not technically necessarily correct, that the Queensland fruit fly virtually took over from the Med fly. They reckon the Med fly disappeared, but the Queensland fly was there. In Western Australia the Queensland fly never got in, but the Med fly was there from Carnarvon to Albany, which is their entire fruit-growing area. It was just accepted as a fruit pest. Over here they'd had no fruit fly at all and didn't have to worry about it, but by the time it was found in 1947 it had extended over some two or three miles of Adelaide country, round the Waite Institute area, down that way, south of Adelaide. It could have been here for some time, but nobody knew. But they said, 'Right we're going to get rid of it', and the only way to get rid of it … There was no previous world history on what to do about it, so South Australia had to design its own eradication campaign. Now I want to give credit here to Harry Kemp, because Harry Kemp … Everybody knew Harry Kemp in those days. Not very many people remember him now, but he was [one of] the Kemp's nursery people. They had a orchard up in the Hills. Harry joined the Department as a graduate, but ahead of the young graduates that we talked about earlier, he was already there. He was technically unparalleled in horticulture. He had a marvellous practical background, practical knowledge, and he had an extremely good theoretical knowledge. He was a very clever bloke. He should get all the credit for designing the fruit fly eradication procedure. He got all the help he could from the entomologist at the Waite Institute, Dr Andrewartha, and from people in Sydney, not Perth, because Perth was not part of Australia in those days. He designed the quarantine area around the outbreak, one-mile radius, and the stripping of the fruit, the destruction of the fruit and the public relations with all the people. Strickland was a very good public relations man. I'd say he would have handled the radio in the early days, there wasn't television, and he certainly

handled it with Tom Playford and the government because he was very well thought of by government officers in those days, the government. So it was very well set up, and I'd never experienced anything like this – couldn't believe it – but as soon as we had an outbreak when I was here, the whole thing just went into operation, just like that. I found that I was responsible for all this: never heard of an issue like this at all. Having had a year or two to catch up with the new horticulture that I was dealing with, now I had to catch up with this eradication procedure. Unfortunately, Harry Kemp had resigned from the Department, retired from the Department, and taken an orchard up at Balhannah so he wasn't here, but the fellows that he left behind had learned his knowledge and they were very well trained to take this up. The work of the Horticulture Branch, except for the work in the country districts, stopped and it all went onto fruit fly. The reasoning for this was that you needed technically sound and reliable people to handle the different situations as they arose, so you had to have them. That went on for a number of years but everybody was put on to it knowing it was only going to be for this year and probably a residual lot next year, but it hasn't happened that way. We did have a period once, it was three years in the middle of my term here, we had no fruit fly outbreaks and we thought that we had actually done the job but then it came again. It is still going on – looks as though it will go on indefinitely.

You couldn't be certain that you had eradicated it completely, could you?

No, no.

Stand-by mode?

That's right. I'm afraid it's going to be like that. When the permanent officers of the Department realised that this was a permanent job which is going to disrupt their work forever, we started to re-organise that and set up a group of people whose job was to understudy the fruit fly work and be there to set it up when the time came. It was a bit of a job to get them winter work, but we managed to keep some of them, enough, on staff so we didn't have to depend upon the permanent research officers and those sorts of people.

You mentioned before, Tom, that in the first outbreak that you experienced, the Department took on 70 people. They were presumably temporary people just to do the work?

Unemployed, that's right, yes.

They were just employed short term to clear the properties?

Yes, they were fruit strippers.

So you'd just take them on as needed each time there was an outbreak?

Yes, that's right. Tom Playford used to think this was great because it used to reduce our list of unemployed. They were fully paid, properly paid. The union watched that.

What were they doing? Basically just taking all the fruit of trees?

Stripping the fruit, yes.

Did they do any spraying or any of that type of stuff?

Yes, baiting or spraying. People call it spraying, it's not really spraying, it's just putting out a bait.

Like the people come around with a backpack these days with a ...

They're still doing that, but it's all mechanised now. In those days they carried the backpack on their back.

So it was Harry Kemp who had designed …

Who designed, yes, and ran it for the first few years. Nobody could really take Harry's place because he had the whole Horticulture Branch, he ran the whole branch. Strickland was the boss, but Kemp did all the work, no question about that.

Harry was there when you joined?

No, Harry would have been the chief but he resigned the year before, which was a pity for South Australia, but there it is.

[15:00] A couple of questions that come out of, not just the fruit fly, we've covered part of that and I'm sure there's more ...

There's infinite amount but you can't do it all.

But you have written a little account there we might be able to get a copy of that to go with the book. But perhaps to wrap up today's session, a couple of quick questions. Testing your memory: when you came to join the Department where were you based that first year or so? Where was the Department?

When I was interviewed, it was in some government building … [The Lands Department]

Flinders Street or …?

Then it moved. By the time that I came over here, just a few months later, it had moved into the Simpson Building in Gawler Place.

So you were there when it was all, not all, amalgamated but when it all ...

That's right in Gawler Place. It used to be in the Treasury Building, wasn't it?

Education or Treasury. I'm not 100% certain myself.

The buildings have gone, you see.

Well the buildings have gone, but in that era departments were scattered around, branches all over the place. At one stage they were in the Exhibition Building down on North Terrace.

Yes, that was earlier, yes, that's right.

[16:30] That's not uncommon for South Australian departments to be scattered around. Thanks for that. The other one question about two people really: I just wondered if you want to make any

preliminary comments about your bosses – your immediate boss, Geoff Strickland, and Allan Callaghan.

Yes.

I am only thinking here in terms of when you were just coming over to join and meeting these people, what were they doing?

They were both well-known identities in agriculture in Australia, but not known to me because West Australia was quite distant away. We knew Roseworthy College existed but I didn't know Doc Callaghan was there. Geoff Strickland was an excellent person as an administrator, mainly because of his public relations with the government. This is very, very important. There'd been a fairly long reign by Playford up to this stage. He and Geoff were quite friends. This was quite important. He would have introduced me to Tom Playford. Tom Playford, of course, was an excellent person as far as a horticulturalist was to have as a premier. He straight away invited me up Sunday morning to his property, walked around his property, and I'm looking to see what he is doing, but more particular he's sizing me up to see what sort of a bloke we've got over here. But we got on very, very well. That was wonderful because anything we wanted Tom was able to get it for us.

[18:40] For example, I'm moving on to a new subject, but it has arisen. There were two Horticultural Research Centres here when I came – one at Blackwood and one at Berri. Now these were carry-ons in South Australia and if you had grown up with them, you accepted them, and they were just part of the landscape. But, me seeing them from different eyes, I wondered what the purpose of them was. The purpose that they were originally started for was either unnecessary or was completed. I saw quite early in the piece that both of these would be better in real estate than they would be in horticulture research, but we had to have a research centre. So I did a most unusual thing for those days. Not unusual now, that's an interesting thing how things change. I recommended that we sell the Berri Research Centre. Now that was heresy in South Australia. But when they started up Loxton (we must have a session on Loxton), when we started at Loxton, which was 1948 the first planning for Loxton Research Centre, at least at Loxton they set aside three 25-acre blocks for the Department as a Research Centre but no money for them to be developed. When I came over the blocks were there but they were just scrub. They were like that for two or three years, but when I recommended we sell Berri and, for some reason or other, that was accepted, we put Berri up for sale. That meant that the next year the money that would have gone to Berri had to go to Loxton. We then started to develop the Loxton Research Centre which is now a very, very important part of horticulture in South Australia. It's developed a lot since I left, but it had to be started and to get things started is the important thing. Now how this arose in my mind, I was talking about Tom Playford. Dave Kilpatrick came to me at work, I think on the Thursday, and said 'Tom, there's a block being

sold in the Adelaide Hills out from Lenswood. Now Lenswood is the centre of our apple industry. Blackwood is out on the fringe and is becoming home dwellings. We ought to look at that block to buy it'. I went straight out of the office, and said 'Dave, take me up'. We went straight up there and had a look at this block, and I said, 'Right'. So through our Minister, might have been Gabe [Bywaters] or Tom Casey, we got on to Playford. You had to go through your Minister, couldn't go direct but Tom would take an immediate interest. Tom rang me and said 'What about this place?'. I said, 'Tom it's very important that we have that. It's right in the heart of the apple industry. It's a perfect spot'. So it was up for auction on the following Saturday morning. Tom Playford got the Lands Department to send an officer up there, bid at the auction and buy it, just like that. Two days to acquire that. Subsequently, 10 years later, the block next door became vacant, went up for sale, so we bought that. We finished up with extremely valuable property up there. There's been threats to sell both in the government re-organisation and I've got onto fruit growers here in the Adelaide Hills and said, 'Over your dead bodies must you allow Lenswood to be sold'. I've done that to three properties. Did the same up at Loxton. Also did the same with Urrbrae High School, if you're interested in that.

Yes.

I was on the Council at Urrbrae High School. They sent one of their fellows out from the head office of the Education Department with a view of having a look at the property with a view of disposing of it. I was called in and had to satisfy this person that he mustn't dispose of Urrbrae High School. Look at it now, it's a TAFE college, it a big thing now. If they had sold it they would not have that. And now for two pins, I can assure you within the 24 hours it would have been on the list to be disposed of, in fact, it was on the list.

How long ago was that one, the possible sale?

Thirty years, I'd say, yes, 30 years ago. It was the fellow who subsequently became Director who came out there, but we convinced him, I don't know quite how. But these have become big issues now. Who were we talking about? Geoff Strickland. Now Callaghan ...

We were talking about Mr Strickland and Mr Callaghan. [Talking over each other]

Are we still on Dr Callaghan?

[25:00] You haven't mentioned much about him yet.

No, we haven't mentioned much about him. He, of course, made his name at Roseworthy College. But when he came down to the Department, which was before my time – he was there when I came over, he was the new broom and he'd re-organised the Department into divisions. I was very interested in his approach to me. He came to me one lunchtime (we used to have lunch in the canteen there), and he comes up alongside of me. I hadn't been here more than a year or so. We'd had a fruit fly outbreak. He said to me, 'What do you think of this fruit fly

outbreak?'. And, 'What do you think of horticulture in South Australia?'. I said, 'Look, come back in two or three years time. You don't pick this up in six months, you need a succession of seasons and a succession of years. Then I'll give you my point of view, but not till then'. I might say he was delighted with that answer. He said, 'What do you think about this fruit fly business?'. I made the comment, 'I can't understand how you can have outbreaks like this every year. To my mind the fruit fly is somewhere in South Australia where we haven't found it. It's in some area where native fruits are growing or escaped figs are grown. We haven't found it. Until you find the key, it's going to go on and on'. I never found that and I have looked I might say. I have looked from the Mid North down to Mt Gambier, Torrens Valley, and never been able to locate the source of outbreaks. I don't know where it is coming from.

The mystery continues!

Yes, it is a mystery. But Callaghan was that sort of a bloke. He was technically very good. Administratively was very good. Very easy to get on with and was very human in his approaches. We were lucky to have two blokes in South Australia like that, particularly at that time, an important period in the development of the State's agriculture.

Thanks for that Tom. This is a point, a starting point perhaps, for another session to pick up on some of these people and personalities and activities, and see how the ebb and flow of your career came about. We'll call a halt for today.

[28:00] End of Tape 2, Side A

AN INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY BERNARD O'NEIL WITH TOM MILLER OF ERINDALE, SOUTH AUSTRALIA ON THE 9TH OF OCTOBER 2003 CONCERNING THE PROJECT ON THE HISTORY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA, FOLLOWING ON FROM THE INTERVIEW OF THE 1ST OF OCTOBER 2003.

Tape 2, Side B

[0:40] Tom, perhaps we can just pick up on more or less where we left last time when we were talking there about, at the end of the tape was to do with fruit fly campaigns around Adelaide and your involvement there. That led on to some discussion of Alan Callaghan in particular, because he had approached you talking about some of your ideas about the fruit fly incident. The other person we were going to talk about then, but we ran out of time, was Geoff Strickland. Perhaps if we could look at a little bit at backtracking of those couple of personalities, and I'm thinking here of course in the period where you first joined the Department, the first three or four years.

[1.30] Yes. It would be a good idea if you talked to other people about Geoff Strickland, because he was a little bit removed from the rest of us in Horticulture. With the creation of the divisions, he had suddenly acquired, at a ripe age for a government officer, a lot of extra responsibilities that he had nothing to do with previously because he had been specifically horticulture as Chief Horticulturalist for 20 years or so. Then all of a sudden he became involved in agronomy as a head of a division. Subsequently, he became Assistant Director and then Director so he virtually had to pick up a lot of things. He was Chairman of the Barley Board for quite a while. He took that on without any sort of background in the industry. Previously the fellows that had worked in Horticulture had been directly under 'Strick' (as he was always called). Just that one question put to a person like Milton Spurling who was pretty well the Senior Officer in Horticulture when I came over, well the senior one still alive, he was always a good contributor, just the one question to him: 'Tell me in a few minutes about Geoff Strickland'.

Did you have much to do with him …

No, that's the point you see. He was the big shot before I came in Horticulture but then he became … Well he spent more of his time in other aspects of departmental work and less in Horticulture. He was quite happy, after a while, to leave that to me. Horticulture was always slightly different. The big thing in agriculture in South Australia was sheep, cereals and beef. Horticulture was regarded as a 'little brother' to the other research officers and advisors and that sort of thing because it was pretty well self-contained and didn't overlap onto the other aspects. Where the Department was held together was by the Extension Branch. Bob Herriot had been head of the Soils Branch and Bob had done a particularly good job. Then he was made Chief of the Extension Division and each branch had extension officers so he used to get us together quite regularly. They were trying to make extension work, which we called advisory work up to that (we had District Advisers), more professionalised so they worked in a more professional manner rather than just an ad hoc manner as they had up to that time. That

was very, very good. All of us talked more about writing articles so that they would be better produced for the audience they were being written for. Published briefings [were] addressed. Things of that nature to improve the way they went about the work. This was very, very good.

The extension work done … at the time was an advisory role for the department … for farmers …

That's right, although they suddenly brought in this word 'extension', which was an American word, but it meant advisory work and advisory is actually a better word. But all branches had their District Advisers who became the Extension Officers. In Horticulture we had about six or seven research officers who were graduates. We had a similar number of District Advisers and the graduates were generally stationed in head office at this time (I'm talking about 1955, that area, around 1955 to 1960) doing research work. They used to travel a lot out in the country districts where they did a lot of their research and planted their demonstration plots and experimental plots. The District Advisers were each out in their specific districts. Then as well as the research and adviser we had the regulatory work. For some reason all the regulatory work in the Department had been put in to the Horticulture Branch. For example, seed testing was under Horticulture. Yet most of the seed that we tested was agronomy seed, and yet it was under horticulture for some reason or another, that's back in the history and I didn't know why.

Did that also apply to legislation for the animal area?

No. Animals were kept quite separate. Always were, they were a life of their own.

Sounds like the legislation was really anything to do with crops and plants and so on?

Yes, anything to do with plants …

Plants and disease and …

Yes, that's right.

The District Officers, the advisory officer, they were living in the districts but …

Yes.

… how were the districts arranged?

Geographically pretty well. We had Renmark, Berri (with the Research Centre at Berri), we had Waikerie, Barossa Valley, the Adelaide Hills and the South East (from Naracoorte south). They were the districts and the advisers were already stationed there and they were very experienced people. In fact, I learned most of what I had to learn about South Australia by going around with the advisory people who were very competent and very well known.

Was there one in each district?

One in each district at that stage.

Did they have support staff?

No. None to start with, then we started to put on inspectors because fruit export started to become quite significant. Most of our citrus that was exported went to New Zealand. That was a big trade and an important trade. I don't know what's happened to that now whether we send any over there or not. While the export business was organised by the industry, the inspection for quality was done by the department. So we started off those inspections in the packing sheds in the Riverland districts and we already had similar inspectors in packing sheds in the Adelaide Hills for apples, so we gradually built up a quite a big inspection staff because you needed an inspector for each facility and they were in each of the Riverland districts from Waikerie to Berri and Loxton and Renmark had their packing sheds, some places two packing sheds, and we had to have inspectors to inspect what they were packing because you'd have a much better knowledge of what was going into the packing boxes from watching it being packed in the shed. After it had been packed and five or ten thousand boxes would arrive: well, you can't inspect them properly but if you had seen them at the source you know much more about them. So we certainly developed extension staff, at least helpers in each of our districts, by appointing these inspectors.

[13.16] And these are people who had to be basically trained on the job?

Well basically trained on the job to do the actual job but most of them were fruit growers, retired fruit growers or people who had some knowledge of the fruit industry so they knew oranges and grapefruit and lemons and mandarins, they knew them. Then they only had to be taught what aspects of them to look at to control the quality.

And would they have been working on a full-time basis or a seasonal basis?

No, mainly on a seasonal basis.

So they were sort of temporary staff?

Yes temporary staff, but what we tended to do was to try to get them work, say assisting the District Advisers in the off-season, so that we could employ them pretty well full-time. There was the problem of trying to get the same people back whenever you started off on an inspection program. It's much better to have people fully employed: they become better officers and they're there when you want them.

The District Officer, was that someone who was obviously more highly skilled, were they …

Yes, most of the District Officers were Roseworthy graduates. Then we started to put on graduates as District Officers as older graduates came along that were suitable.

[15:00] I suppose they would have been fairly broad-based in their knowledge and expertise having to cover all sorts of crops over a large area?

Yes. They had to deal with all the crops and, of course, the growing of crops changes. We didn't grow any avocados in South Australia in those days. Then we had the mixture of grape

vines with citrus, for example in the Riverland, and vegetables and at times other major crops came in. For example, we used to grow lots and lots of tomatoes in the Riverland, mainly going to the eastern States' markets. Then after 1956 which was a very wet year throughout the whole of Australia and a lot of canning peaches died in Victoria and New South Wales where they were important crops, so South Australia started to plant canning varieties of peaches and apricots to take over the canning industry, which they did for a period of time. Then they tended to go out as the interstate crops recovered and they re-planted over there. Then, of course, as I say avocados came in and the District Advisers had to be able to take these crops on as they came.

Murray Cooper would have been very well remembered at Berri. We had John Jennings at Nuriootpa and then later he was transferred to Berri after Murray retired. [Wife, Zoe, comments in background 'To Waikerie dear'] Yes, that's right. To Waikerie, not to Berri.

Thanks Zoe!

Greg Botting went from the Adelaide Hills to Berri and is now still living at Renmark. We used to move them around a little bit because that was good for them. They increased their knowledge and it was more interesting for them to be like that, but generally speaking they liked to settle down in a district and stay there.

They weren't necessarily from the district in the first place?

No, no. They're from wherever we got them.

Because you liked to move them around, was there any policy to have a certain length of time at any one place?

Not really, no. As vacancies occurred you fitted the best one in.

[18.36] Was it the sort of position that people within the Department would aspire to? Was it seen as a good job to have if you were a District Adviser?

Yes, yes a very good job. Probably the most interesting job in the Department, if you were that way inclined. The university started to turn out graduates in narrow fields of work, which was a pity as far as the Department of Agriculture was concerned but we had to work in with that. We got graduates working in narrow fields, working on pests or diseases or soils or nutrition whereas the District Adviser had to know all about those things as they applied to his district. The District Advisers for some reason or another we were satisfied to appoint them as Roseworthy graduates, which were not university degrees in those days, whereas the Research Officers were better trained academically but put into narrow fields of work.

[20:05] Did you encourage, as a Department, did you encourage people such as Research Officers to broaden their experience and perhaps look at becoming District Advisers?

No, no. They wouldn't have that, wouldn't have it at all. In a way they almost decided what they were going to do themselves and wouldn't budge. In fact, some of them that I appointed in the 1960s are still there and still working in the same field, same narrow field. That wasn't necessarily the best thing for our agriculture but that's the way it was. The university started them off and we had to go along with that virtually. It was a little bit different from what I'd done in Western Australia. I was rather surprised at this but I went along with it because you couldn't do anything else about it.

[21:25] The District Officers: what sort of contact or amount of contact did people in Adelaide have with those people in the field? Were they coming into Adelaide much?

Yes and no. We used to have one Branch conference each year where everybody in the Branch came together. There would be 50 or 60 and we would discuss all the important crops and each one made a contribution. They were very good. We were a very tight-knit branch and everybody knew everybody and worked together very well. But then on the more basic things, the important things in the particular districts, our District Advisers used to get together once a month, say in the Riverland, and they would discuss the mutual problems they had which was very good. The Department later on went into this change of operation and instead of everything being run from head office the powers that be – Public Service Commissioners Office – and our Directors went along with it to organise things on a district basis rather than on a State basis. So the Riverland people, the Adelaide Hills people and the South East people then had centres set up. This was a big change. If you could get somebody to talk about this, because all of a sudden … for example, my man in the South East was stationed at Struan where they had animal people, agronomy people, specialists in pests and diseases, and horticulture people. Now this was good in a way, but it took him away from the horticulture group. In the Riverland it was monoculture, it was only horticulture that was important so that didn't happen to the same extent. The Adelaide Hills group tended to be brought in with the head office group.

There was a big change where they tried to do that. They did this in the Education Department and all other departments, but it's gone back to where it used to be.

[25.00] That change – do you have a rough idea when that would have been?

In the 1960s I think [1970s].

I can follow that through. You were talking about those areas: was there anything in the Yorke Peninsula, Eyre Peninsula or West Coast?

They were regionalised as well but it didn't involve me because I didn't have an adviser in those areas. I didn't have an officer in those areas. It probably worked pretty well over there.

Were there other advisers for those areas?

Yes. The agronomy advisers were very good. Very good people working over there.

Just to clarify the people you were talking about in the Riverland and the South East were essentially the Horticulture people?

I'm talking only about fruit and vegetable people.

Although in that sense there was a range of District Officers?

Yes, yes. And there were Soils Officers in districts where they reckoned they were needed.

Were they spread around?

Yes. Exactly the same way.

Would they try and locate the Horticulture Adviser and an Animal Adviser in the one town?

Only where it suited the agriculture of the place. That would have been, for example, in Murray Bridge, Loxton and Struan in particular and in the north. The Barossa used to be a separate place with only a Horticulture Adviser, then they turned Nuriootpa into a departmental office where you had animal people, agronomy people and horticultural people together. This would have had some advantages, but it made administration more difficult.

It sounds to me that you've got research centres, district offices and a whole range of …. starting to get images of a very large department with a lot of tentacles?

That's right.

[27:40] Tom we had to have a bit of a pause there [plus background noise]. While the tape was off we covered lots of interesting aspects which we'll come back to in the course of our interviews: contacts with departmental officers, contacts throughout the Department, use of telephones, the regionalisation and seniors going into the field, people having independence to operate. There'll be some things, as I say, we will come back to, but you were talking about the District Officers and Branch conferences and how you would get people together to discuss things, so perhaps we'd better pick up on that again.

How many people would you have to supervise here in the mid '50s and '60s? You've mentioned your District Officers, Research Officers. Just in Horticulture: do you have a feel for …

What do you mean?

How many people were you in charge of?

Fifty at a guess. I could show you a photograph that I've got at one Branch conference … Don't know where it was but I was going to say it might have been at Roseworthy College.

We can look at that later, perhaps.

Yes. But there would be something like 50 in that.

What sort of percentage would there be of people based in Adelaide/people in the field?

In Adelaide say a dozen and the rest of them out in the country. But then you see, it wasn't only that. Way back in the days of Tom Playford (whatever date that was) we built the Research Centre at Northfield. Now has anybody talked to you about that?

[30:00] Not yet, but it's on the list.

You're telling me. That was a very, very important issue. I can't tell you how this happened but all of a sudden … Marshall Irving was the Director at the time: this was after Callaghan.

We can check the sequence.

Yes. We suddenly became aware of the fact that they were building a research office. Goodness gracious me, listen to this.

Was this move to Northfield something that happened before or after you came to Adelaide?

Yes. This was in the '60s. In fact, the Department of Agriculture which was basically in Adelaide (there was a big staff in Adelaide because all the branch heads and all their subsidiary staff were in Adelaide) but the Department had no headquarters. It was moved from place to place. In fact, when I came over in 1955 we were in the pickle factory in Gawler Place. It was a very unsatisfactory building, they wouldn't have bar of that sort of thing these days, but we somehow fitted in but it was always known (and the government knew this) that they had to build a head office for the Department of Agriculture.

The Commonwealth government owned a lot of land out at Northfield. This is where the Infectious Diseases Hospital was, out that way and they …

[32:45] End of Tape 2, Side B

MILLER INTERVIEW, TAPE 3 IN THE SERIES. IT'S A CONTINUATION OF THE INTERVIEW OF 9TH OF OCTOBER 2003.

Tape 3, Side A

Tom you were leading up to the Northfield, explaining the Northfield situation and the Commonwealth transfer of land to the State.

Now that's why it is at Northfield, because the Commonwealth gave this land to the State and that was part of the land. One of the Commonwealth's conditions was that it was not to be used for housing. Now it's all houses.

Being converted slowly, yes.

So, they were enabled to build a research centre there. So we had a pig farm and we had a very good research laboratory. All the research officers were suddenly taken from wherever they were and put out at Northfield.

Wherever they were around the metropolitan area?

Yes, it is possible that some came in from further afield too. Yes. This was in Playford's day and that was the first wing of a full building to house the whole of the Department. Eventually we were all going out to Northfield. I knew eventually I would be removed from wherever I was in Adelaide to Northfield. But we had to build the building. Marshall Irving set his heart on

this as Director and he spent at least two years where his major job was designing the full building to go out alongside the Northfield Research Centre. The plan would still be in existence. The design was properly drawn up and completed. All that was required was for it to go to Cabinet for formal approval. At this time Don Dunstan was premier. This was still going on … In fact, the major building for the whole Department was being done while Dunstan was there and while Marshall Irving was there. At the same time Don Dunstan was working on a new satellite city for Adelaide at Monarto. You with me?

Yes.

They went to Cabinet. Cabinet had a meeting in Adelaide in the morning. Two things were coming up: ratification of Monarto, ratification of a new building for the Department of Agriculture. Monarto was first on the list. They ratified it. The Department of Agriculture building and plans came before Dunstan. He saw the heading 'Department of Agriculture headquarters'. He said, 'An ideal thing for Monarto so we'll scrub that and build it at Monarto'. After two years work it took just that long to scrub it. Of course, Monarto eventually never went ahead, so nothing went ahead and the Department never ever got a building.

Could those plans have been transferred to the Monarto site?

Probably, yes. It was just a building, so it could have gone anywhere.

And the research facilities and so on that were by then at Northfield, could have been moved as well?

Yes. Possibly that would have happened. The research facilities have been given to somebody else now.

A couple of things arise out of that Tom and one, to try and keep them in sequence, one would be: before the Monarto idea came to the fore, what was the attitude amongst the staff, the troops in the Department of Agriculture, what was their attitude towards the proposed Northfield?

They were all for it, all for it. One of the complications, of course, of moving people out to Northfield was that people … Say in my instance (and this would have applied to all Branch heads), they were working close to me somewhere in our head office in Adelaide. All of a sudden they are sent out to Northfield. Of course, Northfield becomes like a regional centre. You have to have a boss, so they appoint an executive officer out there. All of a sudden my people are administered by somebody else. They're virtually taken away and put out there. Then they get their independent financing and the whole thing is set up as a new department. This is what happened. So what with regionalisation and the Northfield centre, the whole way the Department was administered changed.

You had some of your people actually working at Northfield?

That's right.

And you were still in the city?

Yes, that's right.

So you had to travel out there?

That's right. Well, yes, they were still officially in the Horticulture Branch but they didn't belong to me any more. No, very strange business.

The executive director that you mentioned being someone at Northfield, was that for Horticulture ...?

No, that was for Northfield.

For Northfield.

For Northfield.

So to cover all areas of the Department.

That's right. And everybody was out at Northfield, every research officer, whether they be agronomists or entomology or horticulture or sheep.

There must have been some people who objected to ... who were not happy with the move out there?

No, I couldn't tell you anybody that was unhappy with the move out there. They all went out there and they had their own little department.

So, no sort of people who wanted to resign or ...?

Not that I'm aware of, no. Certainly not my fellows. They were all better off because they were given better facilities, but the management and the administration was completely different.

I was thinking more in practical terms. People would have further to travel if they were coming from one side of town to go out to the north side for example. They relied on their vehicle or public transport. Those sort of little … they are only little issues in one sense but for an individual it becomes a big ...?

Yes, there were some issues like that, but people adjusted themselves very, very well. The Department of Agriculture would be a little bit different from many other departments. They are all dedicated to their work and that's top priority without any doubt. Quite a lot of them had moved from south of Adelaide to up near Northfield, moved their homes so that they'd be near work. But, no, it was nearly really a major issue. Monarto was going to be an enormous issue to just holus bolus shift the entire department out to Northfield. I took my wife (not Zoë) out there and said, 'Come on, have a look around, because we might be able to acquire a block of land here, and build a house out here at Northfield, we might as well move out at Monarto'. She said what every other woman said, 'Over my dead body'.

[10:00] So Monarto wasn't a popular location?

No, it was impossible for it. One of Dunstan's dreams – he had many.

You don't think it could have worked?

No. Well it would have been at enormous expense, and I really mean enormous expense, to build what they were aiming to build, a city, purely because of the drainage. There was no drainage from Monarto, so it's best now what it is, a zoo for giraffes and hyenas. (both laugh)

In terms of the Department of Agriculture would … do you remember if there was much feeling about this Monarto proposal within … people saying in this case they would resign?
They would resign, they wouldn't go. It would have been very difficult.

Sounds like you were investigating a possible land purchase?
That's right.

So you would have gone?
Possibly.

If it came to the crunch and you had to make a decision?
Yes, I would have gone, but – what a terrible thing. With a family here. Oh, no.

Terrible dislocation?
Terrible thing.

I recall that Agriculture was one of the departments. Lands was another being touted for a possible ...
Yes, because they connected with agriculture and Monarto was supposed to be in a rural area. Rural was the word.

So there was a sense of relief about the place, about the Department, when Monarto ...?
Yes, yes.

The grand scheme that didn't eventuate, hmm.
Thank goodness.

If it had gone ahead, would there have still been an office in Adelaide: not so much a head office of course, but ...?
I have no idea, no.

Just wondering whether it was envisaged the whole Department, everybody, would up there and ...
Yes, this is what we were told. Director and everybody would be out at Monarto.

Did the Department do any planning for that ... I asked you there about converting Northfield.
No, not as such, but every senior person would have been thinking deeply about. I have no doubt … Marshall Irving would have turned his back on it. He was that sort of a person. He didn't like being pushed around.

Were you involved personally in any preliminary planning meetings? Any occasion come to mind?

Not really. I have a vague memory of going to one meeting on the move to Monarto, which involved other departments, and we found out that we could not get one answer to any questions which we posed, so we virtually mentally wrote that meeting off as a waste of time.

That could have been other department who could have been moved ...?
That's right, it would have been connected with the move.

That was around about the mid-'70s wasn't it, the Monarto proposal?
Well, it was in Dunstan's heyday, yes.

Around '75, '76?
Yes, that would be right.

Was it before Jim McColl came?
Yes, yes. But Jim came about that time, yes he did.

He would have been the tail end of ...
Yes. Because I retired in '78, you see.

Just trying to put a timeframe on it. Going back to the Northfield situation. You described the people moving out there and the plans for a head office and so on. Even though the head office didn't go ahead out there, was there any expansion of the Northfield facilities?
Yes, for the 10 years or so they were there. Yes they had a second wing built up there, yes, it went on well, and as such it was a great success. I don't know why it's been abandoned. I suppose abandoned because the staff has left.

From your point of view did Horticulture get extra facilities or maybe new staff out there?
Yes, yes.

A little bit of expansion.
Yes, it was good. From the point of view of the work, it was a success.

[16:30] One thing that intrigues me, Tom, you mentioned the work, how much of this experimental research sort of work is on-going. I know from the comment in last week's session you can't expect an answer overnight, you don't have … Your comment to Callaghan, it takes some time to assess the seeds and so on. But basically looking at agriculture in South Australia, you've got 150 years of on-going experimentation, something like that.
Yes, that's right. It goes on forever.

So you don't get to a point where you can actually say we've ...
No, very interesting that. In agriculture research there is no end.

How much of that is re-visiting old issues about some techniques and technologies and how much of it is sort of pioneering? It's like reinventing the wheel going back over the same issues to find better ways of ...?

Yes, we went through a period when they were, but the changes that have taken place in the last 20 years have changed all that. For example, the use of fertilisers, nutrition. It didn't change really very much for probably a period of 50 years. I mean what I learned at university in my early years still applied 30 years later, but now it's quite different. For example, we got on to soil analysis, big thing, leaf analysis, to find out what plants required. That was just a theoretical concept in my day. But now it's practical and people do it, bowling greens do it, gardeners do it, and the agriculturist – the farmer – does it. So I've always said that the work done by my fellows, and I mean the entire Department in this instance, on nutrition, over a period of 30 or 40 years has all been basic to what's going on today. What's going on today is more expensive but more accurate, it's not hit and miss. We were still working on hit and miss.

It seems like there is constant adaptation to …
Yes.

You mention fertilisers. There's more research work on soils and nutrition.
It's pest control. It's weed control. All that sort of thing. Newly introduced. The farmer is quite different today from what he was even 25 years ago.

[20:10] And one of your other comments from a previous session about the technology. The size of the machinery and the type of machinery now is a whole different technological approach.
Exactly, quite different.

The farmer, the agriculturists, all have to learn these new techniques.
That's right. And they are, too, that's the amazing thing, yes.

[21:00] There some quite staggering changes in the last decade. We're going to come back to that I guess in a subsequent session: we will look at some of those changes over time. But one thing you mentioned earlier, when I had that pause on the tape, you went overseas in 1961?
Yes.

Was that to do with work?
Yes. I went over [as] the Commonwealth Fruit Officer. Apple export from Australia was very big business. It had been for 50 years or more. The Commonwealth had a permanent fruit officer in Australia House and every year they sent over one State officer to act as assistant fruit officer during the fruit season, when the apples and pears mainly were arriving in mainly UK, some into European ports as well.

Just the one person from one State?
That's right.

Not each State being represented? Only one person.
Every State in rotation.

Not half-a-dozen of you at one time, just one …

No, that's right, one person. My turn was in 1961. I went over there because South Australia was an apple exporting State, and it was something that I had almost specialised on. I went over there to England. The Commonwealth paid the fare and they re-imbursed my salary to the Department over here while I was over there. The State Department then were very, very helpful in this way with overseas training for its officers. They would have allowed me to visit research centres and do any other work that was related to the fruit industry of South Australia while I was over there. I went to research stations in England and in Europe, and learnt quite a lot I might say.

A combination between promotional sort of work and research, investigation of research facilities?

Well, yes, in what they were doing in research centres as a lead for what we might do over here.

That's research but at the same time promoting the fruit industry?

Yes.

That was for the whole year, basically?

Well, it wasn't: it was about seven or eight months.

Did your family go with you?

Yes.

And your position here was held open?

Yes. I was given leave from here to go and the next in charge would have took over while I was away. Do everybody a world of good.

You said it was South Australia's turn and you mentioned rotation. Was there any set order or relied on one State to putting their hand up and saying, yes we'll fund the officer for the next year?

They did it in some order – State after State as long as it was exporting apples which was a big thing. Perth, Tasmania, South Australia, Victoria, New South Wales – all went over while I was around here. Then, of course, the apple industry, the export has changed. Tasmania is growing much less apples than it used to, so I don't think it happens now. It has stopped, it's one of those things that has ceased.

In practical terms Tom, in exporting apples and other fruits and so on, in refrigerated ships?

Yes, that was one of the important research items that we used to do what was called post-harvest physiology, the storing and transport of fruit.

Well it comes back to the comment I was making before about research work being on-going, trying there new techniques about how to ship the apples without them deteriorating?

Yes, very important.

In that case, and just asking a practical question I suppose, to have to time the picking of the fruit …

Oh, yes, it's all done very scientifically: when you harvest, how you treat them.

Different harvest times to export the fruit as opposed to sell locally.
Not really, no. You pick for quality and then store for long term.

I've got to learn a little about some of these …
Yes.

That was predominantly to do with apples and ...?
Apples and pears and then subsequently citrus, yes.

Was it a big market, the UK?
In those days, yes, very big market, very big business and important shipping. Yes, people from the UK used to come out here buying apples every year. Big business.

Was that your only experience going to London as a fruit officer? In 1961 you've had this trip.
No, it wasn't, I ...

Did your turn come around again I suppose is what I'm saying?
No, never came around twice, strangely enough.

Did someone else from South Australia go?
Yes. We sent Dave Kilpatrick over, probably six or seven years after I'd been, when our turn came again, we sent Dave Kilpatrick over.

[28: 55] Did you have other overseas experiences while working with the Department?
Yes. One quite important one was every four years there is a world horticultural congress and it was always held in the northern hemisphere because that's where the world's horticulture is produced – Europe, England and North America. We used to send somebody over to these conferences. We got in with the administration of these and decided that we were going to have a congress in Australia as the first one in the southern hemisphere to give everybody a change of situation. In about 1978 our turn came. We had to plan this for eight years so it was eight years before 1978, probably 1970 or 1972, I was sent over again by the Commonwealth government to invite all the countries of the world to come to the congress in Australia in 1978.

So you were actually attending a congress?
I was attending a meeting of the committee organising this congress: organising committee meeting I suppose. The secretary was from Holland (the Netherlands) and the members were from Germany, France, Holland, Denmark, England, United States, Italy. It was my job to attend that by representing Australia and to issue this invitation for this congress, which we held in the Sydney Opera House. They were all a big show these horticultural congresses. I

haven't heard much about them in recent years, perhaps they're not being held now, I do not know.

Had you been to a congress yourself?

Yes. I went to Warsaw, somewhere around ... probably eight years before '78, probably 1970.

Perhaps 1970 at Warsaw and in 1972 you were doing the organising – would that be about right?

Yes, that would be right.

Going to the congress: was it just attending the congress or were you able to go off and do any travelling around or investigation work?

Yes, you always ...

[32:50] End of Tape 3, Side A
Tape 3, Side B

[0:10] Tom, it just cut out there you were saying there you had been to Warsaw and you travelled on to ... Israel?

Israel, yes. Spent a week in Israel, virtually understudying what they do in horticulture there because they are a very advanced country. They were at that time and I guess they still are. It was very interesting to see what they do in Israel.

You basically went to the congress direct and then came back to Israel and then back to Australia?

Yes. I'm not too sure that I did. I went through the United States on the way.

Would you have written up anything about this in a report?

Yes. It had all been written up and in the Department. You always had to report on an overseas trip. On both of these, yes.

So with the speed of travel at that time, you probably would have had a little bit of time to do the report on the way home!

No, no. Do it when you get home.

Oh, you were one of those. (laughs)

Yes. Come to think of it, I went from Israel to South Africa, yes, and made it worthwhile. Spent two or three weeks in South Africa, which was also very interesting. But, in fact, all those countries – South Africa, New Zealand, Israel and Australia – were all progressing their horticulture along similar lines at the same time. It was very interesting. We used to keep in touch with those places because we learnt a lot from each other. We had a lot of visitors came out to Australia from those countries, and we did the best we could to keep contact with them.

[2:40] You can see in an area like agriculture where you're exporting to overseas countries, where you're trying to learn techniques and investigate research work that other countries have done, how it might apply in Australia, you can there is that international ...

Yes. It was very, very important and, of course, it makes very good relations with the people in those industries in other countries. Very important from a personnel point of view as well as from technical.

[3:20] That leads me to ask, Tom, because we're talking here in early '70s and getting this world congress to come here and so on, the international focus for South Australia about that time became Libya and the middle eastern countries.

That's right.

Were you involved in that area at all?

No, not from South Australia. That came a little bit after my time, it became important. We were just starting to explore those markets.

Was that an interest of yours at all?

No, nothing special.

It becomes … it stands out as a bit of an episode in the Department's history.

Yes, yes, but relate that to other people.

That's more dryland farming?

Yes, you're on a different route now. Australia is famous throughout the world for its dryland farming techniques. So countries like the North African countries and the Pakistanis came out here looking at dryland farming. Of course, we started to send our specialists to … Libya.

Well that's clarifying things like dryland farming are not really areas you're ...?

No. You see horticulture is more similar in all countries. The way they grow oranges and apples, which are the main horticulture crops, it applies to peaches too and grapes, in all countries it is much the same, much the same problems, they have to be solved locally. We just mentioned grapes. Look at wine grapes. The biggest development in agriculture over the last 10 years will have been the planting of wine grapes in every country in the world where they will grow. I would almost claim that the bulk of the technical information being used in those plantings comes from South Australia … from Australia, in general, because it quickly spreads in Australia. But wherever you go now, and [since I have retired] I have been through Africa, America and Australia quite a bit, the plantings that are going on are identical to those going on in South Australia. Even when I came over here in 1955 South Australia was the leading wine grape-growing State and it still is. Its research and development of grape-growing and winemaking in Australia has been world leading without any question. You'll find now there are winemakers and vineyard managers from Australia in almost every country in the world where they are growing grapes. It's one of the real big things, you know.

In a different light when you see international companies coming in to the South Australian industry. So it is working both ways.

Yes, if that's good. Of course, that is something that Australia has to learn: it doesn't matter where the money comes from so long as it's money.

In one sense we have exported our knowledge and ...

Our expertise without any doubt. It used to be America that did all this. We always welcomed Americans coming over here because the ones that came over were always very, very well informed and industry leaders. We've got them in Australia now, and we have gone past them. In that way, in wine grape growing, not necessarily in other spheres.

Some of those basics you mentioned earlier – the sheep, cereals, the cattle, grapes and these things – go back to the foundation of the economy in South Australia. They were all there virtually from day one.

That's right.

Certainly in the first couple of years. And then we are going get the stump-jump plough and Ridley's stripper and those sort of developments which comes back to the technology coming through.

That's right. South Australia has always made a very valuable contribution in all those ways.

I know you mentioned before the phylloxera issue with the grape industry, the Phylloxera Board, the eradication of disease and so on. We'll follow that one through with some of the publications. You mentioned Wally Boehm's book on the board and so on. Did you have much to do with the grape industry.

Yes. I was on the Phylloxera Board for over 20 years: I think 30 years. (both laugh)

I was thinking … on day-to-day terms? (both talking)

I was never chairman. Yes, it was as much our business as any other fruit was, yes.

Was it up there as one of your main interests, the Horticulture Branch?

Yes, The Branch it was certainly very much one of the main interests, but more on the production rather, not on winemaking so much. Winemaking was … Roseworthy College led the way in winemaking techniques for many, many years and it's a crying shame that that has left Roseworthy, although I've no doubt that it is being carried on just as well by the University of South Australia, but Roseworthy led that and the departmental side was more in the production of the grapes themselves.

You were in touch perhaps more with the wine, with the growers and that part of the industry rather than the …

Yes, that's right. We worked for the growers.

[11:15] There would have been quite a few smaller enterprises in the growing side of things. We think now of the grape industry, the wine industry, being very big, big companies and international companies and so on but in the '50s, '60s it must have been small to medium size?

Yes. They were small vineyards, but already the big companies were coming in and planting their own.

In what areas, geographical areas, were important for South Australia, I'm thinking again in the '50s, '60s?

The Riverland had become the biggest grape wine producing area because it produced so much better under irrigation and the warmer area. We would expect at that time 6 tons to the acre, if I can talk in acres, as against anything from up to 1 ton to 1½ tons in the Barossa. The Riverland outstripped the Barossa in production because of its increased production per acre or hectare. But you see we started off with the Barossa and the Southern Vales, the Clare areas, which were always famous because they produce high quality wine grapes. The Coonawarra comes in on that: they have been there for more than a 100 years. Then the Riverland came in later and outstripped them in production and quite as good in quality too.

The Southern Vales area, Tom. As you say, some early wine growing in that area, but some of the more recent developments like McLaren Vale and so on …

Yes, but those are not that recent, they have been there for 100 years. I see in this morning's paper that Langhorne Creek is producing more than the Barossa, which is quite remarkable, but there it is. That's because of new techniques.

That expansion in the southern area has been quite dramatic in the last two decades or so.

Yes. Quite dramatic. Particularly when you go down the South East, Padthaway, Coonawarra.

Not just the amounts. As you alluded to before, the industry is producing quality product as well.

That's right. Its fallen on its feet because export has become so important. We only used to dribble our wine overseas until the last few years. Now, of course, it's an enormous industry the way it's exported.

In terms of your experiences in the Department, did you have a dedicated staff person, as in a person focusing on the grape industry?

Yes. We always had a specialist. In fact, Wally Boehm was for quite a number of years until he left and went into private industry. And then Richard Cirami … Before that Brian Coombe who left and then went to work at the Waite Institute. These are all specialists on viticulture.

And they were research officer level?

Yes. They were all graduates, yes.

[16:00] If they are leaving to go into the industry and so on, was there some attraction for them, being attracted by these outside offers so to speak?

That's right, more money.

Different sort of work perhaps?

Yes, still – no, not that different, no.

And what about in terms of those individuals and their career opportunities: are they somewhat limited, are they pigeon-holed?

No, not now.

But when they were in the Department: were they were pigeon-holed as a research officer? They might get to senior research officer, then it might be a long wait for another ...?

Yes, that's right. They'd be limited at that stage, yes, for sure. Once industry started paying good money, then we lost quite a few officers.

[17:15] Well that might be an appropriate thing to pick up on in another session because we talked before, on that pause we were talking a little bit about some of the transitions in the Department and the linkages between people. I could ask you a bit more about the hierarchal nature of the work experience there. I can visualise the 1950s, '60s, in particular, into the '70s being very much a structure. That might be an appropriate thing ...

Yes, it would be too.

That gives you a little bit of homework to do in the meantime!

Yes.

We have probably covered enough for a session today.

We have.

We'll give you a few more points to look at and we'll do another session.

One point that has got to be made somewhere. In 1948 Loxton was planted as a War Service Land Settlement area. This was before my time. They took farming land, that's grain producing land. They set up irrigation by Lands Department, E&WS did the work, and Lands Department was the organiser, the managing. Then they planted grapes, [citrus and stone fruits] on this soil and they used the most modern techniques that were known in 1948. This included irrigation – both furrow irrigation and overhead irrigation. I am led to believe that this was the first time that overhead irrigation was used on any large scale in the world; it's a world first. This is one of the things where South Australia did this and this has proved very successful. There was some doubt as to whether it would be successful, but it's been very successful for stone fruit, for citrus and for wine grapes. We spoke in a previous one about the research centre at Loxton. This was a point that was in my mind which I didn't mention. The important issues before the research centre was there. You don't need a research centre to do these up-to-date things. They planted Loxton, and they planted it as modern type plantings as they could be in the world, wonderful thing. And it has never looked back.

I will certainly follow that one through.

Never looked back.

That's good, Thanks for mentioning that Tom. We have had a bit of a session today. We've got a few things to kick off with next time.

Righty-oh. If you want to progress on that one, you had better get Milton Spurling. He's the one I told you to ask to give a thumbnail sketch on Geoff Strickland. Ask him to give you

another thumbnail sketch on the development of the Loxton irrigation area because he was associated with it from the beginning. Very bright boy. He was my Senior Research Officer.

I will follow that one through as well. Alright, thanks for that today.

Righto, that's enough. There's a lot of waffly stuff on the end there.

[21:28] **End of Tape 3, Side B**
Tape 4, Side A

AN INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY BERNARD O'NEIL WITH TOM MILLER ON THE 21ST OF OCTOBER 2003, AT ERINDALE FOR THE PROJECT ON THE HISTORY OF THE SOUTH AUSTRALIAN DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, CONTINUING THE INTERVIEW FROM THE 9TH OF OCTOBER.

[0:30] Tom, when we finished last time we were talking a little bit about your involvement with the Potato Board. I thought we might pick up on that line of enquiry today, boards and enquiries and royal commissions, and that sort of thing. Perhaps if we just go back a little bit on the Potato Board situation, what you were doing there and how you became involved?

The Potato Board was initiated during the war when the Federal government … During the war every State, or every potato-growing State, set up a what was called a Potato Committee to organise the distribution rather than the production of potatoes. After the war period was over, [three] States – West Australia, South Australia and Victoria – continued with a Potato Board. That's right, there were three of them. The policy in those years was for the government always to ensure that a senior government officer was on these boards. The politicians didn't interfere with the boards to any extent. They left it that. The government liaison with the board was through this officer, who was allowed to virtually do what he liked. He didn't get any direction from the Minister about it. We ran the Potato Board over here virtually as a … continued it as a distributor of potatoes. Geoff Strickland was on before me and then when he was promoted in the Department he passed it over to me. This was a very functional board. The growers took it very, very seriously, because the board had the ultimate power. It was extraordinary really. Had the power of granting licence to grow, which wasn't important because anybody that wanted to grow potatoes could. Didn't restrict production. It was supposed to receive and distribute from the central office in Adelaide all potatoes grown in the State. It had price-fixing power over potatoes: the price to the grower, the margins to the merchants and the retail price. So it did all that. I think while I was on the board it did it very, very well, fairly and efficiently. The problem in South Australia was that we had different sections of potato growers. You had the Virginia potatoes, they were growing potatoes in the Virginia district; growing potatoes in the Adelaide Hills; and growing potatoes in the South East around the Mount Gambier–Naracoorte area. Those groups of growers each looked for favours to suit themselves and the board had the problem of travelling the middle road so that each of these got a fair deal, but neither got any special deals. Each one had a grower representative on the board and their job was – as a matter

of fact they made it their jobs – to look after their own interests, the interests of their own sections instead of running it as a State committee. So you would have problems like that where the Hills growers objected to something, some decision you'd made with respect to the South East growers. But it did run very, very well.

[5:25] How big a board was it, Tom? You say sectional interests on there, but half-a-dozen people?
Half-a-dozen people, that was all: one from the South East, one from the Hills, one from Virginia, two merchants, [a retailer] and a departmental officer. In that instance the departmental officer was chairman of the board.

And how did the board relate to the Ag. Department? The officer was being provided by the Department, but did you provide other support?
No, simply the one person, working as board chairman.

Secretarial assistance, or anything?
No, no other. No, the board took a levy from the growers and it cost neither the Department or the government anything at all – the taxpayer, nothing at all, it ran itself.

Did you have Secretary or something to handle …?
The board had a full-time secretary who virtually did all the secretarial work, all the financing, wrote the cheques and distributed the potatoes. Jack McCulloch was secretary of the board for 20 years or so. He was a very skilled potato handler and he virtually ran the whole show under the direction of the Board, which used to meet once a month. That was all, once a month, or as required.

Where was the board based then: it wasn't in the Department.
No. In the market, in the wholesale markets in Rundle Street; that's where the office was. My feeling was, when I became chairman of the board, that there was too much power in the hands of the merchants who sort of ran the show. For example, if there was a surplus of potatoes they just wouldn't accept them, and the grower who came in after the market had been supplied, was just told to take his potatoes back home again. I didn't think this was the proper way the board should operate so I insisted that all potatoes delivered should be taken by the board and distributed. It worked after a while.

[8:15] A bit of opposition to that sort of ...?
Yes, we had a certain amount of opposition. The main opposition actually came from Victoria who wanted our market. Victoria was the big potato-growing State. They sold the bulk of their potatoes in Sydney, a lot in Melbourne, and Adelaide was used as a fringe market. When they had a surplus, they sent them over here. But we handled that very expertly because we used to fix the price. The price actually was the price in Ballarat plus freight to Adelaide. So if we dropped the price a dollar so that the price to the Victorian growers in Adelaide was a dollar

cheaper that what they would get in Melbourne, then they ceased coming over the border into South Australia. It was very expertly done and we did that for years. Manipulated the price to regulate the supply on the market.

[9:30] Did that price fixing apply also for South Australian potatoes?

Yes. We made the price to the grower, then the margin to the merchant and the retail price.

And that price would have been different to the Victorian price?

Based on the Victorian price, but yes, different and a little bit better. The South Australian potato growers were very well off. They were the best off in Australia. But when the governments changed … I actually had enough of it after 10 years so I resigned from the board and they put on another chairman. It went along gaily and about 10 years later when the Labor government came in and felt that it had power, it decided to close up the Potato Board. They virtually gradually, but definitely, closed it up and made a big difference in the industry. The government didn't seem to mind about that. I mean we used to have something like 280 potato growers, all doing quite nicely growing potatoes. When the board ceased, the smaller growers were not catered for, the larger growers took over and we got down to just a relative couple of dozen potato growers. Two hundred people would have given up growing potatoes.

The board would have captured, so to speak, all the potato growers: you were issuing the licences?

Yes.

Couldn't grow without a licence?

You couldn't grow without a licence at all. The board knew you were there. Yes, there was a bit of a black market in potatoes, you couldn't control it, but it wasn't serious.

What did you do in the case of surplus? You were saying your policy was ...

We sent the surplus to Sydney, just like that.

Was there a … that's to supply the Sydney market. Did you find any time when markets Australia-wide were well supplied?

Yes. Down goes the price and the amount of potatoes being sold depended entirely on the price; if the price was low you sold them all, so you dropped the price and they sold. Very easily done. Sydney is a big market and they could absorb anything and everything on the Sydney market at a reasonable price. The Adelaide market, a small market and it would be glutted and sales would stop. Quite different.

I suppose potato is a year-round crop in one sense ...

Yes, you had to … We used to store potatoes so there would plenty there during the [whole year], yes.

But did you go from that famine to flood situation where you've got too much produce ...

Yes. When they started to dig new crops they … We tried to regulate the supply into the market, but we took all the potatoes that came in and manipulated them on a price basis. Then we initiated running the marketing in pools. We would open a new pool of potatoes and for any number of days – maybe five days, maybe two or three weeks – we would pool the prices and then pay all the growers delivering during that pool period at the same price. It worked very well, too, worked very well. As a matter of fact, the organisation of industry it was very, very good. But government policy was against industry organisation of that kind so … The Labor government decided they didn't want it anymore.

The board was really just for marketing and distribution of ...?
That's right.

[14:00] You didn't get into research or ...?
No, if we had any surplus money we would give a grant to the Department. No, the Department did the research.

That's the Department of Agriculture. Did you have any liaison with the Department, you personally coming from the Department ...?
Yes, we had complete liaison, yes. But the two worked independently.

You mentioned Tom that you were on the Board for 10 years.
That's right.

Do you recall when that was? When, roughly? Mid '50s, early '60s.
Probably '60 to '70 something like that. 196?.

We'll check it out.
Yes, if you can. The Board has gone and the records have gone.

You think the records have disappeared?
I would be surprised if they aren't – if you can find them, [I would be] very surprised.

We've been trying to check the annual reports for the Department, but some of them aren't available either!
I don't think the Potato Board would have reported to the Department at all.

Wouldn't have even been like a footnote?
I doubt it.

[15:30] I'll check it out. That's '60 to '70 roughly. Is that the only board that you served on?
No. I served on the Dried Fruits Board. Its job was virtually to organise the marketing without handling anything at all. It organised the retail sales, the packaging and the wholesale sales, but it didn't involve itself in the industry to any great extent. It was purely and simply an organising Board. It functioned alright. It has now ceased too. In fact, changes of marketing, the

method of marketing, rendered that Board impossible to run because you had to allow the changes that had gone on in packaging, in handling and selling. Definitely the Board ran itself out of a job really, or the system ran itself out of a job. I suppose that applies to all those things.

Might be a sign of doing a good job?

Well that's right. You would find the same thing going on in the cereal boards … It wasn't my job, but the officer of the Department was chairman of the Barley Board. You will probably find in recent years that marketing of all cereals has changed so much that the board, as it was, the government board, completely out of context. But you will have to ask somebody else that.

[18:00] I'll follow that through. Your time with the Dried Fruits Board; does that overlap with the Potato Board?

Yes, I was on both.

At the same time?

Yes.

For the same length of time?

Oh no. I was on the Dried Fruits Board for 20 or 30 years. Well after I retired I was still Chairman of the Dried Fruits Board. At the age of 70 I decided that they ought to have somebody else, so I retired.

When did you join the board? Was it when you came to South Australia?

Yes, I think it was.

About then. You were saying before we started today that the Dried Fruits Board originated much earlier in the ...?

Yes. I had nothing to do with it, of course, but I had an idea that was going … I don't know why, quite early in the century.

It would have had, perhaps, something to do with the marketing and the trade of dried fruits in that time?

I'm not too sure why it would have been initiated. I'm sorry I can't help on that.

There was a famous case in the 1930s – the Hughes and Vale. Do you know anything about that one?

Yes. That's right.

Do you know anything about that one?

Yes, that was –

It was before your time in one sense ...?

No, I forget the details – but that was quite a key issue.

It was to do with customs and tariffs and trade across interstate borders with dried fruit the product that was involved.

That's correct, yes.

[20:00] You left the Potato Board and the Dried Fruits Board, were they the only two …?
Phylloxera Board, but that again was an industry organisation board. We didn't handle anything.

I know we mentioned phylloxera in an earlier session, but we want to come back to some of that grape stuff and the vines scene ...
I will put you onto other people to talk about those things.

[20:30] What about other enquiries that the Department might have been involved with?
Yes. We had a Royal Commission into the grape industry, but this was all related to price. This was a carry on from the war when price fixing was a big deal during the war. Mr Murphy was the price-fixing commissioner in South Australia. His job was to fix the price of grapes to wineries. For some reason or other, they continued with that for years and years and years. Nothing to do with the Department of Agriculture. It was the price-fixing commissioner. The wineries didn't like it. They were all big business people. There were some big business wineries and they wished to control the price themselves. The growers, of course, wanted a fixed price to stop the wineries from manipulating the price. The government went along with this and they set up a … It was at the beginning of the season when they started picking grapes, went on for many years, there was always a big argument what was going to be the price of grapes to the wineries. One government set up a Royal Commission into the Grape Industry, but the real purpose behind this was to advise the government what it should do about fixing the price of wine grapes. But they made it a Royal Commission into the whole industry which gave the Royal Commission an enormous amount of work to do, a lot of it completely unnecessary, but they put a report and a recommendation which the government promptly ignored. The recommendation was to let the price of grapes be settled by the market supply, but the government wouldn't agree with that until some 10 or 15 years later and then the government pulled out and left it to supply – market supply – which they should have done from the very beginning anyway, it's the only way to do things really.

This is the Royal Commission back in the mid 1960s.
That'd be right.

That's still in the Playford era – the Playford Government.
Yes, I suppose it was.

Price fixing was a big thing for the Playford Government – sustained it all the way from World War II through ...
Well it became a political issue, that was the point.

Did you get … did have feelings about price control? I mean you were sitting on the Potato Board ...

Properly done, it's not a bad idea, yes. But you give people power they start to use it in the wrong way, that's what happens.

In the case of agricultural produce, setting the price at a fixed level – sort of at which it must be sold or was it a minimum level where the grower must get at least that amount back?

Just depends. No, I wouldn't give in to that, no. All we did with potatoes, which is the one that I was closest to, was take the money and divide it equally amongst the growers: equal price per ton (it was the same to all growers).

I was thinking there in the case of grapes where you could say a certain type of grape or it's seasonal and so on, you could say that's worth ...

Yes, that's what they did with grapes. They fixed the price according to the variety and, in South Australia, according to whether it came from the irrigated areas or the non-irrigated areas, because there is a difference in quality as far as wine-making was concerned, or they used to think there was anyway. But when you look back at that, that was an attempt to placate growers. I mean they got a ton and half to the acre in the Barossa and they got six tons to the acre up the Riverland for the same variety. So they gave the Riverland people less money per ton thinking that or saying that the Riverland grapes were not the same quality.

They still had to take into account regional variations and ...

Oh yes, that was it. That was the idea. Sounds all democratic.

Well, you want the industries to survive. That's the other thing.

Oh well, yes. In those days you wanted industries to survive. All the boards I was interested in, or partly interested in, [were interested] in grower survival in that industry.

[26:50] Did you contribute to that Royal Commission?

Yes, I was one of the Royal Commissioners.

You weren't a witness, you were a Commissioner!

I was a Commissioner. They had three Commissioners.

So you were from the Department?

That's right. De Rieu was a grower, an old experienced grower, nice bloke. And the Auditor-General. That's right, three of us. The Auditor-General ran it, without any doubt.

How long did it go for? Was it a lengthy commission?

Six months – we just met as required, yes. We had all the powers of a Royal Commission, which we didn't use to any great extent. It was a very interesting document that we prepared, but it only related to that particular time. … Just as well the government didn't pay for it, because it was pretty well a waste of time, but good experience for the commissioners.

You say the government didn't pay for it, but you were doing this as part of your duties as an officer of the Department?

That's right.

Did you maintain your other day-to-day work?

Yes.

So it wasn't full time then?

No, it wasn't full time. Probably half-a-day a week, something like that.

Did you have to go out to the areas?

Yes. We had Royal Commission meetings at each grape-growing district, where everybody was entitled to come and put their point of view. Yes, a very good experience.

Do you have an particular recollections of growers or companies taking a very strong stance and ...?

No, not really, no. Everybody was very, very refined in those days. No, no problems at all.

You say the recommendations didn't get implemented for …?

No, not for ages. Not for years and years.

You might have had a wry chuckle when it finally happened.

Yes, but by that time most people had forgotten that it had ever been done.

[29:30] Well Tom you mentioned this as good experience. Did you get any other opportunities to utilise that experience? I'm thinking of this ... any enquiries at a smaller level, a lower level or ...?

No, it was only good background for me in my job.

Well, in the nature of the agricultural industry, enquiries and reports, not necessarily at the level of Royal Commissions, but ongoing series of enquiries and investigations and so on, I'm just wondering if you got ...?

We had the Citrus Enquiry Commission, much the same thing, but it wasn't a Royal Commission … Should have been a very good industry. We grew quite a fair quantity of good quality fruit in South Australia, good quality oranges and other citrus fruits. They have never been [really] profitable crops. So the government set up a commission to look into the citrus industry to see what could be done to improve, mainly its marketing. After that they set up the COC, the Citrus Organising Committee, with a view to assist the industry to market its crop. The changed residues of that are still going under a different name. It did some good, but couldn't revolutionise the price of oranges, not for the grower.

These attempts to market: are you talking about a local domestic South Australian market?

Marketing South Australian oranges, but marketing them in other places, exporting and interstate. Talking about marketing citrus, for many, many years the major market for South Australian oranges was in New Zealand. There was a very strong bond built up between New Zealand and Australia. The New Zealand people were educated that orange juice was vital in

the diet. Truby King wasn't it? [Wife, Zoë, comments in background 'Yes'.] Truby King was a doctor who got this message over very, very soundly in New Zealand. That meant that New Zealand actually set up a committee, board, something like that to authorise them to ... [import citrus – Harvey Turner].

[33:10] **End of Tape 4, Side A**
Side B, Tape 4

[0:05] A very important issue in the horticulture of South Australia was the marketing of its oranges in New Zealand but the marketing was done by the Citrus Growers Association. John Medley was the organiser of all this. He used to … virtually used to flatter the industry that without any documents being signed this large proportion of the oranges were sold in New Zealand at an agreed price and that was a very, very good arrangement. That went on for years and years and years. It was still going on when I retired and I don't know what's happened since but it's certainly changed now. But that was a very significant … In fact, if you can find any documents on that – I don't know where you would find them, but that was very neatly done. There were two great organisations in South Australia's horticulture – the Citrus Growers Association, and the Fruit Growers and Market Gardeners Association. The Citrus Growers handled the citrus. It was voluntary, but done in such a way that there would be very few citrus growers who didn't belong to the organisation. The Fruit Growers and Market Gardeners Association handled vegetables and apples, pears. They functioned much the same way. Two remarkably good grower organisations.

That leads me to ask, was there any particular reason why you had two organisations? You might think citrus being a fruit ...?

Just the way, it was geographical, but it was just the way they started up. The Fruit Growers and Market Gardeners would have been going many, many years before citrus was grown in South Australia. Then when the citrus became a big crop, a major crop, then they set up a Citrus Growers Association. They worked completely independently.

It might seem a little bit odd that they'd be independent, but was the Department involved in …?

Well, yes and no. I was strongly involved with each of these, but because of my job in the Department as Chief Horticulturalist, not through any reason that the Department or the government wanted to liaise with them. But they were all growers and I knew them all. I used to go to … As far as the Fruit Growers and Market Gardeners Association's concerned, they used to hold executive meetings, I suppose it was only once a month on a Friday afternoon. I always went to the executive meeting, by invitation. They were delighted to have me there. Always made a contribution. I didn't go to the Citrus Growers Board meetings, but I was very, very closely involved with them. Yes, very close liaison with them.

In an advisory capacity?

Yes. I suppose the technical reason was that everything that was exported had to be quality examined on behalf of the Commonwealth government. It was my job to organise the inspection that took place. So all the citrus that went to New Zealand, for example, was all inspected by my inspectors, and all apples, apple export was a big trade in those days, mainly to the UK and the continent, and all of that was also inspected. While I did all that on behalf … Canberra, it was done virtually on a State basis, so that would have been my liaison.

These boards and associations and so on would have been replicated throughout other States?

Every State where they did export, yes.

Did you link up nationally? Like the Potato Board or the Citrus Growers: did you attempt to liaise?

Yes. Potato Board – we used to have at least once a year meeting with potato organisations in other States, all done on a voluntary basis, industry basis, and very well run. We used to exchange a lot of basic information. We had contacts, we knew what the supplies were like in other States, what the quality was like and, of course, the price. That applied to each of those. And with citrus and with apples: we used meet at least once a year with the other States – very, very valuable liaisons they were.

[6:30] As a rule, because there may be some exceptions, but as a rule would the interstate associations and boards and so on have been structured similarly to South Australia?

Where they had them, yes, but they didn't always have them. The States worked differently, they did work differently.

I was wondering in that sense whether your involvement with the Department of Agriculture in South Australia was more in keeping in what they did elsewhere, or was it rather different?

The Department in South Australia was more involved in these industry organisations than in any other State, yes, certainly, very much so.

Was that a good thing?

Well, we were very strong in co-operatives in South Australia. Now co-operatives – that's another very important section because under the Playford Government, which was long enough to be a historical period, the co-operatives were given [low-interest] loans, State Bank money. State Bank financed the co-operatives and they got money at a slightly cheaper interest rate than outside. This enabled the co-operatives to be very, very strong. Apple Co-operatives – Lenswood, Cudlee Creek, Balhannah, Ashton – very, very strong co-operatives. The Murray Citrus Growers was also a co-operative organisation. That was the same. They set up marketing organisations. They set up cool stores. They did wonderful jobs. But, of course, they were nurtured by the Playford policy of helping them with finance. When that stopped, the co-operatives stopped.

The co-operative movement in South Australia goes back a long way.

A long, long way, and very strong in South Australia. Stronger that in all other States. Of course, co-operative movements were strong all over the world then. I remember people from overseas, people from England, coming here and wanting to know could they have a look at our co-operatives because of their importance.

I wonder if your comment there about the involvement of South Australia, South Australia's Department on boards being different to the other States, reflects some of that co-operative …?

Yes, well that was it. There has always got to be liaison, a reason, and that would have been the reason over here. It was also people. The people who ran these boards and these organisations wanted liaison with the Department more than they do now. It is quite different really.

One of the things that comes out of this sort of project, Tom, is we try and focus on the people. It's very easy to say the Department did this and the Department did that, but as your intimating there, there is always a level of personal rapport between the grower and the horticulturalist in the Department or whoever it may be.

That's right, yes. That was very important as far as we were concerned in South Australia.

[10:45] Well Tom we just had a bit of a pause while we got some thoughts about your personal involvement. I suppose the work on the boards and so on, it is really important to you as Chief Horticulturalist to have that good liaison with people. It is obviously something that the Department would have supported, and not just for you but for other officers on other boards and so on.

Yes. In those days the Department's policy wasn't to push people around, it was to lead them and to help them. Some government departments always pushed people around, but the Department of Agriculture did not. The powers that be, the ones that were the Directors (the Chiefs of the Divisions in those days), appreciated all officers of the Department who made friends of their growers. This applied right through. It was very, very significant and very important. That's the way we behaved and it was good – good for us, good for them. I always say I had a book of rules and regulations, laws and by-laws 2" thick, and never had a court case. There wasn't any need. It was all handled over the telephone. For anything that was going wrong, I would get on to them and stop them in their tracks: 'You can't do that and you know you can't do it. Now fix it and that's the end of it'. Invariably it was. That was much better than taking them to court. I wasn't working for the lawyers, I was working for the industry.

You knew the rules and regulations, but you also knew how to enforce them.

Well, that's the way it was done. Family concern, it was.

Was that something that applied to other areas of the Department?

I would think so, yes, generally speaking, that was our attitude. The people you're meeting, they're all reasonable, sensible people, Departmental people.

You see that in somewhere like animal, the livestock area, where it is in the interests of the person to get on well with the Departmental officer because they've both got a common goal.

In the livestock section they had a great team of vets. They directly worked for any farmer wherever. Wonderful. Nowadays it costs thousands of dollars to have a dog and a cat. In those days sheep and cattle, It was absolutely wonderful the service that the Department gave as vets, wonderful. Specialist people, government car and available at the end of a telephone.

Those sorts of people and yourselves in the horticulture area, you were working with a common goal, at least a very similar goal, in improving industry, improving the livestock and improving the produce.

That's right.

That is something that the Department was obviously supportive of.

That was world policy with Departments of Agriculture in those days. Now it has changed. It was wonderful because most countries are dependent upon their agriculture for their subsidence. We all want food.

Food and water are fairly basic.

Yes.

[15:30] The level of support or the level of interest from the Department seemed to extend throughout the Department.

The South Australian Department was an excellent department, there is no doubt about that. Probably still is, but, it was certainly wonderful during [those days].

Did you find instances where the people you were trying to help were reluctant to take that help? That they saw … were there occasions where they might have seen the Department or an individual as not being their friend.

No, I couldn't say that at all, no. They were willing to listen and willing to use it. But nobody ever forced themselves on to anybody.

[16:45] When it came to the appointments to boards and so on, the various associations, was that something that required Ministerial endorsement or ...?

For boards, yes. The Minister always appointed you to an official board, but not to industry organisations.

Was that a case of the Minister generally rubber-stamping the Department's recommendation for someone to be on a board.

Yes. I don't like the way you put it, but, yes. The recommendation was usually made by the Director and the Minister didn't interfere.

Which is what I was going to lead up to, in the way I asked the question, did the Minister ever say look I want a particular person to be on a particular board. Did that sort of thing happen in the '50s, '60s?

Well not really as far as I was concerned but it may have happened with others, I don't know.

The Ministers, certainly in other areas and I'm assuming it applies also in agriculture, the Ministers seemed to be a little bit more hands-on with the subject in those days. They didn't rely on advisers and intermediaries and so on. They knew what they were talking about themselves.

A lot of them, yes. The Ministers were generally speaking pretty well informed as individuals.

Did you have personal dealings with Ministers?

A little bit, enough, not too much. There were no consultants in those days. The Departmental officers were the consultants. The Ministers were perfectly happy to accept it that way.

Did you get called in to give advice or …?

Yes.

… go on a field trip with the Minister or something like that?

Some officers more than others. Not often as far as I or my officers were concerned, but a few time, yes.

Anywhere in particular that, any particular trip that ...?

No, not really, nothing of great significance, no.

I remember in the case of Mines and Energy that that Department had the Minister and the Premier, and usually the Premier ahead of the Minister going out on annual holidays on three or four weeks at a time just to inspect areas of the State. Was this a requirement of your Minister or any of your Ministers?

No, I don't think so, no.

That's not to suggest that's a bad mark against them.

No, it's a good thing.

Well we have probably covered the aspects of boards and enquiries.

Yes, enough, plenty.

[20:30] Enough for the moment. There will be some things that will spin out of that. Perhaps, swapping subjects in big way. You talked about the Royal Commission on grapes, and I know in a previous session we chatted about vine selection. Perhaps we could go back over some of that. We talked about the vine selection process where the Act was prohibiting the import of certain vines and grapes because of phylloxera – that threat – and there was the attempt to introduce new varieties of grapes through the CSIRO, do you remember?

Yes, I thought we might have covered that. I mean the situation there ...

We talked about it but not ...?

I see. Broadly, all I'm talking about is very broadly, because it is way back in the past, but broadly the importation of vines into South Australia was absolutely prohibited and that was carried out pretty well to the word. I'm not really aware that any grapevine was ever brought into South Australia illegally. They were brought as far as Mildura, but never seemed to get to South Australia. This was good from the point of view of pests and diseases introduction was

concerned, but it meant that any valuable variety that was produced or found outside South Australia could not then come into the South Australian industry. It was in 1961 when I was overseas that I realised the importance of this, when I tasted wine made from varieties not grown in South Australia and realised it was very good wine and the lack of those varieties in South Australia was detrimental to our industry. So when I came back I instigated an industry meeting and explained the situation and got industry support, that's from growers and winemakers, to see if we could go about introducing some varieties into South Australia. We got round the legal side of it and started of with five or six varieties, which we got from CSIRO in either Sydney or Mildura. That was the start of it. Simultaneously, as it happened, Max Loder, who joined us and who had previously worked in Germany, was aware of the importance of vine selection. That means selecting the best of the varieties where they grew. We had a very bright viticulture bloke over here, Harry Tulloch, and he'd already recognised in his experience that there were patches of shiraz grapes and other varieties in certain areas – Clare and the Barossa – where the yields and the quality were better than average. He'd actually set aside some small areas where he'd found these special vines, had places from which he would take cuttings when he wanted cuttings for growing new vines. So we put all this together and set up a vine selection committee, which is really an industry committee with Departmental officers on it. The same liaison that we had with everything. The Departmental officers supplying technical knowledge and regulatory knowledge and the industry helping with the selection of vines. Then associated with this came the use of root-stock, which were not only for phylloxera resistance, but for supplying vigour to the vines. It didn't happen just like that, it happened slowly. We had the introduction of root-stock, we had the introduction of new varieties, we had the selection of varieties that were already growing in South Australia, and we had disease checks, virus checks, to make sure that the vines that were being propagated, both the root-stock and the **[**varietal**]** material were virus free. So all this was put together and vine selection organisation was set up to do this. Through, again, the district advisers, we showed the growers that if they were to plant more vines on their properties, please get these selected vines, these improved varieties of vines: you'd have virus free and you'd have good varieties, and you'd have healthy vines and vigorous vines. That took off, very, very well. Now in fact I only checked on this this week: as far as I can see, the millions of vines that are now being planted in Australia each year, all have come from this vine selection that was started up like that in those days back following after 1961. The interesting thing was, this show I went to on Friday night, which is an apple selection, now that apple selection started because we saw the vine selection was a success, therefore apple variety selection was started up, and that followed exactly the same line. In fact, the two [are] planted together … A property in the Riverland was taken over by the vine selection committee to propagate their vines,

because you had to have your own property so you could propagate enough, because they want them by the millions if not by the thousands, so the apple people used the same property for propagating their apples, which is very interesting that the two work together. That's been a great success with apples. Same success that there has been with vines. They were telling me on Friday night, these apple people there who are a younger generation then me, that the apple selection in South Australia is leading Australia. Actually South Australia has led Australia, every State, on vine selection and apple selection, which is very interesting. I might say that, that also applies to cherries because they have instigated new varieties of cherries here only in recent years in South Australia. This all stems back from 1961. So that's very significant and very important … The thing now is it's not a government do, it's a grower do, and the growers have been shown what to do and they've taken it on and both these selection groups are going wonderfully well.

Thanks for outlining that Tom and to put down for the record the Friday function you referred to was a gathering at Lenswood?

No, it was down here in town.

It was in town [Adelaide].

Yes The apple industry anyway. Fruit Industry Identities it's called.

And you remain one of the identities.

Apparently.

Some years on.

Apparently.

You were saying when we had a preliminary chat for this session, and you've indicated there, that the vine selection process extended to apples, a similar process extends to wheat varieties and …

Wheat improvement, cereal improvement has gone on forever. That's been very important in South Australia, very important in South Australia. You've just got to talk to somebody who knows all about that, because that's really a big deal.

I'll find someone yet!

Yes, it's a really big deal.

We're just about for today, so I might just … stop that tape there for now.

That'll do. That's good news.

[32:36] **End of Tape 4, Side B**

AN INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY BERNARD O'NEIL WITH TOM MILLER AT ERINDALE ON THE 4TH OF NOVEMBER 2003, CONTINUING THE INTERVIEW OF THE 21ST OF OCTOBER AND PREVIOUSLY IN THE SAME YEAR AND IT CONCERNS THE HISTORY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA.

Tape 5, Side A

[0:35] Tom, we're going to pick up on a few different things today, and just see how we go. No particular order for the session today, no particular structure but I've sent you a list of some questions and topics that we might consider. Perhaps an 'easy' one to start the day with is the situation regarding your own involvement with the Royal Show in Adelaide and, of course, the Department's contribution to the Royal Show and how that fitted together. Perhaps we could pick up on that.

Well, I go back to say the early 1950s and the Extension Branch had just been started up and so they virtually were to control all extension work, whichever branch was doing it they made a big contribution towards it. As far as the Royal Show was concerned, I was surprised to find that the Horticulture Branch was not required to make an input, although there was always a horticultural display on. In fact, the Department had its own hall. There was one small hall, I suppose the size of a church, and it put its display in that building. I always thought it was an excellent display. What the Extension Department did was to professionalise it. In other words, they decided on a theme, departmental theme, and each branch contribution was related to that theme. But they didn't want an input from my branch anyway because the Extension Branch itself just about did all that. In fact, I remember going down there in my first year here, and finding that I wasn't wanted. It was all under control, so for the rest of my life I just left it at that. But the departmental contribution as a whole was excellent.

Did you go along to the Royal Show?

Yes. I always went along and spent enough time in our hall to gauge the reception and the questions that people were doing. I was very interested in that side of it, yes.

Did you serve on the stand or ...?

No, no. As I say, didn't want it, no. Not in our particular instance there. Other branches probably were a little bit different.

How big a display area would it have been, just as a guide?

You mean the horticulture display?

Yes.

Only about 20 or 30 feet frontage in the hall.

And a static display with pictures and text on a wall?

Yes, static. Yes, that's right, yes.

Did they give out produce or samples?

No, no produce. Leaflets. That was the period of leaflets which used to be written and given out in large numbers. Very useful ones too.

Mainly information about ...?

Mainly information … No, on how to do it. Not so much the Department's activity, as how to do it, how to do various things.

You mentioned, Tom, that the Extension Branch was doing this work.

Yes.

Was there any one person in charge of it, or was it a group effort?

No, there was only one person. Albert Engel was broadly in charge, but they had a group of three or four people, and they did it and did it very, very well.

The Extension Branch: were they also looking after other information services?

Yes. All information services were under the Extension Branch.

The *Journal* and ...?

Yes, that's right.

Did they have an editor, or a technical person …?

Yes. They were all technical people. When the branch was first formed, those technical people were gathered from the branches and put together. They were a very good group too. They were a specially selected group. They had a big impact on the Department and its activities, no doubt about that.

And you had, obviously, limited experience then with the Royal Show.

Yes.

You were saying earlier you had some experience in your Western Australian–Perth days. Perhaps a bit more closer ...?

Yes. It was quite different there. We'd have been given say 20' in the display area there and it was up to the branch to do it and we did it as a branch. Over here it was done more centrally by the Department, by the Extension Branch. The system here was better really.

More co-ordinated.

That's right.

Do you know if that co-ordination extended to other departments in a sense of the government departments trying to put on an image across the range of government?

No, I don't think so. Left to do their own thing, yes. No, I give the Department credit. No Department virtually promoted itself. They promoted the work they did, but not … they didn't promote themselves.

Did they use the material that was exhibited at the Royal Show, did they use that in other forums? Send it around the State or ...?

If anybody wanted it, it was there for them to use, yes. Quite a bit of it would have gone out to other country shows, which generally speaking followed the Royal.

So there were other annual rural shows and field days and things like that.

That's right, yes.

Was your involvement in those activities different to ...?

More direct. The rural shows, the rural people depended upon the local district advisers to help them. But there was a big change in the district advisers for the period I'm talking about. They would have done all this themselves with help say from the head office section of Horticulture. But after that the district advisers would call on the Extension Branch to help and when it came to preparation of charts and diagrams, they were done by some qualified artistic person in the Extension Branch, which was a great improvement.

With the rural shows and so on, did you go out to those?

I used to go to as many as I could, but quite often they were only on for one day … There was more pressing work in town or elsewhere, so I didn't. But I was never, as an officer of the Department, never part of a rural show. That's not quite right. I went out … and manned some for a short period of time. I was on the Dried Fruits Board and the Dried Fruits Board used to put up a display and I would probably take more time assisting that than the departmental program.

Under your other hat?

Yes.

You mentioned, Tom, going out to conduct the formalities – opening and sometimes being on the stands and so on. What period was that? Was that earlier or later in your career as a ...?

That was earlier, during the '50s and '60s, and then that declined after that.

Your own involvement declined?

My own involvement.

Did the Department maintain ...?

Yes, the Department always maintained a very strong presence, and a very good one, and a very useful one. They used it as an extension course, and they usually picked a topic of the year, topic of the period that seemed to be important, and specialised on that.

And more in a instructive capacity rather than a teaching or ...?

Yes. Never dogmatically, always advisory, yes. I remember one of the early ones, apricot gummosis which was decimating apricot trees throughout South Australia; South Australia was a big apricot grower for many, many years and then apricot gummosis came in and decimated the trees everywhere. The Department had a program to control apricot gummosis, and that was a big one. Then, say 20 years later, the big thing was vine improvement and so that became the topic. But in between there would have been similar topics. Salinity of the River Murray was always an important topic. The handling of the River Murray, the sort of thing we're talking about now, we were talking about 40 years ago. Hasn't changed, hasn't changed.

Some of those themes or topics, were they of an annual basis? You say you're picking out special themes but also had some standard ones. I'm thinking maybe of quarantine requirements or something like that where you have to reinforce that message every year.

Yes, we often did that. Quarantine, for example, was always a subject you could bring up. You'd try to freshen that up with a new point of view, but frequently I would go in and talk on quarantine, fruit imports, vegetable imports, tree imports, Argentine ants was one (we always claimed we didn't have Argentine ants in South Australia and we kept them out), and various pests and diseases like that, added, of course, to which was fruit fly (a perennial which we could always bring in) and we spent a lot of time on those.

Were you actually giving formal talks?

Yes. I'm moving now from Royal Shows to field days, from shows to field days. You didn't give formal talks at shows, but you did that at field days.

That's like ...?

That's right, and at Bureau meetings, Bureau nights.

Both the Royal Show and field days, I suppose the rural shows, you're giving out information, brochures, leaflets and things like that.

Yes, that was the idea.

A fair bit of time went into publicity, promotion, and so on.

Yes, they were very valuable. Probably still are.

I know it didn't apply to yourself, Tom, but did other staff members go along and work on the stands or is that just ...?

The regional staff usually worked on the – they would have somebody manning the stands.

Was it essentially an Extension Branch activity, so their staff would have probably been the ones on the stands?

No, no. If it was technical and if it was a horticulture or even other technical subjects the Technical Branch would supply a person. The Extension Branch did not have the staff to man rural shows, they just didn't have enough people. They had an enormous job to do with very few people. I mean the Department had five or six very strong branches with lots of information to give out, the Extension Branch only had four or five people trying to organise it and run it and supervise, they had a terrific job to do really.

[15:50] On a related aspect of the Department's work then Tom, things like conferences and seminars and workshops. Who was organising those? Who would run them? Did you, for example, attend seminars where you had to give a presentation or anything? I suppose it's the education role of the Department?

It just depends. Yes, on some subject matter I did. Export fruit, for example, quality of export fruit was my subject. Quarantine, either interstate or overseas, was also my special avenue. I was usually called on to talk on those. But when it came to research or topics of the day, then it would be the research officers or district advisers, whoever we thought was able to make a good contribution. They were all very skilled at doing the job. We also tried to make sure that research officers were out talking about their specific research, to bring them close to the problems at ground level.

Giving them very direct experience, very direct contact and so on.

That's right, and that worked out very, very well.

Were you much interested in things like conferences yourself?

Yes. I had an enormous number of conferences to go to, both within the State and interstate. But I tended to specialise on the interstate ones relating with work in other Departments in other States.

[18:20] Was there a interstate conference of Chief Horticulturalists?

Yes. For many years we had a Chief Horticulturalists' Conference, usually every year because all the Chief Horticulturalists, they had different names in different States but they did pretty well the same job. They each did quarantine, fruit export, quality and inspection, and general administration of horticulture so we had a lot of topics to discuss ... Commonwealth quarantine was run by the Commonwealth who reimbursed the States for the time they spent on that, and they had the money, so they always called us to at least one conference each year. We went to a different capital city, a different State, each year so that we had familiarity with each particular State. The only one we didn't go to was the Northern Territory. That brought us all together, perhaps for a two-day conference, so to make the best of our travel time, we then initiated a Chief Horticulturalists' Conference which must have gone on for something like 20 years, and then for some reason or other it was wound up shortly after I left the Department because they

asked me to write the history of the Chief Horticulturalists' Conference, which I did. And that was sent to the Commonwealth people.

There ought to be a file on that somewhere?

The Chief Horticulturalists never met but under the auspices of Standing Committee the Ministers of Agriculture used to meet annually at what was called a Standing Committee Meeting. If we had to do anything on an interstate basis which involved other States, we had to have the approval of the Standing Committee. That was the formality. The Standing Committee gave us approval to have the Chief Horticulturalists' Conference so we did. These were very, very beneficial. Quite vital to assist me in my administration because we got a lot of information from other States. We tried not to duplicate research that was being done in other States. We shared research information that was gathered. General information that was gathered from all States was tabled at these conferences. Subjects like I mentioned – apricot gummosis, the quality of export fruit, varieties of apples and pears being exported. We knew not only what was going on in our States, we also knew what was going on in other States. This was very, very important information.

Were the individual people at the conference, were they presenting I say a paper but some sort of discussion to set things off, or were you just sitting around the table ...?

No, we had a prepared agenda. What we did in the Chief Horticulturalists' Conference, we had one of the chief horticulturalists was the chairman for the day. It was his job to organise the conference, to prepare the agenda, which he did with conferring with all the others, and make sure that it ran properly. It was all done formally. It just wasn't a get-together … We had quite an agenda as the years went along and the work developed, yes.

With the agenda, Tom, was it a case of each Chief Horticulturalist being given a session, a time allocation to present something ...?

No. It was done on a subject matter rather than on a State matter.

OK. So it might be sometimes when you could go along and have a lot to contribute, and other times not?

Exactly. Yes, it just depends on the importance of the subject to you, yes.

You mentioned that you prepared a history document. Do you remember when the conferences started? It sounds like it was after you'd come to Adelaide.

Yes. It was about 1956, 1957 they would have started. Yes, probably closer to '59 or '60. Then it went till 1975, '78, yes.

I'll check it out. We'll obviously have to try to track down the history paper!

Well, yes, I had retired when I did that history. The agronomists who used to meet not quite so much, it was plant quarantine that brought us together and the fact that we worked for the Commonwealth. The vets used to have plenty of conferences because they also did animal

quarantine on behalf of the Commonwealth, so the Commonwealth got the vets together. The agronomists didn't. The soils people didn't. When they saw the success of these others, they then got on to Standing Committees and arranged that they would have similar conferences, which were then organised.

[25:40] It is interesting in one sense, Tom, it's quite a late development when you're talking about the '50s whereas conferences for people involved in agriculture have gone back to early 1900s. Even the late 19th century there'd be interstate conferences to discuss particular problems. They had obviously made an effort to bring people together from the different colonies, different States as appropriate. In addition to that, you mentioned the Minister of Agriculture conferences – they've got a history going back to the early 19th century.

But most of those were Ministerial conferences rather than technical officers. That was the difference.

But the Ministerial conferences, were they, and likewise the technical officers, were they discussing things like the need for regulations and revisions to laws and so on? I presume in the case of your technical officers' conference all you can do is make recommendations ...?

They were very broad issues that the Minister talked about. I can't put my point on any particular subject but all those agendas must be available somewhere. The Standing Committee on Agriculture, that's what it was.

I was thinking in the case of the Ministers, presumably they would have to report back to their own government in their own State, particularly if there was to be any change of regulations or revision of laws?

See the States usually regulated themselves. They might have tabled what they were doing, but they weren't asking other States for advice on what they should do; the other States were quire independent at Ministerial level, quite independent.

Did they try and get a coordinated or national sort solution at times to problems or ...?

If there was a problem, yes, if there was a national problem, but generally speaking they were State problems, there were a few national problems of course.

[28:00] You mentioned export of fruit, for example. In a sense that's a national situation. If you're going to export something to Britain, presumably you want to do it on the same common terms?

Yes, but this no … No, they're different. A side issue now. The Commonwealth – export of anything from Australia the quality of it was organised by the Commonwealth, not by the States, and the Commonwealth simply employed the State office to do it, because they were on the spot to do it, but the regulatory work was organised from Canberra, and the Commonwealth worked quite independently on that. They didn't … For example, on export fruit any change to an export fruit standard would be bought in by the Commonwealth government, I would say without reference to the States at all. I always felt that I as Chief Quarantine Officer Plants in South Australia would simply be advised of this. I never thought about it at the time, but they

worked quite independently and quite dictatorially on that sort of thing, and they were very jealous of their rights in that respect, yes.

There might have been some instances where you – not necessarily you personally – but you the Department got your back up against the Commonwealth saying 'You must do this'.

Yes, we could have disagreed, but probably after it was done. But this was the importance of the plant quarantine and the export fruit annual conferences where it enabled us to make sure that these subject were brought up and prevent the Commonwealth from being too dictatorial. Yes, no doubt about it. The Commonwealth then – I suppose they are now, but it is more politics now – in those days they were interfering with less political but very important factors.

[3050:] Of course in this period, 10 years or more after World War II, you've got that kind of federalism approach – taxation arrangements in World War II extending to other areas of Commonwealth control, perhaps not suddenly, but eventually extended.

Yes. The Commonwealth were very keen to take over whatever power they could get, no doubt about that. They extended down a little bit too far, and suddenly found they were too far down. See, with CSIRO, for example, that was all important from an agricultural point of view. There was, let me make this point, there was a lot jealousy between CSIRO and State departments in research work. The research officer who worked on a subject, say it was a nutritional subject, was then encouraged by their authorities to extend that information to the industry. State departments considered that was their job, extension work, advisory work, and yet the Commonwealth officers, CSIRO people, wanted to do it in respect of their own work and it was very necessary for the two groups to work together. In some areas they worked very, very well together, and in some areas they didn't. Now in Merbein in Mildura, for example, there was the Merbein Research Centre which was a CSIRO Research Centre, there were also State department officers in the State Department of Agriculture working independently.

[33:05] **End of Tape 5, Side A**
Tape 5, Side B

[0:05] And I'm only instancing them as these two groups. CSIRO, very powerful group, competent people, and a Commonwealth group which gives them status anyway. State Department trying to work for the farmer. Let me tell you this about what happened in South Australia. As it was many, many years ago, it shows what an impact it must have had on my mind. I came over from Western Australia, very naive, I would say, protected, keen and – yes, babe would be the word – and within my first fortnight of being over here I was taken by the then Chief of the Division out to the Waite Institute to interview some of the research officers out there. I perceived a very jealous atmosphere between the two. A jealousy which I had never ever seen before because in Western Australia the CSIRO was very small and the Department was very strong. Over here the Waite Institute – which is not the CSIRO, it is the university

Faculty of Agriculture of the University of South Australia [Adelaide] – it was very strong and the Department was less strong in research, but stronger in advisory. The officers of the Waite were doing excellent work, research work. For example, apricot gummosis was one … The Waite Institute was doing basic research on this, which had never been done anywhere in the world, although the disease did exist in other places. The Department wanted that information to extend to the growers. The Waite Institute officers felt that they should be extending their information to the growers. I found it was quite extraordinary really that these two organisations, the individuals, were at each others throats … I'd never seen this sort of thing happen before.

[3:11] There's an element of empire building or ...?

Well, if you like to call it that, yes. Now fruit fly was much the same. A lot of the basic research was done by the Waite – a lot of the basic technical stuff had to be done by the Waite. They had entomologists who could identify a species of fruit fly, the Department did not have them … You caught a specimen of fruit fly, the Department did, or the public brought it in to the Department, the Department had to take it out to the Waite Institute for identification. If the two worked together, it was excellent. I realised that part of my job was to make sure that everybody did work together, because it was no good this fighting that was obviously there. We were very successful throughout. But this is a big danger when you have two parallel organisations both wanting to work in the same field. I don't know what it was like with other sections. I don't think agronomists, for example, had this problem. But the difference was that agronomists seemed to be agronomists wherever they went. Horticulturalists were research officers in one and advisory officers in another. There was a big exchange between agronomists. Agronomists worked in the Waite Institute, joined the Department and some went from the Department to the Waite Institute for the mutual benefit of everybody. This was very instrumental in keeping the people working together because they didn't see their kingdoms as separate, they saw their kingdoms as united, which is the way it virtually had to be. But this was a very important issue in those days. Now, of course, the attitude [of the] CSIRO has changed it's whole direction … In my day it was more specifically working on research related to an agriculture topic, entomology, plant pathology, soils, nutrition; now it's moved into the field of human nutrition. In those days it had nothing to do with human nutrition so perhaps that factor isn't there at the present time. But it is something that could be expanded upon by people that were even closer than me.

Well from your perspective, Tom, did you see the Department making an attempt, or the CSIRO for that matter, making attempts to break down this level of jealousy, competitiveness? You were obviously aware of it but was there anything practical done to see if you could be like the agronomists who could actually collaborate with these people?

Well, yes, we did. That was the whole point. We collaborated with these people. Once a week or once a fortnight, I would go out to the Waite Institute over many, many years and seek out the research officers out there that were doing work that was important to me, and talk about that and make personal friends of these people, which is the way to go. But it was done at that level. At top level, Director level, they probably ignored the issue. It was probably the best thing too.

Did you go the extent of having a fortnightly or monthly seminar between the organisations?

Not really, no, as required each brought the others in if they had a particular session that needed an input, but, no, there was no formality like that, no.

You were going out on a personal basis. Did you get other officers heading out there with you? Were other people wanting to make that step?

The doors were always open and if they had a problem, yes, they went out. They would go out at their own level.

[8:35] Okay.

And, of course, we employed graduates as research officers in the Department. In fact that's what had happened just before I came over. It was five or six graduates, I think I have mentioned this before, were employed by the Department, and they were cadets. Now they were all trained at the Waite Institute and when they joined the Department they virtually still thought they belonged to the Waite Institute. In some instances this was very good. In some it created a little bit of a problem. The teachers of agriculture at the Waite, Gordon Edwards and Brian Coombe, had started their careers by being educated at the University of Adelaide at the Waite Institute and Roseworthy College, joining the Department of Agriculture as Horticulture Research Officers (Brian Coombe was a Viticulture Research Officer), under the auspices of the Department going over to the United States for higher education at the University of California, and then after returning to South Australia being disappointed with the work in the Department because of lack of helpers and lack of finance and being called upon to do other jobs, which they claim interfered with their work. So they then joined the Waite Institute. So you had this close knitting between the two. Quite extraordinary really. This might have been very beneficial in the long run, but it was extraordinary the way this happened. You had a very strong liaison between the university, the Waite Institute and the Department of Agriculture, because of this mixing up of the graduates. Very good. Over a long term it worked very, very well.

The CSIRO people, did they come in through the – graduates through the University of Adelaide or were they coming from interstate or they ...?

They came from both. The CSIRO at that time was building up it's section out at Glen Osmond, and they specialised as I could see mainly on, at the early stages, on soils, had a very

strong soil section, soils and agronomy. Then, of course, the Department started to build up it's soil section. It liaised very, very strongly with the Waite Institute. I don't think there was this jealousy in soils and agronomy and nutrition, as there was in horticulture, I don't quite know why that was.

An interesting theme we'll follow through.

It is an interesting theme, yes.

[12:35] As well as the CSIRO, was there a Commonwealth department as a stand-alone Department of Primary Industry or Agriculture or ...?

Only in Canberra. There was no section in South Australia. Well there you are: in the '50s the Commonwealth appointed a Director-General of Agriculture in Canberra. There was only one appointment and all of a sudden we went to our conferences and suddenly found that there was a Director-General of Agriculture who hadn't been there before. This was obviously a take-over bid. It never developed, I don't quite know why, but I forget his name now.

He had some staff?

Very little. It was a political appointment, jobs for the boy's sort of thing, although he was a competent agricultural person, yes. It was only one or two conferences that he was present at and then the position disappeared.

Of course, now we've got a Commonwealth Department of Primary Industry or under other names of course over time but in effect that's what ...?

Well the Department of Primary Industry in my experience did export fruit and plant quarantine as they were – as an Australian operation, not as a State operation. Quite involved. I don't think anyone – possibly the United States – but most countries don't have this dual government that Australia has. When you think of plant quarantine, two distinct activities: one Commonwealth quarantine – anything coming into Australia from outside; and the other State quarantine – anything coming from interstate into the State. Similar rules, similar regulations, similar activities, but distinct, separate departments.

It's an interesting additional level, dual level of government, an additional level of bureaucracy, you need to be in contact with these people and ... territorial ...

You need to liaise. You can realise how important it would be to liaise with these two but the Commonwealth administration was very remote from the States. It was probably closer to New South Wales and Victoria but when you think of Tasmania, Queensland and Western Australia and South Australia and Northern Territory, very, very remote. Big problem.

[16:15] Just while we've touched on that broader political dimension, Tom, it might be appropriate to ask now, how significant it was in South Australia and also nationally that the government was fairly stable? The Playford Government in your case continued through to 1965, the Menzies Government for a similar period.

Yes.

Did that assist the work?

Very, very much so, probably only fortuitous because, I mean, politics is not by, the change of government is not by any design. In fact, the constitution is designed so that you are going to get changes of government, but it was very important to have that stability over a period of time. In fact, I would classify 1950 to 1980, yes, I suppose 30 years, as a period when the agriculture of South Australia, let me stick to South Australia, was gaining knowledge. That was the knowledge gaining in all these people that I'm talking about, CSIRO, Waite Institute, which of course is specific to South Australia, no other State has a university faculty that works so closely to agriculture as South Australia did with the Waite Institute. CSIRO, Waite Institute, the Department of Agriculture: efforts were equally divided between providing information to the farmers, to the producers, and obtaining that information by research and what we used to call, applied research, which was usually a 'try it and see' effort. During that period, that 30-year period, nutrition was developed, varieties were developed, root stocks were developed, methods of irrigation were developed and changed, knowledge of soils. In fact, knowledge in every form of agriculture: pests, diseases and the control of pests and the control of diseases, enormous amount of information was gathered. I would claim that area to be the area where knowledge was gained and passed on to the farmer. There has been enormous development since then. What is happening now has been the efficient use of that knowledge to allow all the industries to develop at an unprecedented rate. Because everything that is being done now was known about during that period of time, but it wasn't always applied. Management factors, mainly financial factors, money was not available, the availability of money is very, very important in the development of everything. In those years in South Australia the banks were not interested in supplying money, really. Now money is an important factor, if you're not a financier, you can't be a good farmer. Perhaps it's an economist not a financier, but ...

That is another stream I will follow through with some others on ... economics.

Exactly.

Just coming back to the start of the question there, it seems to be significant that you've got a stable State government.

Absolutely.

On the other hand, perhaps the Department itself could have, whichever political party was in power, could have operated more or less on a continuum. There's a sort of sense of under-pinning that ...

During that period of time, that 30-year period, yes, it would have tried to. But, of course, if the government has a change of policy, for example, as an aftermath of World War II, which were the industries had to be organised, marketing in particular because the shipping disappeared,

virtually disappeared, and this applied to meat, wool, grains and horticulture produce – it all had to be organised from within the State. Everything where export was involved, this was continued with the proliferation of boards and committees, which at that time, seemed to be the right thing to do. Now the government of the day went along with that: Playford's government, and a few years after Playford, was perfectly happy to continue with that because that was the expected thing. Then you only had to get a government with a change of policy with respect to that and it changed. Two things changed. One – I remember a politician saying to me 'It's a feather in my cap if I can arrange for a board to be abolished'. Now to me that was heresy, because any board that I had anything to do with, I made sure it was an industry development board and felt that the industry benefited by the activities of that board. Politicians didn't seem to distinguish between different sorts of boards. So if the government got a change of policy and started to abolish boards, you changed the industry completely. The same goes for staff. All during my period there was sympathy towards employing additional staff if they could make a contribution. For example, with migrants coming in, if they were able to make a contribution to agriculture, the government, whoever it was, the Public Service Board I used to deal with, were sympathetic towards employing them. Then you only had to get in a government whose aim was to reduce the number of civil servants, and that policy becomes redundant and the whole direction of the department is changed. Now we had a long period of time when the Director of the Department was allowed to carry on in this knowledge seeking, giving advice, and that is when the Department flourished and the State flourished, but it didn't flourish as quickly as it should have because of the absence of finance.

One of the things in asking you about that broader perspective is commenting on politics, you've got a Playford Government pushing agrarian interests, agricultural interests, but at the same time developing policies on manufacturing and secondary industry and so on. A slight side issue, of course, is the strong secondary industry base that is going to be making agricultural implements etc., etc., but essentially you come back to you need that basic good agricultural industry.

Yes, you do, everywhere you do.

I was just wondering, therefore, did you notice any shift in emphasis ... that shift in emphasis of the Playford Government to secondary industry, did you notice any shift in support for the Department?

No, not during that period of time. Playford was very good. He seemed to be able to develop whatever he thought ought to be done, without neglecting other sides.

As we were commenting before he had an orchardist background so he had a bit of an idea of the lay of the land.

That's right. He probably thought he – if he did think about that side of it – that he had established the Department of Agriculture that was going along very comfortably and he could put his energies into industry and then subsequently into Radium Hill, those areas.

It's all, in one sense, it's all State development

Absolutely, yes.

He was aware of the fact that South Australia wouldn't survive on an agricultural base alone in terms of employment of people. He was a very cunning character.

A natural cunning, yes. It wasn't ...

But one of the points that comes through in my comments there is, of course, agriculture is fundamental, I mean water and food, you can't get more basic that that for human existence.

No, no.

[28:00] Did you have much to do with the Federal government? We've touched on the CSIRO and the Commonwealth department, but did the Federal government impact upon the Department of Agriculture's work at all? Not at all, but in an intrusive sense? You talked about conferences and relations with CSIRO, but ...?

No, not, I can't say that they were intrusive, no, not at all. They were intrusive in some respects – they were intrusive in Monarto, for example. But that wasn't entirely agriculture.

What about, as opposed to the Commonwealth department, the Federal government itself in terms of things like maybe tariffs or directing trade in other areas? Did you find that involved you or the Department?

It was starting to. No, not during my term of office, but towards the end when you had changes of State government and policies on, for example, export. Export of fruit to Europe and England was regarded as belonging to the past and we had to specialise into Asia and nearer areas, whereas, quite honestly, during my period of time, we completely neglected Asia. Yes.

So that new thrust required a bit of refocusing on the markets and re-education of people locally and overseas.

Yes, that's right. Yes. There was a change, but no, I wouldn't say during my period but you could see it coming – coming for later.

[28:55] Perhaps just to round things out for today, Tom, a quantum leap back to your starting point in South Australia, and this even precedes when you came to South Australia, but the importance of the Commonwealth Extension Services and the funding.

Exactly. Yes, that's where the Commonwealth, of course, did impinge on the States. The Commonwealth Extension Services Grant was a wonderful support, must have been for all the States, it certainly was in this State. There was this fund on which you could depend. If we could prove that something came within the ambit of those rules of reference, we could go along with it, whether it be research or any sort of a project in the Department, particularly in employing people.

It enabled the Department of Agriculture to increase its staff.

Absolutely. Developed enormously, yes.

Were these people employed as temporary officers, by and large?

Yes, by and large, they were temporary. That's the trouble with a fund like that, it's not permanent.

Could you convert them into permanent?

I would say the government over here was sympathetic towards converting them into permanent, yes. And if you have a sympathetic government you can do lots of things. They were at that time, no doubt about it.

That Commonwealth funding. Do you recall how long that continued for? Was there a point where they said, 'End of the scheme' or did it taper off?

Yes, it tapered off. No, I can't really report on that. But, of course, our whole Extension Branch would have been developed because of that CES, I'm sure. I appointed people on CES, small amounts of money and wages were low and it didn't require large amounts of money, but at times it was very, very useful. Very valuable.

So it was an important way for the Department to build up its expertise and so on?

And the State was not supplying adequate funds ...

End of Tape 5, Side B
Tape 6, Side A

AN INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY BERNARD O'NEIL WITH TOM MILLER OF ERINDALE, SOUTH AUSTRALIA ON THE 20TH OF NOVEMBER 2003, CONTINUING THE INTERVIEW ON THE 4TH OF NOVEMBER 2003. THE PROJECT – THE HISTORY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA.

[0:35] Tom, this week you had one of the two lunches for the year of the Retired Officers Group for the Department. Perhaps it is an appropriate time to have a look at the Retired Officers Group and how it came about, how it was formed, the activities it's involved in. It's worthwhile to report some of that for the record.

Well, I'll see if I came summarise it very quickly.

I think you said there had been about 46 of it?

Yes, this was the forty-sixth luncheon, which means we must have started some around 1980, which doesn't seem that long ago historically. But the interesting thing about this is that we are still going, and still going strongly as you can see. We had only 77 there, but sometimes we have over 100. You can't really cope with more than 100 at any meeting, at any gathering like that, so the number is good. But it started say in 1980. The Department, traditionally I suppose, always had a Christmas Eve function; in the afternoon, we only knocked off about 4 or half past four, instead of 5 o'clock. The Social Committee arranged food and drink at a nearby satisfactory place. There were a few retirees, and this fellow from Gawler, I might think of his name [Arthur Hooper], said to me – this would have been 1978, '79 when I had just retired – 'There are not many of us here, but there are enough that we would do better to have our own luncheon, our own Christmas Eve do because we are swamped with departmental people here'.

He said, ‘What about you getting them together?’, which I did. So the following year we had our own function and had this at the Park Hotel. There was somewhere around 20 people there. That was pretty well the sum total of us that were retired at that stage. They decided that we would meet there once a year. Well the very next year the Park Hotel was demolished, so we had to find another place. We kept this going and then, of course, there was a period of 10 or 15 years when there were a lot of retirements because people were being funded out of their job. Didn’t happen in my day: we just retired on our own finance. All of a sudden some people were paid to get out of their jobs. So the numbers increased quite rapidly. They agreed at one meeting, when I brought the subject up, that they would like two a year. They said, ‘One a year isn’t enough – that’s what all the aim was – no, two a year’. I realised that two a year was not a bad idea because they can come to one or the other, they don’t have to come both. Although you have the hard core that comes to every one. We used to have a guest speaker, but found out that that interfered with the social side of it. They said, ‘We don’t want a guest speaker, we want to socialise’. A good meal and socialise which sounds right too – meant you get it over quicker and you didn’t have to find a guest speaker. Now other decisions were: we are not considering that we are part of the Department; we’re part of the past of the Department, but we are not hanging on to the Department; we don’t want the Director or an Assistant Director to come along and tell us what’s going on in the Department, no way; we operate under our own steam. That was point one. At any rate that was it. We continued along that and we simply had this get together. We only have a roll call and a welcome. Anybody else that’s got something that concerns us, we’ll have them along, but only give them five minutes to talk. As you saw this time, we had the photograph collection, which this group are keen to hear about, otherwise they wouldn’t know about it, and also keen to help if they can.

That’s Arthur Tideman trying to get assistance.

That’s right. And the same goes with Bernie O’Neil doing the history and collecting the facts. They are now fully aware that it’s going on, and we are all very enthusiastic about the whole idea.

You mentioned Tom, that you didn’t look for the Director of the Department or Assistant Director and so on to give speeches and talks, but do they get invited to come along at all?

No, this is retired people. When they retire they get invited, not before unless there is a reason for it. For example, we had the professor from Roseworthy here a year ago, but that was for a particular purpose. We thought it was necessary for him to come and talk to us for a few minutes. He came so I’ve left him on my list. He gets invited but he doesn’t even answer now. He doesn’t even say he’s not coming. But that doesn’t matter. The other point was people kept reminding me about people who were ill and people who had died. I refused to turn it into a mourning show, so these are not announced. People can find out about people who we’ve lost

and that sort of thing. [It] would have to be a very special person who died for it to be mentioned officially at the lunch. We, of course, mentioned Sir Allan Callaghan because it was interesting at 92 years of age he'd always come along, always been a good social person, as well as a good technical person. But apart from that, they are two rules – nobody from the old Department to talk to us, nobody from the present Department to talk to us. And we don't turn it into a sympathy meeting.

When you say, Tom, that these are the rules or the guiding principles, that is just something that has evolved?

That's right. It's all evolved. No constitution, nothing at all.

There is no committee or anything like that.

No, no committee.

You've done the organising since day one?

Yes, yes. It's the only way to get things done: do it yourself.

So you get letters organised and sent out and ...

The Department has been very helpful I must say, but I say this quietly because when I sought approval for the typist to do the letters, there was a query on cost. I realised it was only a matter of time before somebody would say, 'No, we're not going to do it'. I had no facilities myself for doing this. We send out somewhere around 250 letters to retired people. I just deal with Sue in the Department. She does them virtually in her spare time. It's just done like this. She is very efficient. Now it's only done with a phone call; tell her the alterations to the letter, and it's done.

So it's a tacit level of support?

That's right. Well they know it's going on, and now, of course, they're realising it is a group that they can use up if they have any reason to need it.

Certainly in the case of the photograph collection, a very …

That's right, this group was there.

And for the history project, well it's a ready-made group to tap into.

That's right … This is the best group of agriculturalists in Australia, practical agriculturalists. South Australia always was a good Department of Agriculture to do its job, that is advising the farmer and advising the government. There's no question about that. I came from the Western Australian government after spending 10 years there. I became a senior officer over there, a very good department. I knew personally, many, many people in the Queensland, New South Wales, Victorian and Tasmanian departments, very many people. There's no question about it, that on a practical basis to do the job we expected the advisers to [handle] all sorts of farmers,

and to be able to assist the government when it wanted assistance. The South Australian department in my view was as good as any. That's the way to put it. In fact, [in] my view … better than most. We didn't get the uplift support like say Sydney and Melbourne used to get from the Department of Primary Industry in Canberra or the CSIRO who had big offices there. We had a small CSIRO office here, small Soils Division in CSIRO; so our fellows were virtually on their own and benefited because of it. Had to be better. Had to [handle] the gap that the CSIRO filled in some of the other States. So I'm not surprised at this group that we've got here. There's a group of 250 people and amongst them you could pick out 50 people who were top, not only in Australia, but many well known around the world. We've still got some of them. Some of them are still working after having been retired for 15 years, still working as consultants and doing an excellent job.

The qualification is, you've retired from the Department not retired from work.

That's right, once retired from the Department. If they retire early and they've gone on to another job, it's over to them. They can come if they wish to; some do, but some don't.

Are you still recruiting members? Are you still getting …?

Yes. In fact, that was the other problem. In the early days you'd go into the Department and find out who retired in the last 6 months or 12 months. Then I found out that there was actually no written, no recorded list of people who had retired. As people retired their files just disappeared and there was no record whatsoever. So we've given that away. Now anybody that wants to come, comes. We've also invited sister departments like Lands Department are welcome; Roseworthy College – welcome; we've got one Department of Primary Industries (Commonwealth), a fellow who comes along because he knows quite a few of us. These people are very closely associated with the old Department. They're all welcome. Everybody is welcome. We never turn anybody back.

[14:00] Obviously you get to know the people or at least get to know their names through your organising role.

Yes, it's been a wonderful thing and the people have got to know each other. I mean it's surprising how you meet your working buddies after you retire. A lot of them I knew but didn't talk with. Now they're all friends of mine, wonderful. Now the important thing that I want to mention, and that's, what do we call it, the knowledge gaining bus trips that we do. About six or seven years ago … Well it happened this way. Bob Hagerstrom from Kangaroo Island, who comes up to our luncheons every so often, he is still a farmer at Kangaroo Island, retired from the Department, he suggested we should go down to Kangaroo Island: why did he always have to come up to Adelaide for the luncheon, why don't we go down to Kangaroo Island, which I thought was a bit of a joke until 18 months later it dawned on me that this wasn't a silly idea. So I said at the next luncheon, 'We're going to run a tour to Kangaroo Island. It's not going to

take the place of our luncheon, but anybody that wants to go down there, and Bob Hagerstrom will be our host down there, we'll go'. We got about 35, 36 people to go down there. We had a wonderful time. Immediately, within 24 hours of leaving Adelaide, they came up to me and said, 'Look, we're having such a wonderful time on this, we want two of these very year'. And I said, 'No way'. But, what evolved from that is that people said, 'Agriculture has changed so much since we've been retired, we'd like to know what is going on, we'd like to be brought up to date'. I said, 'Okay'. We'd done Kangaroo Island, and that's what we saw down there, what was going on in Kangaroo Island. Of course, down on Kangaroo Island we had people with us who were there when the Lands Department started to distribute the land for the development of Kangaroo Island as a rural sort of pastoral area. Some of the original people that were there at that time were with us on this bus tour. So I said, 'We can do this alright'. Now we arranged to have once a year a bus tour and we would cover South Australia. We won't go out of South Australia as yet. We've covered Kangaroo Island. We then did the Riverland as our next tour. Then we did the South East. Then we did what was to be the Mid North, but there was so much around the Clare district that we didn't get far away from Clare. Then by common request we went to Port Lincoln where we found agronomy, while it is still there and still as important as it ever was, had been taken over by being passed financially by [fishing and] aquaculture, so our tour there became partly aquaculture and partly agriculture, which is very interesting and indicated how things are changing. Now this year, to virtually complete the Mid North, we're going to go up to Port Augusta. What we've done, we've gone from Kangaroo Island, we've done Penneshaw to Port Lincoln and everything in between. They have been wonderful because the changes that have gone have been incredible. If you'd been associated with them say 20 years ago and you see it now, you marvel at the improvements. I call them improvements: changes and improvements that have taken place.

It is useful to record a little bit about the Retired Officers Group because those sorts of changes that you allude to, there's also an element of continuity from your own work time through to the present day and you get an overview of some of those sorts of changes, so we're going to come back to them Tom.

It's a pity in a way that we haven't recorded the history of those tours because they're a history of the development of … a broad history of the development of South Australian agriculture as seen through the eyes of people who were closely associated with it in their work up to 15 or 20 years ago.

It's just interesting to see how it's evolved and you mentioned the Port Augusta trip which is going to be March next year, March 2004, so that's six trips, six years of them.

That's right.

So you've been able to maintain it on an annual basis ...

Yes and it is becoming more popular. We can't get them on the one bus now. I don't know what we're going to do.

You're getting 40 to 50.
Yes.

That's good. The people pay for themselves the whole way?
Yes. Everything is done like that. I say to the motel people about our luncheon, 'I'm coming to the motel on a certain date and I'm bringing some friends and that's that'. We all go and we all pay.

You've been going to the same hotel for … since that Park Hotel?
No. Only about 14 or 15 times we've been to this one. A different succession of hotels before that. But then those that want a deposit, no way, because we're not going to go to the trouble of starting to collect cheques.

So you're currently going to the Royal Coach Motel at Kent Town.
Yes, and it is very satisfactory.

When you started Tom, you mentioned about 20 people at the first luncheon. Were they all people that you knew personally and were able to draw together? How did you get ...?
I got that list from the Department at that time. I was still close to the Department because I'd only been retired a year or two and that started us off.

Were they people you knew and able to ...?
Yes, they were all people I knew, yes.

But this evolved out of there.
Yes.

I mean you're coming up to almost your 25th year!
That's right. The motel manager here, he is a very experienced motel manager, he can't understand it. He said, 'Groups like this start off. Retired groups, they go for five, six, eight years and then they fade away, but your group is getting stronger. I can't believe it'. But that's because there is a common interest.

I noticed the other day you had a former Minister?
That's right. Gabe Bywaters, he always comes, yes.

Do you remember when he started coming along. In the early days?
Yes. Early days. He wasn't at the first one.

[22:30] He might have been a bit early for the first one, but other Ministers?

He was probably still in Parliament then. Yes. Tom Casey came along for a while, but never took an interest. At that time, after Bywaters, after Casey, the relationship between the Minister and the Department changed. The Ministers set themselves up as Director, whereas before Ministers used to depend upon the most important departmental officer in the picture that they wanted to advise them. For example, Casey, Bywaters and Ross Storey comes into this too, they got to know a lot of the departmental officers. You'll find this out when you talk to Gabe. He would be very proud to tell you about that. They would sometimes call those departmental officers individually to come over, whereas officially you should do it through the Director or the Director's Secretary anyway. Now they got away with that. Because everybody was closely friendly with each other, the system worked. This in a way was an offshoot from Tom Playford's day because that's the way Tom Playford operated. He got to know departmental officers, the ones he thought he needed to know, and he maintained a friendly association with them rather than official. Departmentally it changed the place because Bob Herriott who was put in Extension Branch, he had a policy that he promoted individual officers in the Department. For example, if there was a statement to be made on agronomy in the Mid North or horticulture in the South East, a press release from the Department would go out in the name of the closest officer concerned, whoever it might be; may be a relatively junior officer. Sometimes those officers would be contacted about it but it would have been possible to send out a press release from the Department as an officer said something, without that officer even knowing. He even did a personal issue about each of the senior officers where he sought out their background and got the paper, we had an evening paper in those days, to publish this views of the officers with the view of making those people known not only to the farmers but to the general public … Then all of a sudden the Ministers demanded that everything was said without [an officer's] name [and in the Minister's name] so that completely undercut that policy of Herriott's and changed the whole process of the Department's press releases. Quite different.

I've seen that in other Departments where individual officers' names are attached to the press release or at least they are quoted in it and so on, so it is a ...?

Yes, this was more than just quoted in it. This was – they actually made the announcement.

Also something that we touched on in an earlier session, Tom, it then means people such as the Chief Horticulturalist, whereas once upon a time they were known, they then become anonymous and even to the extent now the head of a department is relatively anonymous.

That's right, absolutely. I couldn't tell you the names of heads of departments now. I couldn't tell you who is running the present Department of Agriculture.

Bit of a transition. But it's interesting the Minister will come along.

Yes, he wouldn't miss it.

I'll have a bit of a chat to him I hope in due course.

Yes, in due course.

Just to round out things on the Retired Officers Group. We've talked about the formation and obviously its growth over time and the level of interest; there's 250 on your mailing list, and 70 to 100 come along for dinner. That attendance – that includes partners?

Yes.

But it is predominantly retired officers?

I suppose there's probably 150 to 160 retired officers in that group, the rest would be partners.

I found it hard to tell the other day because with the name tags they were names to me and not to know if they were partners or not.

Don't worry, we've found out that many of the so-called partners or wives regarded themselves as if not departmental officers at least giving full support to their husbands in their job, yes, very much so. Country women answering the telephone and it got to the stage of making very positive replies on the telephone. Not setting themselves up as advisers, but sort of setting themselves up as secretaries to their husbands.

That's an interesting comment because one thing I noted with a few of the females that I talked to, that there were women at the lunch who had worked for the Department.

Yes. They're as enthusiastic as the men.

Going through the staff list, you don't see many women in professional positions, but you're actually able to get the comptometrists and the typists and so on to come along.

Yes. These do's – the luncheons and the bus tours – include everybody. That's a wonderful thing.

That does say something about the ethos of the Department because there was no – there doesn't seem to be a separation between the professional and ...?

No separation at all. None at all.

That's good Tom to get that down. A bit on continuity between that ...

It is really because it's easy for me to say all this. As I said to many people, 'Somebody wants to know ... Once I stop saying it, it disappears'.

Well that was going to be my next question. What of the future for the group. Did you set up anyone to ...?

Well yes, Trevor is there as the standby because [none] of us are permanently on this earth. No wait and see.

That's Trevor Roberts has been helping you along.

Yes.

It will be interesting to see what evolves from that.

Yes. You might see it, I won't.

(Laughs) I mightn't qualify for membership. (Both laugh) That was funny the other day when people were saying 'You're too young to be a member' and I'd come along to talk about the project.

That's good Tom to get some of that down. Perhaps we will return now to more strictly departmental experiences.

One last word. Arthur Hooper is the one who suggested this. He was at Gawler. He was in our Extension Branch. He's the one who retired about the same time as I did and he suggested that this is what we should do.

But he bowed out and let you do it all.

Arthur passed away unfortunately. Oh yes, he didn't intend to do it himself.

He passed on the idea to you and ...

That's right, he's the one who made the suggestion.

Did you have … You said before, it just evolved but did you have any other models to follow or was something similar done interstate or other departments locally?

There are smaller do's and some do's in the other States, but not run entirely on these open lines. They're usually technical officers and they usually get somebody from their head office to talk to them about what's going on, and we don't do that. Ours is just the retired officers of the Department of Agriculture and associated departments.

They obviously still take a keen interest in agriculture because not only do they attend as you say, they go on the bus tours and so on. That's great. And helps you maintain your friendships and connections.

They are an exceptional group because they all have a common interest, but they all have a common personality. I suppose over the years, in those days, our job was to deal not only with governments and officers within the Department, but with farmers, rural people, and you had to be able to get on with people.

[33:05] **End of Side A, Tape 6**
Tape 6, Side B

[0:05] ... these groups of adults of all education levels developed this ability amongst the people and now it's when they meet, they are all people that can get on with people. I mean in 22 luncheons we haven't had one problem. Amazing, not one sort of snag.

That's good. We'll have to turn to the Department itself. I asked about role models and other organisations and so on. I suppose in the Department of Ag. there was … you mentioned a Social Club.

That's right.

I suppose sporting interests and that sort of thing. Did people mix a lot after the work day and on the weekends and that sort of thing? Was there any great socialising in the actual Departmental times.

Almost none, no almost none.

For you personally?

For me personally, none. I never heard of any sort of groups that went fishing together or anything like that. Even where you had four or five people in the one town, I don't think, outside of working hours, they worked together.

You mentioned the Social Club with the Christmas party.

Within the Departmental Social Club.

Within the Department, there was a Social Club for organising ...

That's right.

... occasional get togethers, a barbecue or ...?

Yes, that's right, yes.

Was that something where people paid their subscription and belonged to.

Yes. A small subscription. Everybody belonged to it. Everybody had to pay.

So it was compulsory to be in it?

Yes, I think so. Near enough to be ...

But you didn't have to attend the events?

That's right, no.

So they organised dances and film nights and thing like that?

I can only remember a few barbecues up at Northfield. See the Department was scattered all over the State. That was the point. It wasn't as though we were all together in Adelaide or anywhere else. So that you when you had a 'do', the social committee only involved the Adelaide people, which limited it anyway. Yes, we had some very successful barbecues when we had the Northfield Research Centre going. And, incidentally, have you got a story on Northfield?

[3:05] In what sense?

Well, you see, we were in the old Simpson's Building in Gawler Place and bursting at the seams. It was not built as an office building. It was a tomato sauce factory. We were all in there. That's after moving out of the Treasury Building. We had no laboratory … – we had no facilities, put it that way. I don't know how we operated. So some of the senior officers and the directors started to encourage the government to give us some facilities. Suddenly, almost of the blue, came a grant of $1 million to build a research centre out at Northfield. Now the Commonwealth government had given this State Department the Northfield property which is associated with the old Northfield Infectious Diseases Hospital. Although it is only 5 or 6 km from Adelaide, it was all rural so the government simply said the Department of Agriculture

can use this. I'm simplifying it but this is as how I saw it. So we had a pig farm, a dairy farm and quite a lot of land associated with this. All of a sudden they gave us $1 million for a laboratory for the Department of Agriculture to be built. Marshall Irving was the Director at the time. We had a couple of changes of Director after Callaghan left and Marshall spent a lot of time designing this laboratory. It was eventually built, a double-storey laboratory out at Northfield, standing pretty well on its own out in a paddock. Out in the paddock where the first plane from London landed. Now that went very well for 20, 30 years I suppose and it became almost … Well it became the technical side of the Department and virtually divided us up into administration in Adelaide where we'd shifted from the Simpson Building to the building in Gawler Place (the AMP Building in Gawler Place) and all the technical officers were sent out to Northfield. We virtually had two distinct departments – Northfield and Head Office. Now Northfield is gone and I don't know how, why or where. Well I do, yes. They built the new glasshouse establishments out on the Waite Institute property at Glen Osmond and all the Northfield people were moved out to Glen Osmond, including a few technical people that had been left in the Gawler Place building … in the Wakefield Street building.

You mean Grenfell Street?

Grenfell Street, that's right. Notably, the seed testing laboratory which [was in] a beautiful position in the Grenfell Street. They were also moved out there too, so that put all the technical people together. No doubt they're much better off. What's happened to the Northfield laboratory?

Well 1966 or thereabouts they opened Northfield.

That's right.

So that 30 years later they moved out to the Waite and there is housing developing, housing estates, at Northfield.

Yes, but the double storey building must still be there.

The building is still there; I'm not sure what they use it for.

No, neither am I. We all clubbed together and gave Tom Playford a presentation when he opened that Northfield building. We were so pleased to do it ...

You mentioned Marshall Irving was working very hard on the plans for the laboratory? Was there any intent to move the Department itself out there?

Yes, that was the original intention. The laboratory first and then another building which would house the rest of us. Then, of course, the story of how in Don Dunstan's day Cabinet suddenly decided instead of approving the departmental building at Northfield (that's the second leg of the building: it was already planned [to be] completed), put [it] on the desk at the Cabinet

meeting and within five minutes Don Dunstan had swayed the whole Cabinet to decide this was an ideal building to go out to Monarto.

That we've talked about in previous times.

That's right. But I never worked at Northfield so I'm not intimate with what actually went on out there, but they certainly developed an *espirit des corps* [in the] group out there, which was an excellent group, but worked independently. That's the thing that worried me a bit.

I talked to Trevor the other day about some aspects of that: maintaining, in his case, correspondence and administration, supply and that sort of linkage between Head Office and Northfield.

That's right, they'd have had some difficulties. It is very difficult when you start doing that sort of thing, dividing places up.

Even though it is so close, it's not as if it was 50 km away, it was ...

Well Monarto would have been 50 km away.

That would have made a lot of difference there, but ...

If everybody went out there, it would have been an impossible situation, yes. People don't think about that.

[10:15] When we talked about Monarto and talked about some of the opposition to the idea and bit of reluctance for people to move, we were talking last time about that sort of thing, I gather there was a fair bit of opposition from the Public Service in general, the notion of the Department of Lands, the Department of Agriculture and other organisations might all be moved out there. Do you remember much about that?

I never heard that any of those were to go, possibly Lands Department would have, but the reasoning … it would have been Gabe Bywaters. Would he have been there at that time? ...

Bywaters might have been a bit earlier.

It was … The fact that it was the Department of Agriculture. Agriculture belongs to the rural community and the heart of it in the rural area and that was the reasoning for it. I mean a good move for Monarto if the whole Department had been moved out there. Would have been homes and Monarto would have been a goer.

Well it could only work if there was some infrastructure there. In this case, a department or a couple of departments and a couple of regional centres and that sort of thing.

That's right, because that would have been the start.

I gathered from talking to other people that there was some sort of opposition within ...?

Oh, the staff. The staff didn't want it, no. The bulk of the staff had been for many years in the Simpson Building, in the Grenfell Street building and some in the Treasury Building earlier than that. They had their families, grown up, and their friends and relatives all around them, as they do very much in Adelaide; Adelaide is a city of family groups. It's a wonder somebody doesn't write an essay on that sometime because that is quite significant and different from

every other city in Australia. So you couldn't just move two or three from a group like that out to Monarto. No way. Others wouldn't want to go. So there would have been a lot, a lot of problems.

So there is also the broader opposition across the Public Service that – and part of this seems to be the imposition of the idea – 'This is the plan and this is what you'll be doing', as opposed to consulting.

That's right. There would have been lots and lots, well over 50%, resignations without any doubt. In those days, of course, you could get other jobs so it wouldn't have worried anybody in particular.

[13:40] Mid '70s. Well talking about opposition and groups, that leads me on to another subject on our list that perhaps we could spend a few minutes looking at. Your own, or your colleagues', involvement in things like professional organisations, management groups or even the union (the Public Service Association).

I was only fringely developed in these as the Department itself was. The graduates of the Department of Agriculture, the university graduates, all belonged to the Institute of Agricultural Science, which was our technical institute at that time. Now at that time it didn't even include Roseworthy graduates. In fact, there was a special clause in the constitution that allowed Roseworthy graduates in some special circumstances, which I don't recall, to become members. But it was one of the stuffier organisations that only allowed graduates. Now that's been completely opened up and they have technical officers, not only agriculture but other associated sciences as well, and it's become a changed organisation and a much improved organisation, an active one. Most of us, because the membership was limited to graduates in those days, took on a [job] such as being on the committee or being secretary and eventually vice-president and president. I went through this run through. I was president for one year – 1962, something like that. Most of us became branch presidents at some time following that line. A few, not many, became federal presidents, although federal presidents usually came from Sydney or Melbourne because that's where the federal head office was. The federal head office was in Melbourne.

It's a federation-type concept with a national body and State branches?

Yes. Exactly the same. That was limited but it was good and it held us together; we used to have good speakers, a lot of overseas speakers. I remember a Russian group came over when I was president. That was a very interesting group because in those days Russians were regarded as being a bit apart from the rest of the world. It was quite intriguing to have. I think there were three of them.

They'd be treated almost like the enemy, wouldn't they?

Well, yes, interesting. Of course they all spoke Russian so they had an interpreter with them. It was very interesting, very good. I got a few Russian addresses which I never used for a visit ... Then, of course, the other was the Public Service Association. Again, the Department of

Agriculture was never very closely involved in this until John Feagan came along. John came after Graham Itzerott came into the Dairy Branch, then took over [as Chief] after Graham retired. John added a whole different attitude to this. He must have had some background in Victoria about this. He took the Public Service Association early on and later became president and was president for many years, a good number of years anyway. He did a wonderful job. He was there on Monday, John Feagan … We didn't get much help from them, the Association, and I suppose that's because we didn't join in very much, but we used to call on them to assist us in getting an increased wages claim and they used to help a bit, but we didn't do much good for ourselves. In fact, the wages of the old Department is something that ought to be a subject – I don't know whether Trevor can talk on that.

[19:15] I actually had it down as something to talk to you about in another session, but that's ...

See in the early days when I came over here – what are we talking about, 1955, '56 – the wages were lower than everywhere else in Australia. We couldn't believe it because – I mean I, just as one, used to go to interstate conferences and we were quite as good as anybody else. In fact, looked up to from all sections yet we were paid less. We used to tell the Public Service Board this and they used to take no notice whatsoever.

That's something I would like to follow through, perhaps have a session on the work environment itself and things. I was just interested in your own personal involvement with the PSA. Any management groups or anything of that type since you were at a senior level?

You mean within the Department?

[20:20] Well like the Institute of Management or something like that?

No, no. They were just raw things in those days.

Did they have things … These days there's lots of training courses and so on for people to be sent on to develop skills. Did you get any of that sort of training or was it just more or less learning on the job from your own personal knowledge?

Learning on the job ...

These days there are things like leadership courses and so on where people are selected and ...

Not really. We had a few in-courses that Bob Herriott used to run within the Department but they were not the same thing, no. No. I never remember being spoken to by a professional management consultant or financial consultant or anything like that ...

I presume you swapped ideas with colleagues and so on about how to manage situations, tricky staff situations, some things like that.

You can presume that. I'm not too sure that I did.

I'm presuming! I was just wondering if it was the case. (laughs) If you had a particular issue with a member of staff who wasn't performing or something, and you had to bring him into line or ...?

Never happened. Don't allow problems to happen and then you don't have any problems to solve. That's my philosophy.

But other people in the department might not have operated the same way. They might have had ...?
I don't know. No, we didn't have any problems that I'm aware of, not really. But the problems are made now.

They're left to develop sort of thing?
Yes, it's in fashion to be in opposition. Quite different to what it used to be. When I went over as Director-General of Agriculture in Pakistan, and I'd never had any training whatsoever in anything except agriculture.

I remember you saying that, so that's why I was asking whether you ...
But they were quite satisfied.

That learning you did over there: you had to make decisions, and that's a form of learning, putting it into practice here. It's all been learning on the job for you.
Yes. I have no doubt that's right, yes. But these days if you haven't got a management degree or something like that you're nobody.

As I say, there's a plethora of courses that people are being sent on and ...
Don't worry, I've got my son up at Ernabella and within the next five years he will have retired and he's off to courses, six a year.

Always new stuff to learn.
He's far more competent than his father ever was. Perhaps that's why.

Would you have wanted him to do your job? Do sons … do the children follow their parents? Sons follow fathers, daughters follow mothers sort of thing. Do they want to do the same thing?
Mothers and fathers expected them to do so once upon a time, I don't know what they do now.

It was easy in the case to follow someone on the land, become a farmer or a farmer's wife, but ...
I found more problems with farmer's sons not wanting to take over, always, than anywhere else. You had a choice in a city job. In fact, I have had discussions with quite a few fruit growers, block owners … I remember in Orange, New South Wales going in the car one day, I remember at Loxton – they wanted advice what to do with their sons.

I mean some people take the view that it's easier to sell the farm and divide up the money rather than … depending of the size of the family and the level of interest in running the property and so on.
You had to, they had to divide it up otherwise … Adding to his problem is the fact that they didn't sell their farm. There are farmers started off with 100 ha finished up at 2 ha after two or three generations. You had six kids and 100 acres and divide it up equally; and then they have

six kids. What's left – nothing. Don't worry I saw that in Pakistan. I wanted somebody to invent a new system of land ownership and a new system of building fences, …

They'd sort of solve the problem here: they would sell off the farm and divide the money up or become cautious about who would take over from the father and so on. It comes back to your comment about the bus trips and going out and seeing what they are doing in the modern practices, many of the farms now are just so big, they have to be big to be economic now.

That's right, exactly. I have relatives out of Merriden in Western Australia and they've gone into that very strongly and they've all got a lien on the block next door: if it should be sold, it's going to be theirs, they have got to pay any price.

Necessary and practical.

Yes, the farms are becoming enormous. The place we visited last year at Yeelanna (???'s property). Same thing. Three properties. The father accumulated properties and that's what saved the family.

This is over on the Port Lincoln trip?

Yes.

[27:55] Well talking of matters of size, you made a comment earlier, comment about the department being a good department, or regarded as a good department, in comparison with other Australian Departments of Agriculture. It was also one of the smallest departments, wasn't it? Tasmania would have been pretty small.

Smaller than New South Wales and Victoria, but equal to the others.

Queensland and WA would have been … I don't have any precise numbers in my head, but ...

Neither do I but much the same.

The staff list in '64 said around about 350 positions, but not all positions were filled, but probably around 300 staff members. In one sense that seems a bit light on for managing the affairs of agriculture in South Australia.

Yes, it does when you consider the job that was done because, as you say, it was managing affairs and it was a leadership role, which is now, of course, taken on by the grower organisations. I'm sure the leadership in the grain industry is by private people or their associations.

The boards and so on.

I still get the circulars from the Fruit Growers and Market Gardeners Association, which is the Apple and Pear Growers Association. Much of the work they do in their circular is the work that I would have done in my day. I just took it that that was my job and didn't realise what leadership it gave the industry. I see what leadership these people are giving now and I marvel at it. More candidly it's far more involved than what I did, but basically it was my job. Now no departmental officer would even know what's going on.

Do you know if that was a conscious decision for the Department to opt out of that?

I often said to myself over the years, 'Who makes the decision?' because I [never] found [out] our Public Service Board, our government or our decision-making people associated with the government whoever they may have been, Treasury or … how they made their decisions. I often did not know. I found, for example, that we had an interstate meeting and something could happen in Brisbane and there was a parallel happening in Tasmania and I thought, 'Well that's strange'. Within 12 months the same thing was happening over here. I could never envisage Public Service Boards communicating with each other and saying, 'This is what we're doing. It's a good idea'. Yet that happened. I am still unaware of who makes the decisions.

Is it a copycat sort of syndrome or ...?

I don't know. Who makes decisions on 50 miles an hour, 50 ks an hour and 60 ks an hour. And is that every State? Hospitals, nursing homes: who makes those decisions? Yet there is a uniformity throughout Australia.

But in your own case, you see that with things like the Standing Committee and ...?

Is the Standing Committee still going?

But in terms of your comments about things being copied elsewhere, from elsewhere.

That's right. Well, somebody picked these things up and … but ...

Premiers' Conferences and Ministers' Conferences, those sort of things where people in the end are saying, 'Yes, let's be uniform about it all' …

That's right.

… that's where a lot of it comes from.

That's right. There was a pressure there. Yes, that's where it comes from. I guess.

And, of course, coming back to agriculture, then you get things like the involvement of the Commonwealth with the funding and so on. If you've got a Standing Committee meeting and the Commonwealth is turning up saying, 'We've got the purse strings, we'll give out money ...

[32:45] **End of Tape 6, Side A**
Tape 7, Side B

AN INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY BERNARD O'NEIL WITH TOM MILLER OF ERINDALE, SOUTH AUSTRALIA IN REGARDS TO THE HISTORY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA ON THE 25TH OF NOVEMBER 2003, CONTINUING THE INTERVIEW OF THE 20TH OF NOVEMBER 2003.

[0:35] Well, Tom, we finished last time talking about some of your involvement or lack of, with things like the PSA and professional bodies and so on. You were also involved with some boards and committees outside the Department. Perhaps we could pick up on little bit of the story of the Dried Fruits Board. I believe you served as Chairman of the Board for a while?

I must have been on the Dried Fruits Board for at least 20 years; 10 years as a member, which was a government-nominated member, Ministerial-nominated member, and then the last 10

years I was chairman of the board. It was a small board, about half-a-dozen, all growers, except for myself as the Ministerial representative and the secretary who was an employed secretary and belonged to a firm of accountants in town, Nelson Wheeler. We met once a month. The main thing, virtually the only consideration of the board, was the quality control of dried fruits. It was quite determined to maintain good quality control. It had quite a bit to do with labelling, which was related to quality control. That was it. If there were no problems, well the board had nothing to decide about. But it had on it producers (they were mainly grower representatives) and then it had the representative from Angas Park (which was the processor) and the government representative. But that was the main consideration. Looking back I'm quite sure that the Dried Fruits Board was interfering in lots of things it didn't need to interfere in. Let an industry find its own feet, let it go along in its own way and it works it all out. The Dried Fruits Board had a tendency to be a little bit fernickety about labelling, in particular, and packages and that sort of thing. Now all that's thrown out the window because packaging is in the hands of the packagers. That's where it ought to be too. Their job should be to package so that the market will purchase, and not package just because the Dried Fruits Board or somebody of authority says you should package it like that. But that's happened throughout not only the dried fruits industry but the whole of the fruit industry. Packaging in my early days was dictated to by a value of some kind. Why, I wonder now, this was all done. Let me digress. Go on apple packing. Now apple packing was done by mathematics – that was the way I was taught to pack apples: pack them in two rows of six and two rows of five in a box, and the layer on top of that was two rows of five and two rows of six, depending on the size of the apples. Mathematically it was done. Why it was done? Then all of a sudden bulk handling came in so that instead of marketing fruit in boxes that were decided by a law, all the fruit was put together and put in a shop and the purchasers could pick their own, which is the thing that we accept now. So the Dried Fruits Board has had its last meeting, but it went for a long, long time. In the early days, when it was needed, it was a good thing, but it tended to over-interfere in things, unnecessarily. I always wondered about that.

It was dealing obviously with local produce, not imported?

No, this was local produce. But the problem is that these sort of local boards is that they tend to dissuade imports into the State, claiming that they don't do it for any reasons, sometimes other than quarantine. There is always a tendency to favour local methods. The Dried Fruits Board, for example, would have raised trouble if somebody from outside the State started to send dried fruits into South Australia in a different sort of container. The answer was, 'You can't send that in because it's in the wrong container', which is a lot rubbish, but that's the way it was done.

What were they fearful of, you say it's something coming in?

I have no idea. No, I have no idea. Just that was the way it was done.

Presumably there were similar boards interstate?

Yes. There was a Dried Fruits Board in Western Australia, Victoria and New South Wales. They all behaved much the same sort of way. We used to get together with the boards once a year, the other boards, and sometimes these were very harmonious meetings and other times it was quite obvious that people were looking for markets and wanted to interfere with other boards. It always upset me a bit because it just indicated that each State wanted to run its business in its own way. It was the same fruit really. What did it matter? But that's the way it was done. Then, of course, the biggest State, which was Victoria as far as dried fruits was concerned, the Victorian Dried Fruits Board wanted to dominate the other States on quality and packaging and labelling and so on, which sometimes caused a bit of trouble.

You mentioned, Tom, you were on the Board for some 20 years. Did that extend beyond your time in the Department?

Yes. For 10 years after retiring I was chairman of the board. In fact when I turned 70 I thought well it's certainly time to stand aside for somebody young and I voluntarily retired from the board.

How did you become the chairman?

Appointed by the Minister.

Was that subsequent to your ...

At the recommendation of the board at that stage, yes.

But it was subsequent to your retirement? I was wondering if you were appointed at the time …

No. I might have been appointed as chairman when I was still in the Department, and sort of retained that position with the Minister's approval until I retired.

And the other thing that you mentioned, among other things, Tom, is Angas Park being the processor. Were they the only company doing the processing?

Not the only company. There were a couple of smaller ones, but Angas Park would have done 80% of the trade so they were the big voice, and a very good voice too, I might say. They were always very progressive. But there again the board had to register processors. There was one processor at Renmark that had been registered for 25 or 30 years. The place was definitely an unsatisfactory place for processing food stuffs, but the board didn't have the authority to take away the registration, so they were entitled to pack. They didn't pack much and, generally speaking, they only packed their own fruit. It didn't really matter, but the board wasn't too sure whether it was there for hygienic reasons or for quality reasons.

But did the board try and rectify that so that the board would have power to act?

They never got anywhere. No, not really, not strongly, no. The board being a grower organisation didn't try to throw its weight around too much, no.

So it was part of your activities when you were in the Department and continued afterwards.

That's right.

[11:40] Was that the only board or committee or external sort of body that you served on?

No. I was on the Potato Board for 10 years.

That's right, you mentioned that.

For 10 years. Then got a bit wary of that because of the industry politics and voluntarily retired from that. That was actually a marketing board as against the Dried Fruits Board which was a quality control board. The Potato Marketing Board was an actual marketing board. The principle was that people delivered their potatoes to the board and the board distributed them, generally speaking, to the merchants. Towards the end, we got this going very, very well, where you distributed the potatoes to the merchants and we exported the surplus, nearly always to the Sydney market, which was a big enough market to absorb any surplus that we had over here. But we did this as a marketing protection thing in that the Adelaide market was a small market and if you had just a small quantity of potatoes surplus in the Adelaide market, the price dropped down enormously just because there were a few surplus bags of potatoes on the market. But if you quit the potatoes and sent them in a truck to Sydney so that nobody saw them, then the market was buoyant; it was a remarkable example of how quantity on the markets affect the price. In this case they weren't quantities necessary for sale, but merchants knew and the retailers knew that there was a surplus of potatoes and the price used to go down sometimes to nearly 50%, so it was very important to quit the surplus, which we did. It was market manipulation for the benefit of the growers. Associated with that we had control over price, which is quite unusual. That somehow or other many years ago had been slipped into the Act, before my time, and so the board had authority on price fixing … So we fixed the grower price, wholesale price and the retail price, and we made sure that the growers got a fair price, by quitting the surplus, that the merchants got a standard margin and a satisfactory margin, and the retailer sold for a fair price, and got a satisfactory margin. I used to be quite proud of the fact that the housewife in South Australia paid less for potatoes than in any other State, and yet the growers got more … The Board was doing that, then it was doing a good thing. Then we got a government that disapproved of board control of almost anything, so gradually the powers of the Board were taken away and eventually the Board was withdrawn. Probably it didn't make any difference really except we pay a lot more now for potatoes than we would have if we still had a Board. Just depends which side of the fence you're on.

[15:55] What about the dried fruits situation? Talking there about price control of potatoes: was the Dried Fruits Board involved in price control?

No. It was very rare to have a board that had power of price control. Dried fruits price – nothing to do with the Dried Fruits Board.

It had been with the Potato Board.

Only happened to be with the Potato Board, yes. Very interesting. So we used it and I hope we used it wisely. We tried to.

[16:30] Agriculture is obviously a difficult area to work in – when you're talking about marketing and so on. There are so many vagaries of weather and supply and demand, whether you have too much of one and too little of another product.

Yes. So you have got to have people in the industry that know it. You've got potatoes, dried fruits. You've got to know what is important on a quality basis, for example, so that you can be fair with respect to price; once you fix price control, of course, quality almost disappears. That's what has happened these days. See we used to have … now there's an issue that has not come up in these discussions. We always had market inspectors in the Adelaide Market: always had one or two government inspectors and an inspector employed by the market authority, who went around and checked on quality, packaging, labelling, hygiene; everything pertaining to the product. They were pretty strict and they maintained quality control. We've talked about potatoes, but this applied to everything else – Brussels sprouts, cabbages, lettuce, apples, pears, stone fruits, strawberries. For example, strawberries are a product that you can top. In other words, the top layer in a strawberry punnet is the biggest in the punnet. The law said that all the strawberries should be similar in size and colour in a container. The inspectors used to check on this: this was an important thing. Nowadays those inspectors are gone. Apparently it's government policy that you don't do that sort of inspection. When you buy anything, it's now buyer beware. That's the policy. If you do find anything at the buyer, the retailer or wholesaler level and you don't think it's up to the quality it should have been for the price you paid, there is really nowhere that you can go except back to the retailer. Okay, that may be the right thing to do, but in the old days you had an inspector that you could go to and he would make the decision.

[Even though?] that the Department would have inspectors and ...

No, no inspectors [now]. It was a pretty important thing throughout most of my lifetime ...

An interesting thing is that the Department has the power of regulation or oversee regulations, oversee the legislation. You've got to have the right sort of inspectors or staff to do it.

Yes, well, you'd train the staff and you have pretty experienced people in. Yes, that was quite important. But that's all changed.

[20:00] We were talking, Tom, there about markets and the vagaries of markets. Of course, South Australian produce is going out into the world market, not just in the recent times, but going back to

the ’50s, ’60s and ’70s. The big change must have come about with the Common Market, with Britain entering into the European Common Market?

Well ...

I say ‘must have’ because I’m here to learn about it.

Right. Yes, it was an enormous change because I mean my experience was apples and pears going to Europe and England. We grew for export. I was associated in Western Australia where two-thirds of the apples grown were exported, mainly to England. Came to South Australia, a lesser proportion, about one-third of the apples that were grown, went to England, some to Holland and France and Germany, but not very much. Victoria, the same, about 10% of their supply went to England. Tasmania, of course, about 75 or 80% of what they grew all went to England. These were traditional markets. I remember an officer from the Department of Primary Industry in Canberra who came over and talked to us about the Common Market; that must have been 40, 50 years ago. We knew nothing whatsoever about the Common Market which brings up a weakness in our system in those days … The groups didn’t get together. The groups didn’t have seminars where these problems were informed to us and discussed. We just had to learn about these. Nowadays, of course, all these things are discussed at group meetings and this is a great advantage. But we knew nothing about the Common Market. It was a word that was in the papers now and again, but it didn’t mean a thing. Then all of a sudden, this fellow came over and gave us this talk on what the Common Market was going to mean to our fruit exports to England and we could not believe it! … There was a preference for Australian fruit on the English market and if that preference was not necessarily financial, it was certainly there as a historical preference. The buyers from England used to come out every year. I became quite friends of theirs. We got on very, very well together. They used to come out here and virtually select where they were going to get their fruit from. They would go to the packing sheds over here in South Australia, the co-operative packing sheds and they would check on the quality and the varieties and discuss price, which was nothing to do with me, but they would discuss price with the co-op suppliers and go back home and they would have a good idea of what they were going to get. And my job, and my inspectors’ job, was to see that the fruit exported from South Australia was of the right quality and the right variety, but the right quality mainly, that the buyers wanted; and this was all set out in Commonwealth rules and regulations. The Common Market meant that France, for example, a big apple-growing country and Germany, also a big apple-growing country, but France in particular had access to the English market and equal access to the Australian and this was an incredible thing, but it evened the whole thing out. It meant that Argentina was coming in, South Africa (there were always expert marketers in South Africa, aggressive marketers) and they were able to virtually push the South Australian fruit aside and take over ... From that day on the demand for Australian fruit in England slowly dropped off. We had no preference at all – in anyway at all –

it had an enormous effect. Of course, it was almost completely killed with the Suez Canal business when they, whoever it was, closed the Suez Canal and we had two shiploads of apples in the canal. They stayed there for most of the year, six months, and all those apples were a complete loss. That had an enormous effect on both sides: buying in England where they weren't sure of getting the fruit once it was delivered anymore; and, of course, back here in Australia where they had to battle for years to try get some insurance [payment]. I'm not to sure exactly how it finished up, but it was a tragic thing, and that was that.

[26:30] That was in the late '60s?

I guess so. Yes, it was certainly after '61 – mid to late ... That virtually spelt the end, but that's an indication of how politics, if that's politics, can affect trade. All of a sudden we went back to a smaller apple-producing State. Now, of course, we're scarcely producing enough for our own market.

We're becoming an importer of some of the fruit for example.

That's right, oh yes, big importers. In fact, nowadays what a difference there is. You have no idea when you buy anything in the market now – from apples, oranges, vegetables – where it comes from. No idea.

You can try and trust the sticker that's on them, but you can't even be certain there.

In my day it was all local produce. South Australia, of course, was a big grower of tomatoes, vegetables generally, potatoes and fruit, but the bulk of that used to be sent either to the Melbourne or the Sydney market and only a small proportion came to Adelaide. In fact, it's an interesting thing. We still go on about our Riverland. Now our Riverland, from a trade point of view, belongs to Sydney not to Adelaide. The bulk of the Riverland fruit – a lot of it now, of course, goes into processing – but when it was all marketed as fresh fruit, oranges, I'm talking about in particular, but also applies to stone fruit – the bulk of it used to go to Sydney and some to Melbourne and not to South Australia. We used to give [the growers] cheap water to grow fruit to supply the Sydney market, but nobody ever said that.

It's interesting insight, Tom, that South Australia was then supplying interstate markets and now, of course it depends on which shop you go into and whether it be a greengrocer or a supermarket or the Adelaide Market for example, but you can go in and find all these speciality lines – a Tasmanian cheese, Kangaroo Island honey or something that is from a specific location or a specific State and it comes back to your point that you don't know where the fruit comes from.

That's right. Well, of course, what's happened is that Australia is still a country of small producers and each producer looks for its niche market and exists on that. Yes, that's what's going on nowadays. The cheese from Kangaroo Island, the goat cheese from Kangaroo Island – they just find their little niche. They are not big suppliers.

A speciality line that appeals to a certain market.

That's right. It has changed the whole aspect of quality and packaging and that sort of thing. They grow for a particular market.

Those observations you were making about the fruit and the Common Market, were similar sorts of things happening with say dairy lines, with butter and so on and other products?

Must be. You want to get somebody that knows about it. But when I think of the butter export … We used to produce dairy herds all over Australia in any climate and any area for producing butter, the bulk of which was exported (and exported to England mainly) and subsidised by the Australian housewife. Incredible thing, when you come to think about it. We put up with that for 40 years to my knowledge. You could buy Australian butter cheaper in London than you could buy it in Adelaide. Good butter.

And South Australian dairy producers participating in ...

Yes, and being paid less than they should have been paid so that the price of butter was cheaper overseas than at home. Yes. Market manipulation on a political level. I don't know why we did it, but we did.

Was that something that involved the Department itself?

Well, you're going back a long way now. Yes. My memory of that was more in Western Australia. When I was in the Department over there, because I spent a year in the Dairy Branch over there, this was a very, very important issue. Then, of course, when margarine started to come in when I was over here, our Director, Marshall Irving, he ran a campaign, anti-margarine campaign ... He was one of the leaders of it; he joined with the industry groups against margarine coming onto our market. He used to write letters to the paper telling us that margarine was no substitute for butter in any way at all. But now look what's happened.

Was that something that he, he was the head of the Department, was writing in an official capacity?

Yes, yes. Letters to the Editor. I remember this. Incredible, when you come to [think of it] … Even that attitude was incredible. Of course, the information was suspect.

Was the information coming from local sources or ...?

Yes, yes. They thought they were right; but everybody thought that butter was the right thing.

[33:12] **End of Side A, Tape 7**
Tape 7, Side B

[0:05] ... [Truby King] was a very important health doctor in New Zealand. He was the one – every woman who was having a child used to read the Truby King's book on how to bring up children, particularly with respect to diet. He was a very pro-orange juice. New Zealand didn't grow oranges, but they were all told they should feed their children and their family on orange juice. South Australia which was not a big orange-producing State, but one of the biggest in

Australia, virtually cashed in on this. So we used to export what was then large quantities of oranges to New Zealand, both navels and Valencia's, on the basis of the fact that New Zealanders thought they had to buy and eat oranges. This was a great market. In fact, the New Zealand government set up a [system] to import fruit, and in particular oranges, into New Zealand; so the Murray Citrus Growers Association in South Australia, who used to organise the industry and the exports, the big mover was John Medley, he had this personal contact with the Turners, which were a marketing firm in New Zealand which had been given the contract by the government of New Zealand to import oranges. So John Medley, the Murray Citrus Growers Association and Turner Brothers, I think it was, in New Zealand organised this trade from South Australia to New Zealand. That was a wonderful trade for something like 20 years. A million dollars or more of oranges sent to New Zealand, and John Medley used to say, all this was done and not one document was signed. No documentation. Simply done on verbal agreement between people. Wonderful idea. Worked to our favour, so it was good.

A formal arrangement, but done informally sort of thing.

Yes.

[3:10] Okay Tom, well perhaps with four or five minutes we've got left we could look at some specific things about your working life.

What about hours of work? Now essentially we worked 40 or 38½ hours a week. But if you were a professional officer, which meant you had a university degree in those days, you didn't have any hours of work. You worked according to the job and that meant … Fruit fly was one, for example, in South Australia – you were on duty 24-hours-a-day, no questions asked, no overtime given.

You didn't clock on, clock off or anything?

No, not for professional officers. Clerical staff clocked on and off. Professional officers didn't. But they all worked much more than the hours they were supposed to work.

Did that apply for the temporary people as well as the permanent staff?

No because temporary people were usually put on specifically for a particular job. It just depended on what they were doing. Yes, I'd put on temporary people under the CESG (Commonwealth Extension Services Grant), for example, and they were just regarded as people doing a job and they were like our professional officers, they travelled in their own time and they worked when a job had to be done. But inspectors – they tried to work within their hours, yes.

[4:55] What about your work environment? The office accommodation and so on.

Well, we never complained.

Did you have an office?

Well, yes, we never complained but it was pretty poor compared with what one would expect now. We never really got decent office accommodation until we went to the AMP Building in Grenfell Street.

The 'Black Stump'?

Yes. That was virtually designed for our offices and that was a revelation to come into conditions like that.

It's still a relatively modern building now but in the mid '70s, early '70s, it was ...

That's right. That was given to the Department as a substitute for the office they did not build at Northfield and subsequently was to go to Monarto. They had to send us somewhere because they had sold the Gawler Place office or it was owned by the Commonwealth at that stage.

Was there an open-plan situation? You had an office and your staff have an open plan?

It started off as an open plan and it wasn't long before everybody bought a screen. I had to have an enclosed office, presumably as I was expected to need some privacy. Heads of Branches had offices, sometimes the second-in-command would have offices, senior research officer might have an office. But all the other staff was open plan, but it was quite unsatisfactory. They didn't like it and used to surround themselves with pot plants and screens … Bit by bit we had the place [changed] … more permanent screens built, but it was certainly open plan to start with.

[7:15] Both Gawler Place and Grenfell Street – those two main offices for you – were they smoking environments?

No thought about smoking in those days.

But people would smoke at work?

Yes, no thought of anything else. Mind you, they didn't smoke much. My group didn't smoke much, come to think of it, but some did, yes.

[7:45] Did you have accidents at work? Not you personally, but other people?

No, very, very little. If so, we didn't hear about them, no.

Was occupational health and safety not a big concern?

No, no. All of a sudden they started to bring this in and somebody on each floor had to be the Occupation Safety Officer. This was related to the possibility of fires more than anything else.

Would you have a Fire Warden, a separate person?

Yes, separate person. Never needed, but we used to, yes, now and again ...

Have a fire drill?

... in the last couple of years that I was there we had an occasional fire drill. Not taken terribly seriously, I might say.

No-one does until they need to use it.

That's right, that right.

[8:50] Some other aspects of the conditions. We talked before about the Public Service Association and the campaign it was involved in. Your salary and your sickness benefits and so on: how did you find ...?

Well in South Australia, we were never satisfied with our salaries and that was in comparison with other States and people doing similar work. Sickness benefits – really no comment, not aware that there was any great problem.

Did you have much sick leave at all or ...?

No, no. I had mumps once when I was about 40, 45, but it had to be a thing like that. I took very, very little sick leave. In fact, I referred to Geoff Strickland who died as our Director on his 65th birthday. He was the Chief Horticulturalist before I came here. He was 28 years as Chief Horticulturalist when he became Chief of the Division and then Director for a time. He never took any holidays and never took any sick leave. Now and again in later life he would take a couple of days off, or a day off, but never applied for sick leave, never applied for leave. The story was, and I mention him but he was typical of what went on, annual leave was accumulated and that was to go on to your long service leave which was also accumulated for retirement as a retirement benefit. When Strickland died on his 65th birthday, he had been working for goodness knows how long – 30, 40 years – in the Department and he'd never applied for any leave so he was entitled to all the accumulated sick leave, accumulated holiday leave, accumulated long service leave after his retirement. That amounted to 18 months, two years or more. Somebody had to sit down for days and work all that out. He had actually had a few days leave, but nothing to speak about. But you were never … you were too important in the job to take leave. I tended to follow his lead. I wasn't interested in holidays particularly. I used to do interstate trips; I did enough overseas trips to satisfy me; and didn't feel that I needed the leave so I accumulated quite a bit too. But later in life I began the get the lesson that leave was there for a reason. Then I used to take a bit of leave. In fact, towards the end of my time, they started to encourage us to take the leave, rather than accumulate it. But in the early years you were encouraged to accumulate it, and that was an enormous change really, that took place in the entitlement.

What was the usual amount of leave in the early days?

Two weeks – fortnight's leave.

For the year?

Yes, that's the one. Then it became three weeks. A few other little perks like that came in too; if you didn't know about you didn't get.

Things like leave loading and so on in the 1970s, holiday loading.

That's right.

Were you in a superannuation scheme?

Yes. I joined a superannuation scheme when it first came out when I was in Western Australia, whenever it was, the 1940s, and carried through to South Australia when I came.

It was transferred to South Australia?

Yes, but everything that South Australia was doing [was] in Western Australia.

Was it compulsory to have superannuation?

I thought it was when it first came in. There was no question. I mean you don't want to think about retirement when you're 21 years of age, you might say, but we joined and we joined because it was compulsory. Then I realised later on how important that was. Nearly everybody that joined under me took superannuation straight away.

[14:25] We've talked a bit about a few of your colleagues. I was just wondering if there were many women in the work force. I know it changed over time.

No, no. The women were typists, stenographers. On the technical side we had seed testers, they were girls. One woman came in as a [plant] pathologist (Mary Walker) and that was all throughout my entire career.

What about say the veterinary side? Were you aware of other ...?

Not very many during my term, no. Some women vets came in but they were after I'd retired.

Did it strike you as being odd?

No, that was normal and what you expected, yes. We didn't object when Mary Walker came in. But recruitment, for example at the technical level, generally speaking, was done by cadetship and the university students were mainly males. Those that were appointed as cadets while they were still at university were males, so that was the technical recruitment in the Department as they came through after their final university year, they were [appointed]. There were no vacancies, as such, but they were given a job because that was government policy to give them a job. But they were, with very few exceptions, all males.

Amongst the office staff, the female office staff, were they required to leave the job when they got married?

Early in the part, yes. But then it changed. I don't know when it changed or why it changed, but, yes, when they got married they left anyway.

So in that case there was a bit of a turnover of the female typists and the comptometrists and …?

Yes, there must have been a lot. But that's going back about 50 years now.

Some of it might seem a little bit on the mundane side, but it's tracking those sorts of changes in the working environment …

Yes.

… and people's attitudes towards them and so on. One of the things I was going to ask you about was what expectations were there about dress standards for example?

Well, there was – it was like a code of ethics. There was no standard, but nobody invented a new standard. Everybody was perfectly happy to dress well and comfortably ...

A suit and tie?

Yes, although, that relaxed a bit after a while. Ties went out and then suits went out, but they were still well dressed and respectably dressed. Yes, nobody … the fashions weren't there. I remember our Director once, this was Marshall Irving again, he appointed a typist, a women, when she came to work – say a 21-year-old, when she came, she came in black stockings. He wouldn't have it – sent her home. Either she changed or she went – she went. That's about the only example I can recall, ever, of that. That was more recent years; that would have been about 30 years ago.

What about going out to the field? You weren't in the office all the time. You were going out ...?

Go out in a sports shirt and a pair of pants. Those that were permanently out adopted a 'RM Williams' look but, generally speaking, no.

[20:00] Overalls or ...?

No, very little. They were left entirely to the staff – they were not supplied with any code nor with any clothes. The only ones that were … We used to have a big crowd, up to 70 fellows, on fruit fly, most summers, for a period of anything from one month to three or four months. So the unions took them over because they were ready for the unions to operate on. The rest of us were scattered and we very seldom heard from the unions. The fruit fly people got organised by the unions. I remember going down there one morning, at a quarter to eight in the morning because the unions were coming. In the early days, fruit fly was easy. You used to recruit people, used to send Departmental officers to work and you organised them into groups and told them the jobs to do and out they went and did it. Stripping fruit and spraying, yes they were the main jobs. Then there was the disposal of the fruit that was stripped. Then when the unions came in, they said, 'Right for every six people, every five or six people, you have to have a ganger'. That meant he wasn't a worker, he was a ganger just to organising that group. Then if anything went wrong, for example a dog got out of a house, we were criticised for not closing the gates and the unions came on to us, 'Don't you teach your blokes how to do their job?'. You don't have to have a special course to teach people how to close gates. I remember

putting on a red shirt and a pair of jeans and going down there at a quarter to eight in the morning and jumping on the back of one of our trucks that was taking our gangs out onto fruit fly work, just in competition with the union blokes who were doing just that. Going down to Glenside water tower, that was our fruit fly office, and the trucks used to line up there in Conyngham Street, up to 20 or 30 trucks, and the unions came down and started to, first of all, make them all join the union. As soon as we put them on as a casual, had to join the union. Then other factors like that, like the ganger, and they had to be trained in their jobs. They were simple jobs, requiring five minutes training, but they formalised it. Then they used to come into me at head office. I would be down there in my red shirt and jeans at 8 o'clock in the morning; then at half past nine they would come into my office and I'd be in my suit. They didn't realise they were talking to the same bloke. I did this as a sort of support to hold up the Department's side because they would have doubled the cost of fruit fly eradication. Unnecessarily, to my way of thinking, but that's just the way I was brought up.

These chaps doing the fruit fly eradication, were they provided with any special clothing ...?

Yes, that's right. With the backing of the unions they could demand protective clothing because they were using pesticides for sure and probably that's the right thing to do. But the Department wouldn't have done it without … I might say they needed the union support for the Department to do it, otherwise there was no thought otherwise of giving them safe protective clothing.

[24:20] What about the work the Department was involved in more generally: were they dealing with hazardous chemicals?

Not really, no. They were, but they weren't using them to any extent, no.

Or chemicals or anything of that type where you needed extra protection?

Not really, no, only on an experimental basis.

[24:45] I asked you, Tom, earlier about smoking in the workplace. Were there any expectations about work behaviours and work patterns? What time you'd clock on? Would you stop for smoko or smoke during the day, morning tea?

Not really. On a very casual basis only, very casual.

What sort of time were people expected to start work? 8 o'clock?

8 o'clock or 9 o'clock, yes. 9 o'clock for office workers, 8 o'clock for outside workers.

Was the office open at nine, as in dealing with the public and so on?

Yes.

9 to 5?

Yes, 9 to 5. Of course, we didn't have flexi-time so everybody was there 9 to 5. We had to get used to the flexi-time because you'd call for a stenographer and find she wasn't there. She'd been there for the last 10 years and all of a sudden she wasn't there.

Just a different timetable?

Well, you had to re-organise your work.

The implications from your comments, Tom, it's a more structured daily work routine in your earlier days then the '70s come along with these … seems a little bit more casual?

Well, this is it, which way you think is casual. Mine was structured in that you did your correspondence and you did your dictation and you did your telephoning, but you did it as it came, you'd call for assistance from the clerical staff as you needed it. Then all of sudden, when you found that the workers wouldn't necessarily be there at that time, you had to structure your work differently.

Did it cause you any consternation that ...?

Yes, yes. But only because you got used to one system and you had to have another. After a while it seemed to work alright, but it meant that if the Director wanted something done in a hurry, you couldn't always do it in a hurry because you didn't have the supporting staff, so everybody had to wait.

You start to operate by the panic button sort of thing?

Well, I don't know … You see, you had an occasional Director who wanted things done in a hurry and they're a damned nuisance, those sort of people. They had to realise that they didn't have full control any more, that the system took over. That probably wasn't a bad thing. But we were allowed to work independently. I don't know what it's like these days. Nobody interfered with my work at all, but horticulture was regarded as being a little bit apart. It required a certain specialised knowledge, which nobody else claimed to have. We never had a horticulturalist as a chief of the division, generally speaking, or as a director. They didn't interfere at all, which suited me.

[28:40] In the series of chats we've been having, Tom, you've been very positive about the Department, and you've talked about a lot of positive experiences in your working life in the Department and in the industry, agricultural industry, I was just wondering – trying to get some sort of overview from an insider's perspective, how the Department of Agriculture stood in regards to other departments in South Australia. We've talked about Agriculture Departments interstate. What was the status of the Ag. Department over time?

It had a very high status in the rural areas, but not much status in the city. Compared very well. It was a different type of department. The [status] department in the rural areas would have been the Lands Department, but the Lands Department operated as a real government department. They operated with legal rights, which they used. They organised irrigation and it was well organised: growers had to water when the water was available and availability was decided by the Lands Department, sometimes by the E&WS. The Department of Agriculture used to tend to side on the grower's side. If this irked the growers, they would join with the growers in trying to explain to the Lands Department that things ought to be a little bit

different. Lands Department didn't listen very much. They were a very powerful department. In a way the Department of Agriculture belonged very much to the growers and supported the growers and, in a way, almost opposed other government departments in that connection. In fact, one of our officers who is still around, up in the Riverland, he caused a lot of trouble by fighting a lone battle to try and improve the irrigation system. He was right, but the Lands Department didn't like it. He wanted all the water not put in trenches, because of the evaporation factor, but put into pipes. That was an expensive job to do, so they didn't want to do it. Of course, you wouldn't have anything else in South Australia except in pipes, but it took 20 years to get the change. It takes 25 years to get a change of that kind. I've found that on a number of occasions where officers have preached changes, it's 25 years before those changes are fully adopted.

That can happen in a lot of fields.

Yes, I'm sure it does.

It sounds from your comments there, Tom, that the Ag. Department was a bit stand-alone at times.

Yes it was. It was prepared to stand alone because it was a free department in an advisory capacity and the Ministers generally speaking, were very tolerant. Yes.

Well, we haven't spent much time talking about the Ministers, but we'll probably have to come back and have a look at topics of that nature at some future time.

Yes.

[32:48] **End of tape and of the recording sessions.**