AN INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY BERNARD O'NEIL WITH MR PETER BARROW OF WATTLE PARK, SOUTH AUSTRALIA ON THE 30TH OF MARCH 2004 IN REGARDS TO THE HISTORY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA.
[Square brackets incorporate corrections supplied by Peter Barrow in April 2007.]

Tape 1, Side A

[0:25] Peter an obvious point to start with is a little bit of biographical detail. Could you outline some of your details, full name ...

Yes. Full name is Peter McKee Barrow. McKee was my mother's maiden name. Born 1928, in Adelaide.

The suburb of Adelaide [was] …?

The hospital was in Adelaide [Rose Park]. Yes Adelaide, fair enough. Our home was in Netherby. In fact, I lived in Netherby in the same house right through until I got married which was 1953. I haven't had much shifting around as far as home life was concerned, we just lived in the one house. Netherby was a suburb that adjoined the Waite Institute. I went to Highgate School when I finally got to school. Highgate was somewhat north of the Waite Institute whereas Netherby was somewhat south so we walked through the Waite Institute just about every day to go to school. We knew a fair bit about what was going on from a schoolboy point of view anyway. I became interested in what was happening there. That plus family influences in that my father also thought it would be a good idea, I did Agricultural Science. That was the reason why I finished up where I did.

Schooling – pretty simple: Highgate Public School as it was called in those days was in the suburb of [Highgate] – seven years there. Then straight to Unley High School. I went as far as you could go at Unley High in those days and that was three years. It was a funny period. They allowed people to do the first three years of schooling in two years if they got through all right. They're called Year 8, 9 and 10 these days: they were jammed into two years. Then Year 11 was the year that you did what they called 'Leaving'. That was sufficient to qualify for university entrance. I was too young to go to university anyway after that, so I did another year in what was then called 'Leaving Honours', but Unley High didn't provide that so I went off to Adelaide High School for one year.

Were you much interested in the school. Were you a keen student?

Yes, I liked school. I was fairly keen and I enjoyed it. Played a bit of sport but nothing very much. They were good times, I enjoyed it.

Were you interested in going on to university by doing this extra year?

Yes. I had no doubt that that was where I wanted to go. I had already matriculated at Unley High School in Leaving year and then I was filling in time doing an extra year. I remember my father going and seeking information from a guy called Professor Prescott, who was the head of

the Waite Institute at that time, saying, 'What subjects should this lad do if he wants to go on to the university?'. The old prof. gave some useful advice like don't drop mathematics and do this and do that, then he said it would be a good idea if he took up German because a lot of scientific literature was written in German. So I did a year's German and I've never used it to this day. But nevertheless it was probably good training.

[5:10] Did you have much say in choosing your course, choosing this path?

I think so. I don't think my parents … My parents had a controlling influence, you've got to say that. My father took a particular interest in what I was going to do but he wouldn't have let me do anything that I wasn't keen to do. It worked out pretty well. In fact, he got me to apply for this cadetship. The Agriculture Department … Really there was a bit of a cut off point. We're talking about 1944 or thereabouts, the war was just coming to an end. Lots of the people in the Department had been in the services. The Department was probably in pretty poor shape I would have thought up until then because of the war. Then suddenly there were a number of chances to … There was money a bit more freely available for the government and that sort of thing and they decided to expand the Department.

The Faculty of Agricultural Science at the University of Adelaide had been pretty small, two or three graduates per year prior to the war. In the war years, a lot of youngsters piled into the university. We had around about 12 people graduating in my year in Agricultural Science which was the biggest year they'd ever had. It started to increase even beyond that in years subsequently, but at that time the government decided they were going to boost the size of the Agriculture Department and they created a cadetship scheme. I can't remember a lot of the details but I know three of us were appointed as Soil Conservation Cadets. We were seen as having a future career in what was just being created as the Soil Conservation Branch of the Department. Two of my mates were also Horticultural Cadets. They finished up in Tom Miller's Department in Horticulture, before Tom got there but it was eventually his branch of the Department. Cadetship was good in that it gave us a job. We were guaranteed work for three years after we graduated and that was the biggest thing as far as I was concerned. There was a bit of money but pretty small: it was $100 a year plus ...

$100 or pounds?

(laughs) Yes, £100. They might have helped with university fees if there were any in those days, I can't remember, and probably some books. We had access to the Department of Agriculture library and we had to work for the Department during the university breaks (during that cadetship period) if we could. The Faculty of Agricultural Science at the university were insisting on people getting some practical experience in farming. So, mostly, we were sent off to work on farms or at Roseworthy College during the university breaks, but when that wasn't

necessary the Department called us in and we did jobs, fairly low-level sort of stuff, mostly fieldwork. I remember working like a dog on the fruit fly outbreak. That might have been about 1947, the start of fruit fly in South Australia, and various other little jobs that we did for the Department but nothing very substantial.

[9:10] You were still young fellows then and learning.
That's right. I was surprised because most university students have grown up these days but we (me more so than most) we were just kids. I was 16 when I started and it was a four-year course so I was 20 when I finished.

You started your Agricultural Science degree in 1945?
1945, Bernie, yes.

1945 you started, OK.
The last year of the course was 1948 and the graduation was in something like May of the next year, 1949. But we cadets were appointed into positions in the Department straight after Christmas in that year, 1949. We went straight to work.

Just to clarify, putting a little bit of fine detail on things. You started your course in '45. Did you start the cadetship in the same year?
Yes.

So you had three years as a cadet?
Four years of cadet, '45, '46, '47, '48.

OK. Sorry, I thought you said it was a three-year cadetship?
No, it was a four-year cadetship and a four-year university course.

[10:40] That clarifies that. Just to go back a little bit, you were talking about getting practical experience on farms through your course. Did you have any experiences of ag., going off to farms for holidays or was it very much a sheltered life at Netherby so to speak?
No. I went up into the country a couple of times.

Did you have family with farms or anything?
No. Our family had no agricultural background. It's funny isn't it but that's the way it happened. I put it down to having lived and walked through the Waite Institute and my father to select that as a possible career. During the cadetship I had a great time up on a farm owned by a guy called Bert Kelly, who eventually became the Minister for the Navy and a few other things in the Commonwealth government. He was a practical farmer up at Tarlee. I went up and worked with him right through one Christmas. Another time I went up to work with a bloke at Parrakie, which is in the Murray Mallee, right through the harvest period just doing whatever we had to do which wasn't much – harvesting wheat, sowing bags and general sort of low-level agricultural work.

We did some of our practical experience at Roseworthy College. A fair bit of time available for non-academic work. The Christmas break was a couple of months or more, I don't know what it was but a fair bit and then a couple of other smaller breaks during the year. Roseworthy was a lot more organised. They really tried to make sure that we learnt how to milk cows and we learnt how to drive a team of horses and we learnt how to do this and that. It was reasonably organised student instruction that we got up there, nothing academic just practical work.

You took a shine to that?

Yes. I enjoyed it, no problems. It was good. I never had any interest in becoming a farmer, although eventually I did buy a little farm with my wife but I was near retirement then – just as a sort of weekender. I had no wish to become a farmer: I knew it wasn't for me.

[13:25] What did you see yourself doing then as an Ag. Science graduate? Just a small course ...

A good question. I thought I might work as a research person because of the little I knew about what happened at the Waite Institute, that's what that was there for. But I finished up starting my career in the Department in the Soil Conservation Branch. My job was an advisory job really. It's funny isn't it? A 20-year-old bloke with no farming experience is suddenly put on the road as an adviser to farmers on soil conservation but that's the way it goes.

Did you have someone guiding you when you were doing that?

Yes and no. We certainly had a few older blokes. This Soil Conservation Branch was pretty small but the Soil Conservator as he was called, the head of the Branch, was a fellow called Bob Herriot (who you've probably got some record of). A couple of the blokes that were ex-servicemen that came back into the Department at about that time were the people who taught us what we had to do – Bob Baker was one; Jack Blencowe was another one that I remember particularly well; Alan Beare – he was not an ex-serviceman, but he was a university graduate. They were the people that got us going and then there was a couple of these cadets who graduated the year before I did. They taught us what they'd found out during the first year of their work career. I started work in 1949, so they'd started work in 1948 and they'd found out a bit of what soil conservation was about. More than anything, we were just learning our trade. We were also trying to help farmers.

In that first year of my career I got put on to a job which was a survey of badly eroded farms in the Murray Mallee. Somebody in probably the Department of Lands (not our own Department) had created a list of badly eroded farms because that was straight after a historically very, very serious drought. Half of the Murray Mallee had blown away. Farms had been turned into just sand drift. We had this list and I went out and mapped farms that were on this list, talked to the owners and found out a bit about the history of what they had done and what they hoped they

could do with these badly eroded farms. Then the farmers were called into a 'meeting' with the Murray Mallee Soil Conservation Board, the idea being more than anything else to cheer these fellows up. They were financially in a lot of trouble after the drought and after the war and a bit down psychologically and we were trying to fix it up. In fact, the Murray Mallee came back very well in 5 or 10 years after that period. But that was a survey in the Murray Mallee.

The rest of that first year I was learning how to survey and lay out contour-banking schemes on paddocks for farmers. Sometimes a farmer would call us in to look at a badly eroded paddock. Mostly this was in the Mid North country – around Gladstone, Jamestown etc. – where the whole paddocks in some cases had just been washed out with flooding caused by over-cultivation and bad farming practices. One of the measures that was adopted was to build these contour banks. We'd be called in, perhaps to just look at a single paddock, sometimes to look at a whole farm. In that case we'd actually do a survey of the whole farm and drew up what we called a farm plan in those days. A far simpler sort of program than what's being done today – the government's Landcare Program – but, nevertheless, it was very useful. We worked on the basis of land use capability classes that had been devised by the United States soil conservation movement. It worked very well with us. We mapped these classes and then worked out where contour banks would be applicable according to the soil type and the slope, worked out where all the surplus water had to be disposed of into watercourses or wherever we could get rid of it. We were learning our trade really, just doing this work. We helped a lot of farmers, nevertheless, even though we were pretty young.

[19:20] A bit of learning on the job there for you. How novel was this soil conservation area, this soil conservation work?

In South Australia it was very novel. Bob Herriot, our boss, was appointed in 1940. He was a soil scientist and had been with the CSIRO until then for a few years. Then he was appointed by the State government to be the Soil Conservator. He worked on his own for a few years and then he gradually built up a tiny team of people – there was only about four or five of them until the first of these cadets came through. The terminology was new, of course. Soil conservation was only started in the United States as a discipline in the 1930s, 1934 or something saw the creation of the US soil conservation movement.

I remember at a later stage interviewing an old bloke called … Let's think: never mind, he was a Member of Parliament and he was the member for the area around Peterborough.

We can get his name later on, that's OK.

It wouldn't be hard to sort out who he was. I've forgotten for the time being now. But we were doing a bit of work on this farm of his. He said, 'You do realise that Tom Playford thinks that this soil conservation is mumbo jumbo?'. So we didn't have full support from some of the

people on high because Tom Playford was a very practical farmer in his own right in the Adelaide Hills. Anyway, the movement got underway and it was created as a separate section of the Department of Agriculture.

That leads to a question Peter about how the work of the Department and your own work, how readily was that accepted by the farmers? Did they see it as mumbo jumbo?

No, I don't think so. People that had a real problem with soil erosion could easily see how serious it was and they wanted to do something about it. Our first approach was to try and get them involved in some mechanical work rather than try and talk to them about how they had to alter their ways and they had to use the right fertilisers and they had to do that. That was a bit secondary, even though we recognised the importance of it. Our aim was to get access to a farm so that we could continually visit these people, build these contour banks and, in the process, develop better farming methods by a better scientific approach to fertiliser use and crop rotations and things like that. Basically, we were doing the mechanical work on these farms in the Mid North particularly. Contour banking and certain other procedures that were used in the Murray Mallee – not worth going into. Anyway, it was somewhat novel. The term was just coming into people's minds, soil conservation. But it was being accepted quite well, although you always found people that didn't want you! (laughs)

[23:40] I was going to ask what sort of challenging experiences you might have had where you felt as a young graduate …

I can remember the oldest farmer in the Murray Mallee and his son. I drove on to this place and said I was from the Department of Agriculture and I'd come to do a survey of his farm because his farm had been listed as one of the badly eroded farms in the Murray Mallee. This bloke called his son over and said, 'Hey Joe, come over here. There's this bloke who's going to show us how to get rid of the sand drift'. That was one of the most embarrassing things in my life because I was still very, very young. That was just one fellow who didn't appreciate being on the list I don't think, but mostly we got a great reception. When we worked on farms we always got to know the family. The farmers were great. They'd always take us inside and give us a meal. We never paid for meals, none of them. Perhaps it's just like all farmers in those days but when it was dinner time you'd be in with the family, you'd go in and sit down at the table with them. So we lived pretty well. We lived in hotels at night time, came home for the weekends, but not always – sometimes guys stayed away for a fortnight at a time but mostly for a week.

[25:15] Did you have a departmental vehicle for these …

Yes. Each one of us had a vehicle of sorts. I started work in a little Ford Prefect in my first year and that was very old. It was a pre-war car. It was a mess. Then during the time that I did this survey of badly eroded farms out in the Murray Mallee, they gave me an ex-Army buckboard I suppose. It was an old Chev. truck virtually: four-speed manual gear box; no slipping gears

from one to the other, it was double de-clutch for every gear change; and I learnt quick how to drive this wretched thing! (laughs) That was my car for about three or four years I drove that thing around. It was a mess. The wheel fell off once and they immediately scrapped all these ex-Army cars because I could have killed myself, but it didn't turn out too badly. One of the stud axles just broke off and [the wheel away from the vehicle]. That was the end of ex-Army cars. Cars were very hard to come by. This fellow Bob Herriot was a bit of an operator and he eventually made a deal with – probably it was called International Harvester Company. They were turning out a pretty heavy utility type vehicle and were using them in Australia. He got hold of about half-a-dozen of these things and we were using them. But there always was … We relied on cars daily to do our job.

So you had ready access to a vehicle?

I should say always, yes. I'm just trying to think whether there was ever a time – I don't think there was ever a time where lack of a vehicle was a big deal.

It's a bit of a status symbol though for then – a young stage, a new employee.

Yes. I don't know about status symbol but it was a great thrill because I didn't even know how to drive when I first started work. I was still at the pretty excited stage about driving around in a car for those first couple of years.

How did the Department teach you to drive? Just throw you the keys?

No, not really. We were talking earlier about the guy that was given a motorbike to go to Yorke Peninsula and certainly he was just given the once around the block and then away he went. It might have had a sidecar so that made it a bit less dangerous. In my case, we had to go to Gladstone the day that I first drove. The night before they took me out in this Ford Prefect and we drove around the suburbs a bit. Then on the day we went off, two of us went to Gladstone, each in separate cars and the bloke who could already drive led the way and led me out from the Government Garage (which used to be in Pirie Street) and around East Terrace and down Frome Road and out of the city and me being absolutely scared to death that I'd run into something and eventually we got to Gladstone. Driving's alright. Wasn't too bad after the first couple of days since you learn that you have in fact got control of the vehicle it's no great difficulty.

[28:55] You heading up north there, Peter, reminds me that you'd spent some time at Roseworthy College. How did you travel to the College?

Train, always train. Wartime kids – virtually none of us in our year had Army experience, we were too young. One fellow eventually bought an old, old car. He used to drive backwards and forwards to Roseworthy. Occasionally he took passengers. But nearly all the time we were going to Roseworthy, we used the train. That was for these vacation trips for practical experience, but during the first three years of our university course (back into the late '40s

now), we had to go to Roseworthy for two days a week. We spent most of our time during the agricultural university course at the Waite Institute. Sometimes in North Terrace to do certain things like at the Institute of Medical and Veterinary Science or in the Botany Department at the university. But two days a week at Roseworthy College for lectures and practical, agricultural type subjects. That was a train trip up and a train trip back. First year, we went up Thursday night and we came home straight after lunch on Saturday. That was a bit of an outing! (laughs)

[30:50] Thanks for clarifying that. We'll come back to your departmental experience, driving around Gladstone and those sorts of trips. How often did you stay out? How often were you going out and staying out there?

OK. I could have said every week but it wasn't quite.

Once a month?

We had conferences and meetings occasionally in Adelaide which kept us back. There's an organisation called the Agricultural Bureau of South Australia (which you probably know about) and they held a congress in Adelaide once a year and we always stayed and took part in that. When we were drawing up some of these farm plan maps, we might get a week in Adelaide drawing up maps and what have you. Probably three weeks out of four we were out from Monday to Friday. We didn't work Saturday morning at that stage. Saturday morning work cut out at about that time. I never worked officially on a Saturday morning but, of course, at times you do work unofficially. It sorted itself out.

How much contact did you have with the fellow members of the Soil Conservation Branch if you're out in the field as much as you were?

Most of us worked alone (with the farmers, of course), but occasionally we'd go out as a pair on certain jobs – special farm planning work, we sometimes did that with two people. We were always in the office early Monday morning. Sometimes we'd get back to the office before 5 o'clock on Friday afternoon. It was a fairly close-knit little group of people. We got a lot of help and had a lot of fun together.

[33:15] **End of Side A, Tape 1**
Tape 1, Side B

[0:20] Peter, you were just saying, leading up to 1953 ...

That's right, my position was called Soil Conservation Officer. That was a basic graduate's classification in the Public Service. 1953, in January, I got married and my wife and I went straight to live in Jamestown. I was thrown into a slightly more senior position where I was in charge of a couple of other Soil Conservation Officers in that area. Soon after I got there I was given the grand title of Soil Conservation Adviser, which was a slightly higher position in the hierarchy. We got up to the stage where there were four of us in that office so we had daily

contact with other soil conservation people. In that office in Jamestown there were always people like the Agriculture Adviser (who was a crop and pasture specialist) and the Stock Inspector (who looked after animal health matters), Dairy Adviser, there was a Weeds Inspector and probably a few other sundry bods that were in our Jamestown office. It was a slight change in career for me because I was looking after other people's work as well as my own. I spent two days a week in the office and the rest of the time I was out just doing the same work that I had done previously.

Was this a position you had to apply for, to move to Jamestown?

No. I seem to remember going to this Bob Herriot (my boss) and saying. 'I've just got engaged. I want to get married in January' and he said, 'That's great. You're going to Jamestown'. The government were in the process of starting to build (through the South Australian Housing Trust) two or three houses in Jamestown and we went to live in one of these wretched old – not prefabricated but very cheap – rural dwellings that the Housing Trust were putting up. We lived there for three or four years.

So was that not really a career choice for you? The decision was made!

The decision was made. It wasn't my choice, no. I didn't apply for the job. Then this question of promotion to the glorious title of Soil Conservation Adviser, I got a letter addressed to me as Peter Barrow, Soil Conservation Adviser. I rang up Adelaide and said, 'What's this?'. They said, 'Didn't you read the *Government Gazette*? You've just been promoted'. I didn't apply for that either. That came out of nowhere. I stayed at Jamestown until 1956. That was a fairly short spell, but I enjoyed it. That was the only period when I actually lived in the country for the whole of my career.

Then in 1956 I applied for a job which was something of a career change, still in the Department. It was to be the agronomist in a program that was called the Barley Improvement Program of South Australia which involved the Waite Institute, Roseworthy College and the Agriculture Department. It was the first of the programs that was actually funded by the industry; the industry provided money. The maltsters, the brewers and the farmers they put in enough money and they employed people like a plant breeder at the Waite Institute and myself as an agronomist and a bit of help for me (another field officer that worked with me). It gradually built up into quite a nice research program really.

I switched out of this advisory work into a research job at this stage and I was doing barley research work associated with selection of varieties of barley, testing varieties that were being bred by the plant breeders at the Waite Institute and other institutions around Australia. Doing jobs like testing fertiliser, testing rotations, testing a couple of field practices that were innovations in the barley-growing world. Whilst we were Research Officers, we were pretty

well involved in advisory work as well because it just came naturally. Any information that was worth handing around we had to pass on.

This Agricultural Bureau organisation that I mentioned earlier on, they held monthly meetings ... Just about every town in the agricultural areas of South Australia had a branch of this Agricultural Bureau. It was under the auspices of the Department of Agriculture in a way, although its formation back in the 1800s had preceded the creation of the Agriculture Department. We used to go to meetings. They were always at night times. We talked at hundreds of these meetings at night time, unpaid, up till all hours of the night after having done a days work. It was tough from that point of view but really very valuable as a contact. Both as a Soil Conservation Officer in the earlier days and then as this Barley Agronomist, I used to do a terrible lot of talking at these Agricultural Bureau meetings. We organised field days every now and again to get farmers to come in and see what was going on in our research programs.

You even talked about the work you were doing and how it might help farmers?

Yes. Sometimes they'd ask you to talk on a specific subject. Mostly we'd chose a subject. I remember my first year at Jamestown, I gave the same talk to every Bureau I went to as a first visit. It was all about the effect of heavy rain drop splashes damaging the surface of the soil if it was left unprotected in any way. It was a major cause of soil erosion in the higher rainfall regions of the State and this was a pitch we made to kind of get people interested in providing better protection for their soils. Then after that I talked on whatever seemed to be the appropriate subject. Dream up something and talk to these folk. If they hadn't asked for something, they'd just ask for Joe Blow by name then you'd go along and talk about anything you wanted to. There was always stuff. Once you get into a job there's always things that are worth talking about.

[8:40] Why did you make that change from the soil conservation to the agronomist's position?

It's hard to say. Probably after four years at Jamestown, we thought it might be nice to get out of Jamestown. This was the first vacant position that attracted me in any way and I jumped at it. This new barley agronomist job, it was a new field of work in the Department. The Department had not a had a research worker in that field until then. I saw it as a chance to just broaden out my experience in the agricultural world.

Was there a future if you'd remained in soil conservation? Not necessarily in Jamestown. Or were you just hankering for a bit of a change?

I might have had in the back of my mind that the future would be better if I got out of Jamestown, yes. People I worked with in Jamestown remained as advisers – that was their title. Occasionally one or two of them became senior advisers, slightly further up the tree. One of the blokes that worked with me in Jamestown then (and that's going back a long way) still lives in

Jamestown. He retired from his job in Jamestown and lived on in the town and he was perfectly happy. He was a very important man in the order of things but he didn't gain great heights in the hierarchy of the Department and he didn't want to either. Everyone's different.

Were you keen to advance your career?

I was pretty unsophisticated in those terms but people used to talk about promotion and I thought it was the right thing to do! So I applied for jobs that I thought were going to further my career and I did change jobs quite a bit over the years.

As you're aware, it's a very hierarchical structure and you do a certain number of years at a certain level and then you go to the next level.

Yes, that's right. Quite often the chance into the next level is not in your own field of work so you're chopping and changing around a bit.

What sort of opportunities did you think might open up with the barley work in coming back to Adelaide?

Came back to Adelaide. We didn't have any money. We never saved any money at Jamestown. It was just the way things were. Salaries weren't too high: I started work on £470 a year, so there's not a great scope for saving money. We had to start up buying furniture and car and one thing and another. Came back to Adelaide, lived in a Housing Trust house for seven years at Northfield, built our own house at Wattle Park, shifted into that in 1962 and we are in that till this day, this house here. So I haven't experienced living in too many homes apart from jaunts overseas on jobs. I only ever lived at Netherby in one house, Jamestown in one house, Northfield in a Trust house and then Wattle Park where we've been for about 43 or 44 years.

[13:00] How long was I in the barley job? I was a Barley Agronomist for 4 years and the same thing happened – I got itchy feet and was looking around. The job as Barley Agronomist was in a different branch of the Department. There was a branch known as the Agronomy Branch of the Department and that was the branch that had the most important of our advisory services in the Department. The Agricultural Advisers were all part of that branch, plus a fairly decent research structure and a certain amount of regulatory work as well. At the time I became Barley Agronomist, I was then a member of the Agronomy Branch. Lex Walker was soon to become the Chief Agronomist and head of that branch. Prior to that, the time that I joined it, there was a fellow called Len Cook, quite an old officer in the Department, he was the Chief Agronomist. Then Lex Walker left his job at the Waite Institute and became Chief Agronomist in the Department. That was a significant move for him and it was very, very good for the Department because Walker was quite a brilliant man. He brought a lot to the Department.

Had you got to know people in the barley areas with your research work?

Yes. It was terrific because this Barley Improvement Program started in South Australia – we were the barley growing State mainly – then it expanded into some of the other States and they

set up an Australia-wide Barley Improvement Research Committee and a local South Australian Barley Research Committee. We served that committee. I don't know whether I was ever a member of them, I don't think so, but we were the officers of that committee to do the work. We were required to attend meetings, we got to know people. The people that were in those committees were the likes of CSIRO scientists, university scientists (both at the Waite Institute and in other State universities), Departments of Agriculture all around Australia (or wherever they grow barley – Victoria, Western Australia and New South Wales) and the malting industry. There were big names in the likes of Carlton United. They thought it was pretty important to improve the type of barley that they were getting to make their beer. They were right into it with big money. And top blokes out of the organisations. And the malting industry, which was an old, old industry in Australia, but it was pretty well organised and they could see the need for improvement in barley varieties and barley-growing technology to get the best malt that they could get. We got to know those people very, very well. We really got into the industry through this Barley Improvement Program. It was a good period from the point of view of getting to know what that part of the world was like.

That went on until 1960 and a job came up which was closely allied to what I had been doing in the Agronomy Branch. It was to take some control … slightly more senior area of control over agronomy research in general. The title of the job I applied for was Senior Research Officer (Agronomy). It was a long-established job in the Department at that stage and it became vacant. I stayed in that for another four years. From then on, I'd have to say I became an administrator.

[18:15] Out of research?

Vaguely. In a small way I clung onto a couple of little research programs but not enough to do anything worthwhile really. I was looking after other people's research in that job. That was in Adelaide until 1962 when the Department built its research laboratories at Northfield. Just going into the history of that – the Hospitals Department owned a farm. It was the Northfield Mental Hospital who owned a pretty decent slab of land at Northfield and in their wisdom the hospitals people decided that farm work was no longer suitable for the mentally impaired people that were in the hospital there so it became available and our Department grabbed the chance to get hold of this land and we established quite a decent research centre there. We designed it and we saw to the building of it. We had a main, big central part which contained most of the research people who were in Adelaide in the likes of entomology, horticulture, agricultural production, crop production, pasture production and the likes. Then there was a smaller unit which was the Dairy Research Centre. John Radcliffe may have been the first – no he wasn't, he was appointed as a research officer, that's right. He wasn't in charge of it until later on. John Feagan was the first guy in charge of that. I've go an idea that John Feagan only

operated from Head Office, but nevertheless he was in charge of this subsidiary research organisation out there at Northfield.

There was a very nice Pig Research Unit which gradually developed over the years. I'm trying to think of what else there was out there – there was another area I can't remember quite what it was down there. It was nowhere near as big as the Pig Research Unit or the Dairy Research Unit. Anyway, we saw to the building of that and in 1962 we moved in. I was designated as officer-in-charge of the main building. It was a filler job in that it didn't have a title. The Director of Agriculture was then a fellow called Geoff Strickland and he grabbed me one day and he said, 'You'll have to call yourself the officer-in-charge'. I was still just the Senior Research Officer in the Department, no change in title, no change in salary but I was supposed to run the administration of this place. We shifted out there. We had new laboratories. It was a good time really. I was the Senior Officer out there for a couple of years.

Peter, had you been involved in planning Northfield, the facilities or what you might need?

Yes, I was involved in planning. We drew plan after plan after plan. I wasn't involved at a high level. I helped to design the structures of some of the agronomy-type laboratories. I did the original survey of the farm with a fellow called Graham Itzerott. Does that name mean anything to you? [Bernie nods] He was the Chief Dairy Officer. He was John Feagan's boss and John Radcliffe's boss. He and I did the survey of the place and made a report saying that this part ought to be a dairy research farm; this part out to be an agronomy research farm; if you're going to build laboratories they ought to be there because of the soil types and one thing and another. So it was reasonably important work to set that up. Then we moved in.

You were consolidating the Department out there and bringing together ...

We brought together research groups. The Department has (as you know) three main areas of work – research, advisory and regulatory. Quite a lot of regulatory work involving stock inspection and bee inspectors and agricultural chemicals inspectors and all sorts of things, disease inspectors.

Was there any notion of you bringing the whole Department?

The whole Department? Absolutely. For some years we had a strong move to try and get the whole Department shifted to Northfield. We actually designed a building. When I say we, I didn't; I was pretty new in Adelaide at the time. That would have been in the late '50s, early '60s. Anyway, a lot of work was put together to do a plan which would involve building a biggish place to house the whole of the Department. The homework was done; the funds were found; and it went to Cabinet for final approval and something happened. I forget what it was now and Cabinet knocked it back and said no, it's not appropriate to spend that much money at this time. It fell through, thankfully, because eventually the Department shifted out to the Waite

Institute campus and that was an extremely significant move. It was taking place at about the time I retired but, nevertheless, it was very, very important. It set us back 20 years but what's out at the Waite Institute, on the Waite Campus now is just a very, very good place.

[25.20] Northfield would have been good for you, of course, personally: you were living out there.

No. It's about the time I shifted away from Northfield. I lived in a house which was three houses away from the boundary of the Northfield property and I shifted away from there in 1962 to come and live here in Wattle Park. That was the time when I shifted my office from Adelaide out to Northfield so I was driving between here, Wattle Park and Northfield every day to go to work. It was good to be in a brand new outfit, they were all people that we worked with one way or another but we broadened our interests out a bit. We still had our branch structure but there were about three or four different branches were involved in research work out there. There was a certain amount of cooperation but mostly they were doing their own thing.

As officer-in-charge, what was involved there? Making sure the place runs smoothly?

It wasn't much of a job. As I said before, it didn't have a title and didn't have any salary attached to it. Someone had to be in charge and that was me. We had a typing staff/clerical staff and they were my folk and just looked after their day-to-day activities which wasn't any great shakes. I was still the Senior Research Officer for the Agronomy Branch: my title was Senior Research Officer (Agronomy). I was in charge of my own Agronomy Research Officers out there at that time but I didn't have any technical control over the entomologists and the horticultural officers and the various other people, plant pathologists. They did their own thing.

In terms of the people Peter, about your own people and the rest at Northfield, did you get any training or advice or coaching on how to manage people and how to supervise staff?

Yes. To outline what we did do, the Department tried to run management courses. We went into residence at Roseworthy College at one stage for some kind of a management course. I was sent off to a Commonwealth Public Service inspectors middle management training course which was held up at Arbury Park in the [Adelaide] Hills. We were there for a fortnight and that was supposed to be good for us. I was the only State public servant in that, the rest of them were all Commonwealth officers but that was all fairly serious stuff and I gained a bit from it.

Is that something that you expressed interest in or were you selected for that?

Came out of nowhere. They just said, 'You better go'. There was some talk of the State … Probably the State government owned the property up there if I remember correctly and so they said, 'If you're going to hold your conference here, you Commonwealth people, you better employ at least one State Officer as well', so probably that's how that came about. No, I didn't apply for it or anything. It was something that they decided I ought to go to.

Did you find management as an area appealing? Did you see it opening up as a career?

I had realised at that stage that that was my future. I don't think I was any great shakes as a manager but it became what I did. It's a good field to be in, in as much as you had to maintain a reasonable grasp on the scientific aspects of our discipline, as well as the people management side of it. It was quite pleasant work really, although I did get tired of it towards the end which is even another 20 years on.

We haven't quite gotten to that yet! You were dealing with people, you were dealing with budgets, finances, facilities and you've got a lot of balls juggling in the air.

Yes. There was plenty of lower level administrative work. We weren't hot shots in any way at all, we just used to look after the people and make sure they had enough money and enough equipment and that they got permission to do overseas trips. We helped them apply for jobs and pointed them in the right direction here, there and everywhere. But people management is not a bad field to be in, I enjoyed it. That was Northfield.

Were you going back and forth from Northfield to the city during your time there?

Absolutely, I was but for a special reason. My boss was a fellow called Frank Pearson who had replaced Lex Walker. Let me think why that would have been? Anyway, the Chief Agronomist was this Frank Pearson who was a fairly sick fellow at that stage. He was an ex-Army bloke. He'd been blown up in Tobruk during the war and he never fully recovered. He was a brilliant bloke but, physically, he had his problems because of the war. He got quite sick during that time and he had extended periods of sick leave. I just took over his job as best I could. I was running Northfield and I was looking after Frank's office in Adelaide as well and I was driving backwards and forwards pretty well everyday for reasonably long periods during a couple of years there. That was probably middle '60s, somewhere about there anyway. I just forget the dates. That was a further little bit of experience, I'd forgotten about it. I was acting, unpaid as head of a branch of the Department at that stage while this Frank Pearson was sick. Just holding it together mind you because I still had a job to do at Northfield.

So you were dividing your time between the city and Northfield?

Yes. Not in any structured way. I'd try and go in once a day or something like that and that was about it. But anyway, soon after then …

[33:25] **End of Side B, Tape 1**
Tape 2, Side A

[0:15] Peter, perhaps we'll pick up more of a chronological account of the career.

OK. Around about 1966 I was still at Northfield. I'd been in charge of the laboratory up there for a couple of years. Then I shifted back to Adelaide and it was something of a career change for me. Instead of being the Senior Research Officer in Agronomy, I became the Principal

Research Officer in Agronomy. I was stationed in Head Office. It was really similar work except a bit higher up the ladder looking after research officers. I did that for a couple of years.

Were these a lot of the research officers who'd come through the Extension Grant Scheme? Were you dealing with those sorts of people?

Yes, we had a few, yes that's right. The Department was never very interested in where they came from – but you're talking about the [Commonwealth Extension Services Grant]?

Yes.

That was a huge and important source of money for us. It didn't make any difference to the type of person that we employed. We were just allowed to create … We had to put in an annual budget but the Commonwealth were very good. As long as we were doing something to further the development of good agricultural practices they were happy. So we were allowed to … It was called the [Commonwealth Extension Services Grant] but, in fact, it employed quite a lot of research people as well. Some of the guys that I worked with in the Agronomy Branch were employed under that grant.

1966 – I shifted at that stage back into Head Office into a job called … Let me think: it was at that stage that I was appointed Principal Research Officer in Agronomy. That was a bit of a lift up the ladder, a little bit higher pay. It was fairly strenuous work. I got that job because one of the chaps had retired or had gone on to something a bit better somewhere. I only did that work for two years and then I changed tack and applied for a job as what they called Principal Agronomist. I was previously Principal Research Officer and I made a horizontal move to Principal Agronomist, which was in charge of the Advisory Services in that same branch. People tried to talk me out of it. Lex Walker was one. He said, 'What do you want to do this for?'. Eventually he came to me and said, 'Perhaps it's not a bad idea'. I only wanted to do it because it was another aspect of the work that was going to be good for me, providing that I could get into it. So I held down that job.

What was the difference between the two – Principal Research and Principal Agronomist?

OK. One was in charge of the research staff but the Principal Agronomist was in charge of the advisory staff, so it was as different as chalk and cheese really in terms of the people that we were looking after, they were a different group of people.

So you were back out dealing with farmers and industry people?

No I wasn't, but the fellows that worked with me were. We had (as you probably know full well) a heap of District Agricultural Advisers and various other sundry specialist officers scattered around the countryside. I was looking after that. I was there for four years by the looks of the bit of paper that I've got in front of me now! I'm a bit hazy about how I would have filled out those four years. I was mainly helping the Chief Agronomist to do his job and

helped look after this third team of officers. Yes, I was probably in charge of this small group of regulatory officers like Weeds Inspectors and those sort of people but only in a not very structured way really. There was still a senior weeds man, possibly Arthur Tideman at that stage, I can't quite remember. We had those people in our branch.

Were you working in ...

I was back in Head Office, which at that stage was in Gawler Place. Then it was a job that led after four years straight into a vacancy which was the vacancy of the Chief Agronomist. The Chief Agronomist when I joined had been this Len Cook (who I mentioned), finest old agronomist from the 1920s or earlier, Lex Walker, Newton Tiver briefly and then this Frank Pearson who I mentioned previously. Frank retired and that was my job really. I walked straight into the job of Chief Agronomist. It was the head of the branch, head of the Agronomy Branch. I've got to say that I occupied that job for a matter of months. Most of that time I spent on a little committee that the new Director of Agriculture had set up.

[7:25] The new Director then was Marshall Irving who's come in to your notes quite freely I would have guessed by now. Marshall wanted to change some of the hierarchical structure at the top of the Department and he put me on to a job with a fellow from the Public Service Commissioner's Office to try to devise a management structure, just at the top. Previously there was Director-General (excuse the hand movements but I can't talk without doing that) – there was the Director of Agriculture and the Secretary to the Department. Those two poor sods had to do everything. They devised the financial structure of the Department; they made appointments; they interviewed staff; they did the lot. Marshall Irving wanted to broaden that out near the top and this little group of two, myself and this fellow from the Public Service Commissioner's Office, worked on it for a matter of months. We devised a scheme which was finally accepted by the government for the creation of Assistant Directors positions. They created the three jobs. It's amazing really that, in fact, there are now five blokes who are doing the work that previously two fellows used to do, but that's life. Those three positions were (if I can get this right) Assistant Director of Agriculture, Administration. He looked after the clerical side and the management stuff of the Department, all of the money side of things, accounts. There was an Assistant Director, Technical and Industry. He was mainly concerned with the contacts that the Department had with the industry itself. It was the likes of, to some extent for example, some weed control, some other legal or administrative matters, contact with industry in relation to funding, funding from industry sources which were becoming very important at that stage. The third one, if I can remember, was an Assistant Director who was in charge of the real stuff. I forget what they called him at that stage. I walked straight into the job – not simply but after a couple of appeals which I managed to win – as Assistant Director, Technical and Industry. It was a weird job really. I don't suppose I was very good at it but I was in it at that

stage. I guess that a couple of people in the Department wanted me to get into this area. I didn't enjoy it all that much I don't suppose. Perhaps I was getting to the stage where I was … I was no big shot administrator naturally, whereas this was a reasonably senior job in the organisation, second in line (with a group of other people) to the Director-General of Agriculture.

About when was that Peter?

That happened in 1970. No it didn't; it happened in 1971.

[11:45] You mentioned Marshall Irving had got you to do this review. What was involved in that? Were you out looking at other models in other departments or interstate?

Yes. We probably went interstate, I can't remember for sure, but certainly we looked at the structures not only in Agriculture Departments but in other government departments. This fellow from the Public Service Commissioner's Office was a lot more important than what I was in terms of this. That was his job whereas I was just a representative of the Department to make sure that we had a bit of an understanding of our side of it. We looked at the organisation structures in private industry a little bit and in other government departments and interstate Agriculture Departments. They were all enjoying the hierarchical structure which had a few more people at the top. It seemed to be the way reorganisations always went. There was never any attempt in those days to try and cut down an organisation. Any change always seemed to lead to the appointment of more senior staff, which is not the way they go these days.

As you pointed out, Marshall Irving was Director and there wasn't really a Deputy Director.

No, there was no deputy. The secretary was the deputy. A very important job. Probably didn't get paid all that much either. He was an accountant by trade and a very good administrator as it turned out. After this reorganisation that job as secretary disappeared. He retired. The new Assistant Director, Administration (I think they called him) was a new appointment, came from another government department and he came and took over that secretary's job. Lex Walker became the most important of these three Deputy Directors. He was in charge of departmental work, as a direct assistant to Marshall Irving. And I was in this dreadful job as Assistant Director, Technical and Industry looking after the drafting of legislation, looking after all the odds and sods that cropped up. A lot of people wondered what I was doing and I felt a bit the same, (laughs) out of sorts some times! It was the structure that we'd devised and that was it.

That's why I was interested in your comments because you had been integral to devising this structure.

That's right. Marshall Irving as Director-General had it in his mind that he wanted somebody doing this work. His ideas prevailed in that he talked to this group of two of us – there's myself and this fellow from the Public Service Board – saying that's what he would like to have, another assistant. He was sick of handling industry matters himself, the outside industry

matters. The Farmers' Federation, which wasn't called that in those days, and lobbies of one sort or another who wanted legislation changed and this and that, so he wanted someone who could take a bit of the flak and that was what I did.

[15:40] Was that the first time that you worked closely with Marshall Irving? What sort of contact had you had with him?

Just about none. I knew the previous Director of Agriculture fairly well, that was Geoff Strickland because he was a primary industry man. He had been the Chief of the Horticultural Branch, Chief Horticulturalist, and then he became the Director of Agriculture. When he retired – he died. When he died Marshall Irving took over. Marshall was a vet., as you know – perhaps you don't know – but anyway Marshall was a veterinary officer. He came into the Department as head of one of the animal production branches, the branch that looked after animal health matters rather than animal production matters and then he became the Director of Agriculture. During all that time I had just about no contact with him except socially – we got to know one and other at functions here and there. I was a bit of a stranger to him. We got on pretty well. He was getting old then and actually went through a period when he was not well enough to work full-time. This is getting into the late '60s – correction, getting into the mid '70s – and there were periods when all of us had a go at doing his job while he was away on sick leave. Lex Walker was an Acting Director of Agriculture. I was an Acting Director of Agriculture. Later on Peter Trumble became an Acting Director of Agriculture for a fairly long time and he did a super job, he was good. Then Marshall Irving retired. It was the beginning of a new era in the Department. It would have been 1976. He was replaced by Jim McColl who came out of nowhere as far as I was concerned. We couldn't believe it. Always, for as long as we'd known the Department, there was a bloke near the top who moved up into that job. We thought that was just going to go on forever, but in fact the whole world was changing. Jim was a hotshot. He was a good operator. He came from Victoria where he'd had a couple of pretty worthwhile jobs. He took over the Department and he pulled it into shape. He did a good job.

[19.15] You mentioned the three of you having had stints as Acting Directors. Would you personally have been interested in being Director if the opportunity had come up?

Yes, I applied for it. Both Lex and I applied for it, not at the time that Jim was appointed. Let me try and work out what happened. They created a job. There was some job that we applied for (both Lex and I) and in the advertisement it said, 'It is anticipated that this person will be appointed as the Director-General of Agriculture on the retirement of Marshall Irving', or something like that. We applied and we were the only two applicants. The Public Service Commissioner came and sat us down and he said, 'We don't want either of you'. So that position lapsed and then we went on helping to run the Department of course and then Jim was appointed. He came from overseas with far better ideas about how to set things up than what either Lex or I had really, he was a good operator. I'm pretty sure it was 1976.

So you were in a state of limbo there for a while with Marshall Irving being crook.

Not good, not good at all. I remember the time they came in and said, 'We'd like you to act for Marshall' during this particular period of illness. I said, 'Look, there's better blokes than me'. They said, 'No we want you to do it'. They were looking at us. They had a pretty good idea that neither Lex nor I … Lex was probably getting on in age anyway and I probably didn't have what it took. We didn't get the job. Up until then we had been through a reasonably tough time with Marshall being sick. I remember now – Peter Trumble had become the Assistant Director of Administration, probably on the retirement of the fellow who originally got that job. Peter did a marvellous job. He just about ran the Department for a good long time while Marshall was sick although, as I say, a couple of us had a bit of a go at it as well.

[22:00] Just backtracking Peter before we get into this mid '70s period. Did Marshall Irving explain to you at any time why you had been selected to do this review to set up the new administrative structure? It came out of the blue to you from the sounds of it.

It came out of the blue but I had an inkling straight away that they were going to appoint me to a senior job. It was a bit hard to believe at the time but I played along with it. Marshall had got an idea that I was a bit of a hotshot. I wasn't, but I wasn't going to turn him off because it was my future and I was happy to go along with it. Marshall was in touch with all the other people in the Department and the likes of Lex who was always very good to me and probably had said that I was ready for a promotion.

It's interesting that he selected you to be part of this review process and not someone like Lex or Peter Trumble.

Yes. I was down the line a bit, that's right but I was still young. At that stage I was the oldest of the post-war graduates. There was … It was real enough, it wasn't big but there was a break between me as the most senior one of that mob that came out of university after the war, and the people who had been in the war or had been members of the Department before the war. We were the new breed, whereas Lex wasn't quite. Lex was older again. Lex was a lecturer of ours while we were at university.

[24:10] Talking more generally about the Department, Peter, at that time, we're thinking here the early '70s with Marshall Irving being crook, what was the atmosphere like in the Department? Had it lost its way? Was it a vibrant place? Do you have a feel for what was going on there?

The people that were doing the real work were just going on doing what they were doing. Maybe there was a feeling that organisational change had to be done. The Public Service Board changed their tack. They were all for reviews and reorganisations or one thing or another at that time. It seemed to me that the Public Service was going a bit haywire. There was a period of great interest in structures, whereas up until then the structure just grew. As more people were appointed they were fitted into various slots in the structure. The Public Service Board in all departments was changing things around quite a lot. Whole chunks of departments were being

taken out of one department and put into another department and that sort of thing although I can't remember it happening to us like that at that time.

The big thing in that period is the Callaghan Report into the Department.

Yes, I'd forgotten all about that. Marshall would have instituted that. At least he would have been influenced by Peter Trumble in getting that done. Callaghan was well retired at that stage. He was pretty old, I guess he was 70-ish, might have been more, but he was brilliant. I'd forgotten all about that. That went on for a long time and we people who were in what had then become called the Executive of the Department – Marshall Irving, Peter Trumble, Lex Walker and myself and another bloke called Matthews – Callaghan worked through us fairly well, but he also did investigations through other people in the Department and looked at other organisational structures. How he did it I don't really know. That was a pretty influential report.

The story ('cause we're going to come back to that report), there's a story that the report was initiated partly in response to a government query as to the actual need for a Department of Agriculture. Have you heard that said at all?

It was gone before I ever knew, I had forgotten about it. The big move afoot at this stage was regionalisation. It was just starting to bubble over in terms of thinking. Previously everything had been run from Head Office. You'd go down the office at say Mt Gambier and there's a Dairy Research Officer and his boss was in Adelaide; and there was a Bee Inspector, let's say, and his boss was in Adelaide; there was a Wool Adviser and his boss was in Adelaide; and so on and so forth. The idea was to create pretty important regional offices. You must have got a pretty good run down on this if you've interviewed Peter Trumble in that development. I can't pin down exactly when it really happened.

[28:35] It was really when Jim McColl came along.

It was in Jim's time but it had been bubbling over before then and I dare say it was part of the Callaghan report, but I'm pretty hazy about the Callaghan Report I'm sorry. It must have been one of Callaghan's recommendations.

It was one of his recommendations. I was just wondering how much involvement you had in that report? It sort of washed over.

It washed over me, it has indeed. We used to meet pretty often during that time. I don't know how long, but it seemed to go on for a long time, maybe a year. We used to see a fair bit of him. But I didn't make too much of a contribution towards it, I can't remember.

This was also at the time when Marshall Irving was … taking sick leave and so on?

Probably yes. I'm a bit hazy about the actual date of Callaghan's work. It had to be early '70s, the first half of the '70s.

[29:55] It's hard to follow some of the Department's activities at this time because it's also when …

No reports.

… no annual reports were being issued. They stopped in about ’72.
Yes, that’s right. It’s a pity, but there you go.

Do you remember that at all?
I was aware of the fact. We were all very pleased about it actually. (laughs)

You didn’t have to prepare them!
We didn’t have to take part in them.

Was there any reason why they stopped?
There was a bit of an understanding that it was a waste of time: no-one ever read them.

But didn’t you have to present them to Parliament?
Yes. They were presented to Parliament, but why Parliament didn’t come down on us like a ton of bricks I don’t know but they didn’t and we got away with it. That’s what it amounted to.

Then it became habit not to produce one!
Yes.

[30:55] So we’ve got you up to the mid ’70s.
Mid ’70s yes. Jim McColl came in ’76.

’76
I was still in this job as Assistant Director of Agriculture, Technical and Industry. For some reason or other, I seemed to get a bit side tracked into looking after more the plant industry matters of the Department. I became more involved in the Pest Plants Commission and at that stage also the Animal, Pest Animals Group who had been in the Lands Department came and joined us and I seemed to become involved with them.

Was that just a straight transfer?
I can’t remember. I can’t remember about an appointment, there may have been and I’m sorry I can’t quite remember it. It’s available if it’s of any importance but I don’t think it is. It just didn’t seem to be a very important time. I looked upon the arrival of Jim as the important day and a lot of things started to happen about that time.

There were a couple of big things there, so perhaps we should put pause on for a moment.

[32:40] **End of Side A, Tape 2**
Tape 3, Side A – session of 13 April 2004

[0:20] Peter we’ll perhaps kick off with a little bit of the overseas experiences for yourself and for the Department. Perhaps if you could just, from your perspective, trace the origins of the overseas work.
As far as I was concerned it was a bit of a watershed to get involved in it. It was exciting, of course, but it was a bit of a curse in that we all had our jobs back here all the time that we were

chasing around overseas. We got a letter from the Libyan government, it was the Premier of South Australia [Don Dunstan] who got a letter saying, in English, 'We have decided to create a demonstration farm to investigate and to demonstrate Australian methods of dryland farming and we want this farm to be run by the South Australian government'. I must have had a bad day – somebody said, 'You'd better go to Libya', so I went off to Libya. I had never been outside of Australia before, so it was the first overseas trip that I ever went on. It was an experience. I was there for a few weeks and we put together the bare bones of a project. We didn't use the word project. Strangely enough, that word hadn't come into the language. We just went there to try and see if there was some way that we could help them. Even then the administrative procedure was for the government to give some of our staff leave without pay so they could go over there and they were paid by the Libyan government, and we did set up this farm.

This would have been ...?

1974 and we would have had seven people there the whole of that time, it was seven. There was a soils bloke; there was a livestock bloke; there was a cropping bloke; there was an officer-in-charge. Some of them were married, of course, they took their wives. I can't remember whether any kids went. But while it was going on it was fine. The Libyan government were trying to establish farms for their own settlers on this beautiful piece of flat country in the area called Jebel Akhdar, a green mountain area which is near Benghazi. It had good rainfall. Very, very similar to South Australia, so it was quite appropriate for us to be there. They gave us 1000 ha whereas these local farmers were going to get about 150 ha or less, so there were some difficulties in it. We were trying to just treat it as an Australian farm. The team that we sent over, they farm planned the whole area; they decided where they were going to put fences. Fences were a bit strange to the Libyans. They didn't understand fences but we fenced it off and treated it like our own farm. It was pretty successful. It ran for four or five years – no, more than that probably. There was a turnover of staff and it probably went until about 1979 or 1980. There was an organisation in South Australia called the South Australian Seed Growers Cooperative and they were there ahead of us. Also machinery manufacturers were in Libya ahead of us – Horwood Bagshaw especially, but John Shearer and Co. – and they were trying to sell Australian agricultural machinery. When this idea came through the Premier's Office, Don Dunstan just jumped at it and said, 'We've got to be in that'. The Labor government was probably running out of steam by about that time, I'm not sure. They were glad to get anything that was going to look pretty good, so they supported the establishment of this project.

[4:55] Had it come out of the blue in the sense of other States or other countries around the world being interested and South Australia going in as a tenderer or a competitor or something?

No, no we were on our own. There was no tendering. There was no nothing. They just told us that they wanted to get started and our government said, 'We'd like to be involved'. We didn't provide much in the way of back-up from the point of view of machinery or housing or anything. We just let these fellows go and the Libyan government did the rest. In terms of modern consultancy programs it was a quite a primitive arrangement really.

Had the approach come from outside to the Department, to the government?

They were all our own staff that went.

Yes, but the approach's being made from Libya rather than the Department or the government going out to seek …?

Absolutely, yes. One of our chaps had been on a tour. He was a seed production expert. On his way home he passed through Algeria and Tunisia and Libya. We think he must have sowed the seed of this thing in the minds of some of the senior people in Libya while he was there, because this thing just came out of the blue as far as we were concerned. Anyway, it worked.

The Department had limited overseas experience to this point.

Only these individual experiences of people who had been to India and to some tropical countries. We didn't have much in the way of the overseas experience at that stage. All the blokes who went there were beginners as far as working overseas was concerned. They were some of our good people – agricultural advisers and research station managers and things like that.

You suggested earlier Peter, you hadn't travelled much then you became involved in this exercise.

It's incredible really. I'd be too scared to do it now. I just got on a plane. I had a letter from the Premier [Dunstan] introducing me, saying that if I got stuck anywhere, the Premier hoped that they would look after me sort of thing and I just went off to Rome. I met a fellow from the Australian Embassy and he pointed me in the direction of the Libyan Embassy and we had to go and get a visa and then hop on a plane across to Libya. Libya was a cow of a place to get into because they were just a little bit anti-Western in some ways. They would not print anything in the English language and so all the entry papers were in Arabic. (laughs) We had to try and get through all the entry procedures (which weren't easy!) in the middle of the night with no help. Eventually when I got through all that, I met up with a Libyan bloke who'd been sent there to pick me up and he took me to the hotel and we got going, but it was quite an experience.

How did you feel about this? You were in a sense plucked out to go, your wife and family here.

I didn't work on this one. I only went there to set it up. I didn't mind. I was only there for several weeks, it was a fortnight or three weeks perhaps initially to do up a plan which came

back for approval by our mob back in South Australia. Then when the Libyans said, 'That sounds alright, go for it', we started to recruit staff and then they took over. We serviced them in as much as various people visited Libya for the next five or six years after that. Whenever somebody was anywhere near the area they diverted and went in to meet these people who were very isolated. They weren't in a big city. They were in a relatively small town and the farm was … Benghazi is a big city, but they were 100 km, 100 miles or something out of Benghazi. They were isolated. They could occasionally get through to Adelaide by telephone but not very satisfactorily and it was a hard thing to run. People did call in to try and keep them going and the staff got rotated. Nobody stayed there for more than three years with one exception, one guy renewed his contract. It went on for a while and I thought it was quite successful. But by the time we left there, the Libyan attitudes to foreigners had changed quite a bit and had become quite unpleasant. Libya was becoming a rogue state you might say by about that time, starting to become anyway and we knew that things weren't going to progress too much further and so we got out.

[10:25] So your main involvement was really setting up this farm?

My involvement was drawing up the original agreement, helping to recruit the staff (virtually recruiting the staff) and seeing them on their way. Then I visited them, I can't think whether I visited them then next year, I certainly visited them in 1975 and that was with Tom Casey, the Minister of Agriculture.

And then when you were back in Adelaide, apart from that visit you're back in Adelaide, did you maintain any connection, any involvement, any interest?

Yes. It wasn't very satisfactory: we didn't know what we were doing. We didn't establish lines of communication. We got the occasional letter saying, 'Could you do this or could you do that?'. We tried our best to help them, but it wasn't really satisfactory. They were out on a limb, which is not the way you'd ever want to run an overseas project and we learnt that. It was pretty tough on them and after that we looked after things a bit better. They were just working overseas to please the Premier [Dunstan] virtually. Starting that up – I don't know how many times I visited Libya but it might have been about four or five, perhaps five times over the next five years. We thought it was a pretty good project considering that it started from nowhere and we had no real experience. We had terrific people working on that project there.

Was it just the one project in Libya?

In Libya it was one for us but, strangely enough, the Western Australian government soon after we got started the Western Australian government received a similar letter. They didn't just send one poor pea like me over there. They, in fact, sent their Minister of Agriculture, Director of Agriculture and about three other senior officials straight to Libya and they set up a project at the other end of the Libyan country. We were right in the far east and they were right in the

far west of northern Libya. They had a great project too. It was similar to ours, dryland farming, and so the Libyans had two Australian groups working there. That got the Western Australian government involved in agricultural consultancy work as well. We were both off and running from that.

[13:00] I don't know when Tom Casey was appointed. I was away overseas during 1974 on something that was quite unrelated. I went to the International Grasslands Congress in Moscow and ...

Were you representing the Department at that conference?

Yes. I made an application. Normally these international congresses came up about every four years. For a number of four-year periods we'd had somebody attending. They were very important conferences. I wouldn't say it was my turn but I put in an application to go and I was accepted, that was a good experience. While I was there, this whole Libyan thing blew up and a lot of the final signing of the documents was done while I was away and the Premier [Dunstan] made quite a big blurb about what was going on. That was 1974. I didn't do too much departmental work I seemed to be chasing around on Libya or on this International Grasslands Congress. Associated with the Congress I went on a world tour, you might say. I toured Russia and I toured England and Canada, the United States and that was just for the improvement of my knowledge of agriculture, overseas agriculture. 1975 …

Was there going to be some application of that knowledge back in South Australia?

Yes. I'd been involved somehow or other in a little investigation that the Premier [Dunstan] got quite interested in, which was rural cooperatives. I can't remember the dates of this but it must have predated this trip to Russia and England. There was a fellow from the Premier's Department and myself were constituted as an investigation committee to look at the operation and the possible introduction to South Australia of rural buying cooperatives. Very sensible, but very hard to get going. The idea is, just in the simplest terms, it's crazy for one farmer to buy a $250 000 harvester that gets used 10 days per year and his next door neighbour has one as well and the next neighbour has one as well. They get together and they form a buying cooperative and between about four blokes they buy a harvester or many, many other operations. Buying and selling can be done cooperatively. This guy from the Premier's Department and I studied this and wrote our report after I'd made this overseas trip. So while I was in England, Canada and the United States I was trying to investigate what they'd done. In fact, I should have been in France also. In France the EEC was just getting going and France had a great cooperative scheme really, it was pretty big in France. It was getting going in England and it just got underway in South Australia in a limited way and our Department played this small part in getting it off the ground. Fellows would join together to run maybe three or four farms jointly

where it was appropriate. One fellow might specialise in raising pigs, one of the other ones might be the crop man and the other one might be the sheep man. One would, you'd hope be a mechanic so he could fix up the machinery and really it was a pretty good deal. Farmers, being individualists, they do like to not be … ... It was not a big deal, it just got done.

Were you looking at what we might call nuts and bolts, Peter? How to get, in that case of four farms, you might have four different personalities for the farmers but …

No, no I wasn't getting in to that. I was …

You then need to have some sort of formal arrangement they all sign. Was that the sort of thing you ...

We looked at that overseas. There were associations in England, cooperative societies or something and they employed staff to supervise the setting up of these cooperatives in England. It was a bigger deal there than it ever became in South Australia.

You needed to really have some good business arrangements or some way of making sure the co-op would work.

Yes. Usually they'd be friends: if they weren't friends it wasn't going to work. Ideally, they should be neighbours as well and that was usually the case with the ones that I knew in South Australia. Anyway, that was why I travelled extensively, mainly to look at these cooperatives and we came back to write that report and got that out of the way.

[18:45] I don't know when Tom Casey was appointed, but he wanted to go overseas and so the government sent Tom as Minister of Agriculture, the fellow from the abattoirs – from the South Australian Meat Corporation on the question of the meat exports mainly, and myself in the area of agricultural consultancy, and off we went on this tour. While we did go to Libya, we went to Tunisia, we went to Algeria, we went to Lebanon and we went to Iraq. That was it. We spent up to a week in each one of those places.

This is the trip where you showed me the photographs last time at around 1975?

Yes, that was the trip. Those photos were of the Libyan leg of that trip.

That's 1975?

'75 yes. We were able to stir up a bit of interest. Tom was not a bad operator. They, in some cases, didn't know what they wanted but they thought it would be nice to have assistance of experts from Australia. The point being that so much of that Middle East and North African climate is just about the same as ours, it's a Mediterranean climate, so it's very appropriate. Our agriculture was a lot more advanced than what theirs was. They were still using donkeys and cows to pull their ploughs and things like that in some cases, in many cases. We got a bit of interest and Tom … … for trying to sell them the idea of setting up demonstration farms. We finished up this trip leading to the establishment of projects in Algeria and in Iraq. Unlike my visit to Libya in 1973 where it was all set up in a year and the agreement was drawn up

virtually between a senior official in Libya and myself. We said, 'I'm going to do this. I'm going to send staff to work here, if we can recruit them in any way'. This was all written out in a formal document when we got back and it was signed straight off, no worries. After that, these projects took years and years and years to get off the ground. They didn't know what they wanted. We were having difficulty putting it together. Governments change in those countries. Every time we went to Algeria there'd be a different government in power or a different Department of Agriculture personnel in power, so we'd start off from scratch again. That was a successful trip. We got educated ourselves a bit in overseas agriculture and we got leads into especially Algeria and Iraq. One of our fellows resigned from the Department and took a job with an overseas aid organisation in Tunisia. He was a contact point for us also so we had a bit of a lead into Tunisia, although it turned out that none of us ever worked in Tunisia as consultants. We thought we might get there.

It's interesting Peter that observation about the need to negotiate and renegotiate each time. One might have thought that the South Australian mob having set things up in Libya were experts and could come in and say 'This is what you need to do. Here's the documentation'. But it wasn't quite like that.

The local government in Iraq played a major part in trying to spell out what they thought would be a good idea. I thought we were getting somewhere. At that stage the Department of Agriculture became involved with a private consulting firm who you might know of, AACM, (Australian Agricultural Consulting and Management). It was run by agricultural graduates who were friends of ours. After Tom Casey's visit to Iraq, I went back with these guys. Two of them and myself went back to Iraq and we got to the stage where we had an agreement that yes we would establish this demonstration farm or whatever you'd like to call it. It never came to anything and then eventually the Department said – they might have written to us and said we'd like to reopen the negotiations. That's when Arthur Tideman went back. They said to Arthur, 'Forget all the previous discussions. We're going to start again'. So they started again and we got the project up and running in Iraq. Our team went into Iraq in about 1980. Iraq was at war. The war between Iraq and Iran had broken out between the signing of the contract and our first staff arriving, so there were all sorts of problems. It got off the ground and it operated for perhaps six years, something like that and it was a pretty successful farm. We had 5000 ha this time in really good agricultural country.

In Algeria the project had been set up there and again Arthur had a major part in finally getting that off the ground. I went to Algeria about three times but we never got anywhere. I went there with these AACM blokes once or twice and on my own once.

In conjunction with other trips?

That's right, yes. Finally Arthur got them to say what they really wanted. They wanted to set up a scheme which was half-way out into the desert but involving irrigation. They did a lot of good there but I don't know too much about the real project itself. We started to recruit some experts from outside the Department at that stage. We were getting hydrologists and sheep specialists who were not part of our own staff. That was a project that was done and it was probably successful although I can't say that I had much to do with it or that I've got any really knowledge of it.

Iraq was a different story. Arthur played a major part in setting up the final draft of this agreement. It was a big project this time, big by our standards anyway it was $9 000 000 and we not only sent staff but we provided Australian machinery, Australian housing and everything that they could get that was Australian, they got it so we were running a typical Australian farm as much as we could. Fencing materials came from Australia, silos, sheds came from Australia, the whole box and dice and we were set up there. At this stage I was probably not too much involved in overseas consultancy work. I was probably at that stage Chairman of the Pest Plants Commission, but following on this overseas consultancy line of thought, I got appointed as the Officer-in-Charge of the Iraq project after it had been running for two years. Two years a team went in and they rotated and they came out of Iraq, the new team went in and I was in charge of it. It was a major change for me and before I left I told Jim McColl (who had joined the Department by this stage) you can do what you like with me, I'm old and I'd like to get leave to go and do this job, it would be two years in Iraq and when I come back, if I don't get my old job back it's not going to worry me very much. I was kind of in retirement mode and I could see this overseas work as being my way out of the Department until I finally retired. My wife and I both had two great years in Iraq and then Arthur went in for one extra year after that. There was a fellow called Glyn Webber who ran it for the first two years, I ran it for the second two years and then Arthur wound it up. It was a nice piece of work. How much money the SA government made out of it I'm not too sure, but I didn't care either.

[28:55] I was going to ask you Peter, how much money did the Department, did the government make out of these projects overall?

They certainly made nothing out of Libya. I wouldn't have thought they made a bean out of Algeria. We had a money contract in Iraq and the idea was that we'd make a few million dollars out of it and perhaps they did. It's hard to say. We never knew. We never took much notice of it, we just did the job. Somewhere along the line of that period, it would have been before 1980 it might have been as early as say 1977, '78, the Department formed a branch which they called the Overseas Projects Division or something. Arthur, unofficially, was head of that and then quite soon after that, this organisation called Sagric International was formed as

a kind of company if you like, a consultant company wholly owned by the SA government. That became the organ that ran this project in Iraq. It didn't make a lot of difference to us. There was a board of management and one thing or another and they went off. The people that ran this Sagric International were in another building but they were still [in charge] as far as we were concerned and that was the way that it was managed. They were formed by the government as a consulting organisation with the idea that it was going to (a) make money and (b) it was going to boost the sale of Australian products in these countries. Along with our work in – I mentioned earlier on, that machinery companies and seed companies were already in Libya before we got there. They were interested in Iraq. They might have been involved in Algeria I don't know, but there were major attempts for Australian companies to sell their agricultural machinery, seeds, fertilisers and things like that into Iraq. The idea was that that was a pretty big spin off from this project as far as South Australia was concerned. If it wasn't for the war in Iraq, it would have turned out pretty good. But, in fact, people were glad to get out of Iraq eventually after five or six years because things were getting a bit nasty.

[31:55] We lived in a compound … I'm waffling now, but it's interesting! We lived in a compound just outside, or 1 km outside, there were some open fields, outside a village called Ain Kawa which had become a suburb of the major city of Erbil, which you hear about from time to time (now in Kurdish country in northern Iraq). The war with Iran was taking place in the south of the country so we weren't affected. Then it turned nasty. In fact, the Iranians crossed the border right up where we were. We were working about 50 km I'd say at a guess from the border. The Iranians were 10 or 15 km inside the border. We used to see the helicopters going over every day into this fight and we were in the war zone, we really were. We were not only in a war zone in terms of the Iraqi government fighting the Iranian government but the Kurdish people are really tribal. They were in the middle of a rebellion against the central government in Baghdad anyway so amongst it all we got tangled up with certain ...

[The discussion continued after the tape ran out: This minor attack on our compound occurred on the second night after my wife and I arrived at Ain Kawa – it is not important.]

[33:25] **End of Side A, Tape 3**
Tape 3, Side B

[0:05] … They went out, got torches and found couple of bullet holes in this machine, one each side of this poor bugger that was having a cigarette. The army went mad. They went out after him. These people were dissidents and they thought we were the enemy. It upset us a bit. The Australian Ambassador came right up to our compound and read the 'Riot Act' a bit. The outcome of which was that he recommended that all the women and children go back to

Australia forthwith. A couple of the women, one of whom was my wife, said, 'No. We're going to stay. We haven't got children. Our children are all grown up so we'll stay here and look after the men'. In fact, there were five men and two ladies. Then things got a bit better and some additional ladies (wives) came back and joined us, no more kids ever again, but there was something like four or five ladies – four ladies working in the compound by the time we left. There were seven of us (seven technical people) from Australia, and we had a counterpart staff (they called them counterparts) and they were acting as partly labour and partly in a learning position as counterparts. They were all university graduates in agriculture from the university in the north of Iraq, a good university. They were our mates. We used to get on very well with them. They just guaranteed that we wouldn't get kidnapped: 'No, no, no Mr Peter, you needn't worry. You won't get kidnapped – you're Australians, you're good'. We took them at their word. A couple of them had been former Pesh Merga members anyway so they knew what was going on. Another young fellow joined us at one stage and his father was an operator in this Pesh Merga organisation. He used to come to work in the morning and tell us what had happened the night before, until eventually the authorities got on to him and kicked him out. We knew what was going on. The Pesh Merga were trying to establish a grip on that northern part of Iraq, in opposition to the central government in Baghdad who were trying to Arabise the Kurdish area of Iraq. So there was this real war going on, as with ...

[Pesh Merga – an underground Kurdish fighting force harassing the Baghdad government. In 2007 they run Northern (Kurdish) Iraq for the Baghdad government.]

A little bit of tension in the air.

Yes, too right there was. We used to hear gunfire all the time. It's hard to know where it was going. Generally speaking we saw tracers, anything like if a Kalashnikov was loaded in a way that maybe every third or fourth bullet was a tracer so if a fellow fired off on the Kalashnikov you could see the trail from it. We'd go out and watch this display. If the bullets were going this way [horizontal], it was serious. If the bullets were going like this [vertical], it meant that Iraq had won the football or something like that. It was quite weird. (laughs) They were heavily armed and used to really enjoy themselves! ... loss of life I don't think. They used to fight amongst themselves. This village that was close to where we lived was a Christian village so there was a little bit of tension. There's a lot of Christians in Iraq and there's a little bit of tension between the Christian people in this village and the Kurdish people in the main town which was a mile or so away. That's not very interesting from our point of view is it, so I'll get off that side.

[4:30] No, that's fine. It is interesting. Just for the record on the tape, Peter, you were indicating that the football shots and so on, the enjoyment factor, they were firing vertically and if it was a dangerous situation the bullets were being fired horizontally.

We had a bullet through the roof. We didn't realise it until the next day. We didn't hear it land but we went out and there was a hole in the veranda roof and we found the damn shell. It was on a bag on our veranda so we were aware we could get hurt. It was probably a spent bullet that had been up fired in the air and was on the way down again, but anyway we were in amongst it.

That's interesting Peter. There's a couple of things that have come out of your description. What were the wives and children doing, obviously before they got sent home. How did they occupy themselves?

They worked. Yes, they were unpaid workers.

The Australian wives?

The Australian wives were generously allowed to accompany their husbands. No allowance financially or anything like that, but they were provided with a house. Every family had a house whether they were a married couple or whether it was a single man, we had one of these ATCO demountable houses. The women set to work. We were trying to improve this compound. We planted trees all over it. We put in a drip irrigation system. They were well on their way towards establishing a grass tennis court, would you believe, and various other things. They had a swimming pool. The women did all sorts of work. They used to clean our office which used to get filthy dirty with 20-odd men in it every day. They did the cleaning, they did all this sort of stuff.

Unpaid labour?

Unpaid totally. Financially it was alright for us: most of us were getting the equivalent of our South Australian salary, but tax free.

That was paid by ...

That was paid out of the Libyan project money, but it was paid by Sagric International.

Because you mentioned you'd been on leave when you went to Iraq and I just wondered who paid your salary then.

That's right. The project paid our salaries and the money came through Sagric International. Probably the Iraqi government made a payment to Sagric twice a year say, maybe once a year, and then that covered the cost of all the things we had to buy. Things would break down and we had to buy new drills and new spanners and one thing and another and, of course, our salary was being paid.

And the Department still had your salary to pay someone to fill your position back here while you were on 'holiday'.

They probably did, but they never did it. In my case, I could be let go. I forget who took over the Pest Plants Commission but probably Arthur. He was back in Australia most of the time but I don't really know, I've forgotten now. No-one replaced me anyway. I was dispensable at that stage. I told Jim McColl, 'You can do what you like'. That's right. Before I got back a guy had been appointed into the job that I previously held; that's right a nice bloke. He and I worked

together a bit when I got back. I came back from there and for one year I was in Adelaide and my only real job was to look after the Pest Plants Commission. By then, the amalgamated organisation which was the Pest Plants and the Pest Animals (they were all combined by then). I did that for 12 months. Finally, I got one last job overseas which was six months in Saudi Arabia growing wheat under irrigation. There was a group of about four or five of us who ran a project there. That was my last fling for the Department – I'd retired by the time I got back.

That was in 198...?
1986.

And you retired the day that you got back?
I retired the day after I got back, yes.

Oh, the day after.
They knew. They knew that I was on the way out.

What was the situation in Saudi Arabia? More project discussions and setting things up?
Yes. I didn't have anything to do with setting it up. It was at the stage where Sagric International was starting to flex its wings a bit. Previously, we had said in the Department, 'We're the experts on dryland farming. We're world experts on farming with no irrigation' and we were recognised internationally as such. But Sagric International said, 'We can do more than this dryland farming', and they were looking at intense production of vegetables and irrigation projects and eventually, of course, they branched right out of agriculture and they were designing airports and setting up a scheme of population control in one country and all sorts of things. They'd do anything. They became an excellent consulting organisation and they're still doing very, very well. So our little Overseas Unit became quite a worthwhile international consulting organisation eventually.

[11:00] Peter, what had been the profile of the Unit and, even before the Unit, the profile of the overseas experiences within the Department? How did other staff react to these overseas 'jaunts'?
Varying experiences. John Radcliffe was interesting. He really thought it was a load of rubbish; it was preventing people from doing their work. That was his opinion. People who had a chance to go overseas thought it was wonderful experience, but John had a broader view and he thought it was really something that we ought not to be involved in. He was somewhat junior at that stage, but we knew what his views were because he was still important or becoming important. Generally speaking, it was looked on as being worthwhile. It gained a bit of not notoriety but a bit of good publicity for the Department having teams of people overseas. From that time onwards, it developed into a better thing altogether. It was highly organised consultancy work, properly financed, properly organised by experts instead of the sorts of things that we were involved in. Expert consultants is what I mean. We were agricultural

experts but we weren't consulting experts. That was my experience with the overseas consulting.

[12:45] A couple of other things from your comments, Peter. I asked you about the profiles within the Department. What about within the government, allowing for that we had a Labor government, a Liberal government? Was there a continuing level of support?

Yes, there must have been. The kick came at the start from the Premier's Office, from the Premier himself. There's no doubt about that. The Premier [Dunstan] had a guy working quite close to him who was our direct contact. He came overseas with me. He came with me to Algeria on one trip and he might have gone overseas on another trip with somebody else. We were seeing one another at least once a week, this guy and myself, on the prospects of new projects and that sort of thing. So we had a close tie-in with the Premier's Department.

[13:50] Just a slight pause for a truck going up the street Peter. We were just talking then about the government attitude. Any perceived change in attitude with ...

With changes in government?

Yes.

No. I don't know when the Labor Party lost office. Do you?

You've got 1979, late '79, and you've got the Tonkin government for three years and that overlaps with your Iraq experience.

Then they came back in.

Labor came back in '82, but that overlaps with you Iraqi experience. Was there bipartisan sort of support?

Honestly, I can't answer your question. I don't think I was aware of anything related to the change of government. We had visits in Iraq by two Ministers of Agriculture. One of them must have been a Liberal, a fellow called [Ted] Chapman from Kangaroo Island. The other visit was from a Minister of Agriculture. If I was smarter I'd tell you straight away.

Was it Brian Chatterton?

Chatterton, that's right. Brian Chatterton. Brian Chatterton didn't think we were doing what we were supposed to do. He said, 'Where's your Extension Program? That's what you're here for'. We knew that we weren't. We had a contract with them to run the farm. He and his wife [Lynne Chatterton] they laid it about us a bit about not doing the right thing and we couldn't do a thing about it. We just had to get on with doing our stuff and our official orders from Adelaide were keep going the way you are.

Would this have been after Chapman, Chatterton's visit?

After Chapman, yes. Must have been. It would have had to have been 1984. Were they back in power by then?

Yes.

That's what it was. Not too long … This fellow Chatterton had a colossal row with Jim McColl. You probably know all about that. Jim won, that's what it amounted to, but I was told on the phone in Iraq that Chatterton was coming to sack me and that I wasn't to accept the sacking. It was nasty and it turned out that I got on very well with Chatterton. He lived in our house for three or four days. His wife got sick and my wife looked after his wife. It was quite a reasonable visit and I didn't get the sack.

Did it come to that stage of him attempting to sack you?

No.

But you had that background knowledge.

Must have been settled in Adelaide before he left because it never came up. I was certainly waiting for it. Jim McColl told me quite plainly, 'You cannot change the nature of your project no matter what happens when the Minister of Agriculture visits you. You've got to just keep doing what you've been contracted to do'. It was actually his assistant who rang me and said, 'Chatterton's coming to sack you. Don't take any notice of him!'. (laughs) It was rather weird. It was rather nasty. Chatterton was a funny guy, he really was.

[17:40] I wanted to ask you about the Ministers and I'm probably taking you off on a little bit of a tangent but while we're at that point, you travelled with Tom Casey, you had Chatterton come to visit you, Ted Chapman's come to visit you. How did you get on with the Ministers?

Me personally – I got along quite well.

In Adelaide and overseas?

I haven't got much more to say on the overseas consultancy. As far as involvement with Ministers overall is concerned, I knew Tom Casey as a farmer, he was a mate of mine right back from the 1950s, so that was easy. He became the Minister and he was a good friend straight away. Other Ministers, Gabe Bywaters was everybody's friend. You've probably had people talk about these Ministers and I won't even remember them all I'm sure, but Gabe was a champion. Chapman was a funny bloke, a Liberal Minister but he was friendly with everybody. We mostly got our own way about what we thought had to be done. Money was always short but we would prime the Minister to try and get priority. Chapman was the Minister when we set up the Pest Plants Commission. It was rather funny. We said, 'We've got to get $200 000 a year to get this commission off the ground'. He said, 'Right, I'll fix it'. He sent a submission into Cabinet for $450 000 a year to run this thing. He didn't get it all but he got a lot more than what we'd said we needed! So we started off pretty well through Ted Chapman. I got along alright with him.

[19:40] I had a couple of trips to meetings with the Australian Agricultural Council. There was an Australian-wide body called the Australian Agricultural Council which was a Ministerial Committee. Associated with it was the Standing Committee on Agriculture which was all the

State and Commonwealth Directors of Agriculture or the equivalent. I had a couple of trips away to those. It gives you a chance to become involved with the Minister a little bit.

A bit of an advisory role, an observer?

There in an advisory role yes, I don't suppose I played a very important role. I was there as a resource when they needed to check out on papers. We had to write briefs on all the … The agenda was well known: we had to write briefs on … somebody did.

Did other people from the Department go like McColl?

McColl always went, yes. The Minister of Agriculture and the Director of Agriculture were the key players and there was just maybe three or four others that went to these meetings from time to time, various ones. At this stage, I would have thought John Radcliffe was in the policy area, rather than whatever he had been doing before that, the research management area. He became a key player. He'd sit right alongside Jim McColl and hand him bits of paper all the time. He and Jim hit it off very, very well and it was a good relationship.

A bit of a working team?

Yes. Jim McColl used to say if he had more blokes like John Radcliffe and another hotshot Director that we had, who was a railways engineer of all things, Barry Greer, if he had more blokes like that he could have done anything. But, of course, we were ordinary workers I'm afraid. We weren't quite up to it.

You mentioned earlier Peter that John was your assistant and you were away a fair bit. How did that work?

He did it, yes he did it.

Did you delegate authority for him to ...

No. I don't have any recollection of that. It certainly wasn't done formally but he was so capable. He was doing most of it even when I was there. He was really good. I had other jobs to do, this is the area of research management. It was the field that made John Radcliffe. He was super in terms of setting up a proper project structure for the whole of the Department's research and development area. Prior to that, it was everybody in for what he could get. People used to design their own projects. We didn't have to get approval to start new experiments. If you could get the money you could go ahead and do it, whereas John set up a very meaningful program of project management. All the projects had to be – not in some formal statement – given proper names, they had to have a budget and there was budget programming for each to use operations. It was a big improvement in the Department, it really was.

He's a capable sort of character. Were you able just to give John his steam and let him go full bore?

Absolutely, yes, yes. He worked underneath me for probably two years, I can't really remember now, but in all that time I recognised him as a somewhat superior being. I had no doubts that he

was good stuff and he wasn't to be messed around too much. (laughs) It worked well. I used to go off overseas and whatever was going on with the Pest Plants Commission thing cropped up, which were none of his business.

[24:00] So you had some good backup support there.

I don't want to say much about overseas projects. I've wasted enough of your time on that. I wanted to touch on something that I felt was significant in the Department and that was something that came into it when the Labor Party took office and it hit us like a bit of a thunderbolt. Prior to that, country people ran South Australia right up into the '60s. There was a time when every member of State Cabinet was a member of the Agricultural Bureau of South Australia. You know what the Agricultural Bureau is Bernie?

Yes.

They were either farmers or they were country folk. The Attorney-General was a lawyer at his office in Maitland and things like that. They were members of the Agricultural Bureau and agriculture was running the State. The Department of Agriculture was set up to help farmers, purely and simply. What we did was designed to help farmers as much as possible. It was amazing that governments were putting so much money into support for agricultural extension They drew up the … and one thing and another, plus they set up an advisory service. You don't get an advisory service set up on how to run a shop or how to run a garage or anything like that but farmers had it provided. The farmer had access to the Poultry Adviser and the Dairy Adviser and the Wheat Adviser and so on and so forth. Governments did a lot for farmers. The Labor government came in … Let's just go back a little bit. About this time, there was an organisation, I don't even know what it was called – it was the ISAC. It was a Commonwealth organisation carrying out investigations in industries.

Was it the Industries Assistance Commission?

It might have been. I just don't remember. But we were given a job for writing answers for the State government on agricultural matters. We wrote them purely and simply on the basis of what farmers would like to see. The Labor government came in and they said, 'Wait a minute boys. There's more to life than farmers', and it brought about a change in the whole outlook of the Agriculture Department. We didn't exactly get kicked off this job of writing these briefs on agricultural matters, but we had to get everything we wrote cleared by some bright young fellows in the Premier's Department from then on.

Lots of things changed. A good example was margarine. The margarine industry was kind of a backwards affair, hardly anyone used margarine. It wasn't illegal to make margarine, but there were all sorts of restrictions on how it could be made, how it could be marketed. It wasn't allowed to be called butter and all sorts of things like that. This was to protect the dairy

industry. Tom Casey, probably under instruction from his Cabinet colleagues, wiped out all the restrictions on margarine manufacture and within a couple of years everybody was eating margarine and the butter industry was suffering because the philosophy of the Labor Party was, 'We're here to help all of the people in South Australia. If we can provide a cheap substitute for butter that's better for lots of people even if it's not better for the dairy farmers'. That was just an example of the sort of change that came about in the thinking and we had to absorb that. The Department had to always from then on think, 'What's best for South Australia?' not 'What's best for the wheat farmers and the barley growers?' and all of that.

Just to put some timeframe on that Peter. You talk about the IAC, which is a Federal body, that you were writing reports for. You were also talking about the State Labor government coming in. So we're talking what, early '70s? Tom Casey was Minister in about '72.

I would've thought so. I'm not too sure.

Can always add it in the transcript.

No, I don't know where I'd find a reference to it but somebody else might know. It was a real change in the Department's philosophy. It took a bit of getting used to for a while.

There is a story, and maybe you saw the memo – I haven't set eyes on this, but there's a story of a memo coming down from Don Dunstan as Premier in around about '72, '73 asking for the Department to justify itself, to justify its existence. Does that ring a bell to you at all?

It rings a bell but that's about all it does do. I can't remember being involved in it.

[29:40] The thing that followed on from this 'Please justify yourself' is the Callaghan Report into the Department.

Can we have that off just a minute. [break] I'm fairly hazy about it. It's just my bad memory. We worked with the Doc, Sir Allan, right through the preparation of his report. He held meetings with our Executive all the time, so we knew exactly what he was thinking as his ideas developed. We were feeding ideas into it as well.

Was there a mutual exchange process with Callaghan?

There was, very much so. He wasn't working on his own anyway. He was probably getting help from a lot of other people as well but the Executive had quite big inputs into it, probably the likes of Jim, Peter Trumble, John Radcliffe (who sat in on a lot of these meetings) and this gentlemen, Barry Greer, who was at that stage Assistant Director, Administration and he was a really good operator, he really was. They were the people who had a big influence on Dr Callaghan in putting together that report. What I've got to say is, I can't remember very much of what was in the Callaghan Report. I'm sure they've got a copy of it, if it was ever published. I haven't got a copy of it. I've lost it. It involved regionalisation didn't it? Was that the main tenet of the whole thing?

That seemed to be the main outcome. Of course, you've got to put it into context of you being overseas in this '73 ...

Do you know when it was published?

At the end of '73, into '74.

I was halfway towards going on a trip to the Grasslands Congress and we'd just got back from Libya. I didn't know quite what was going on. But I was in a lot of the discussions with Dr Callaghan within our Executive group. Personally, I didn't like the idea of regionalisation. There were a lot of aspects of it which affected people's status in the Department. Anyone that was responsible for a group of research officers found that he was going to lose half of them, some were going to be somebody else's. It had its strengths, of course. Regionalisation was seen as something that was very important. In fact, it failed. I don't know why. It broke down after I retired. The regions were set up with senior people. The senior people were … our regions and I'm not saying this anew – you've had this from other people I'm sure. So we had these regions, four or five whatever they were.

[33:30] **End of Side B, Tape 3**
Tape 4, Side A – session of 20 April 2004

[0:30] Peter, we just started talking last time about the impact of regionalisation on the Department and where the regionalisation approach came from. Perhaps if we could just pick up on that and your involvement at the Executive level with people like Doc Callaghan preparing the report. Would you like to explain a bit about your involvement there, your level of involvement?

Yes. My involvement wasn't all that significant I don't believe. I sat in on numerous lengthy discussions with our group, our Executive group, in the Department with Dr Callaghan and took part in the formulation of some of his ideas no doubt. I had no significant individual role to play in setting up the Callaghan Report.

Regionalisation. It worked pretty well. You probably know the set up don't you? There were the regions that were established in the Department. How many did we have? About five?

Yes.

They were pretty autonomous in that they had a Regional Director and they looked after their own program. There was a certain amount of supervision at Head Office level. Certain people, just as an example, were in charge of research management and the Department had to have unified finance and recording systems for its research projects, so that probably overrode any local system for recording research work. Nevertheless, the planning and the work was done strictly at the local level. I thought it worked pretty well. There were research officers, they would have been at Northfield as far as agronomy was concerned and other central locations, but the biggest proportion of research officers were in the regions and that was a major change in the departmental approach. It probably gave us a better look at what was needed in the planning process because at any district office there was a group of advisory officers, a group

of research officers and a group of, if you like, administrative and regulatory officers, all within whispering distance of one another. They would have had morning tea together and all that sort of thing. So there was good contact there. They'd have been closer to what was needed.

There's always a bit of a problem in a research organisation of people wanting to do their own thing. Someone's got to make sure that they're on the ball. Some people want to do what you might call basic research, which the government ought not to be too interested in funding – it's more like university-style work. We had to make sure that everything that was done in the research field was done for the purpose of improving our agriculture or our livestock industry. The regional arrangements kept people on track a bit better than it had been when we were all individuals in Head Office. Even quite serious research work was being done in the regions before regionalisation. But those people had to come home every weekend: their homes were in Adelaide, their offices were in Adelaide and their control was in Adelaide. Regionalisation overcame that and it was good.

Was there a sense there Peter that the Department might have lost its way a bit in terms of this research work and so on, therefore regionalisation was needed or a new approach was needed?

Yes. There was a feeling, I don't think it was serious, but we did have this tendency to operate as a group of individuals. I remember John Radcliffe trying to get people to program, to create a structure in their planning which had all their research work in the right pocket sort of thing, under titles and under project numbers and that kind of thing and there was resistance from amongst a number of research officers: they didn't want to do it.

A bit too modern for them?

No, no. They were having a good time. No doubt there was a lot of research done that never hit the road. The Department was very bad at writing up its research work during this period before regionalisation. We didn't have a good record of published work. We had a good record of results and the results were handed over, somewhat informally, to the advisory staff so farmers got hold of what was useful, but there was a fair bit of work that never got into the official record of scientific publications. There was probably a fair bit that finished up incomplete because people changed jobs, retired, moved out of the field that they were working in and there was no detailed planning of continuity. Something quite important might be done in the field of let's just say plant introduction, which was introducing mostly new pasture plants, and it didn't ever get finished. It went on and on and on – people going overseas, bringing in new seeds and ourselves doing these excursions overseas and many other organisations were collecting seeds and there was good cooperation between the various States, but a lot of that work never came to the stage where farmers ever got the benefit of it. The emphasis on, what would you call it?, a true understanding of the nature of applied research came about through

(a) Radcliffe and (b) regionalisation. There's no doubt about that in my mind, regionalisation helped.

I don't know what's happened in recent years, but I suspect it's all gone. It might have fallen over when the Department … when SARDI was established, which was not in my time.

You were there when regionalisation came in and ...

It was still recognised when I retired. I retired in '86. I don't know at what stage SARDI came into existence, but about then. I never had any involvement with it.

Just with that notion you were hinting at, the Department having lost its way a bit in the research and not getting results published and projects going on without an end to them, was there an attempt by the Director or any of the senior people to bring things into line? I'm thinking of in the '60s and before the Callaghan Report. How had it got to that stage that things were just wandering on?

No, perhaps it was not recognised as a Department having lost its way in terms of research. The Directors-General of Agriculture, or whatever they were called in those days, before McColl were a field veterinary officer (Marshall Irving), a good horticultural administrator (Geoff Strickland) and who would have been before him?, probably Dr Callaghan. They tried to do the right thing. There's no doubt about that. But both Strickland and Irving which were in my time were old men and all the research people were quite young. There was a bit of a break between that. There was no executive structure in the Department until Marshall Irving's time when he tried to create an executive structure with Assistant Directors. There was the Director-General and then there was a series of branch heads. The branch heads tended not to be research people, but they knew that they had to have research going on. I don't think it turned out to be all that bad otherwise people would have recognised it. It was probably pretty good, but looking back at it I can see that there were things where we fell down a bit. A little bit of irrelevant research, a little bit of research that never got finished and certainly a lack of proper publication of research were things that were a bit of a worry. Together with regionalisation, that's been largely overcome. Regionalisation produced a bit of a stir in terms of the amount of research.

As far as regionalisation for advisory work, extension programs, were concerned I would have thought it was brilliant. There had always been a district structure in the advisory services: there were district Dairy Advisers, district Agricultural Advisers etc. etc. It just fell into place when there was regional control and they no doubt had weekly discussions about what work would be going on and really planned their work better than they could when there was an Agricultural Adviser in Jamestown who was responsible to some guy in Adelaide and there was a Pastoral Adviser, if you like or something along those lines, responsible to some other guy in Adelaide. They were close together in the country but their bosses were way away somewhere. There wasn't the liaison and there wasn't the control that came under the regional system.

I don't think we liked it when it came in. Many of us that had been around the place for a few years felt that it was a pretty big change and that we were going to lose something. But I do believe they did it well and I had the feeling that eventually it was working pretty well.

[13:35] When Callaghan was preparing the report, you were at the executive level. How much involvement, how close were you to that process? Was Callaghan coming around looking for advice and comment? Were Executive Directors meeting to talk about issues?

I don't know how frequently we met with Callaghan, but it seemed to me that we would have whole Executive meetings. They were held weekly but I don't think the Doc came to weekly meetings but he came to frequent meetings of the Executive and would spend the whole morning laying out his ideas and we'd be throwing in our own ideas. I can't claim to have had any important role in that. I just sat through it and threw in what I could, which wasn't anything too wonderful.

What about when the regionalisation was implemented, at the Executive level yourself? Were you going out and about …

To the regions?

… to the regions? Any need for you to go around the State?

We all travelled.

Of course, I realise you were overseas for a fair bit of this time as well.

Yes. I was trying to get the timing in to ... Regionalisation might have started around about the late '70s.

Around about '76, thereabouts.

I certainly didn't supervise any of the regional work. That was handled in another way at Head Office. I didn't have too much involvement with it. We used to know pretty well what was going on in the regions because we did travel around a fair bit and kept in touch with people, people that we'd worked with all our lives, of course, a lot of them, later to become regional officers.

You were able to maintain contact with the troops so to speak?

I felt so, yes. That's a personal view, it was OK. I was becoming more involved in some of that overseas work and I also had breaks in my concentration on the job really from time to time.

[16:30] I realise that. In your description you mentioned three of the Directors – Callaghan, Strickland and Irving. How well did you know those guys, different phases of your career in the Department?

The only one that I felt I got quite close to was Marshall (Marshall Irving) only because I had that job (which I've spoken to you about previously) of working with a guy from the Public Service Commissioner's Office for the recommendations for an executive structure for the Department. There was big input from Marshall on that. When it was set up I was appointed as

one of those Assistant Directors. We started regular Executive meetings and we were quite close.

The previous Director-General (this was Geoff Strickland), he was somewhat aloof and, of course, he was as busy as all hell because he didn't have any assistants and there was not much chance to get close to people like that. He certainly didn't direct closely any of the work that I was involved in.

Dr Callaghan. I'm trying to think what the dates of his departure were, what the date of his final departure from the Department was. I can't remember too much about the Doc. Everyone thought he was brilliant and he did a good job. He came into the Department probably about the end of the war. He was the Principal of Roseworthy College. He tried to do that job whilst he was Chairman of the Lands Development Executive which is a Lands Department structure for Soldier Settlement Schemes. He was a giant in that field, no doubt about that. He was still doing a bit of that when he became Director of the Department, so he was a very, very busy man. We were still in the aftermath of the war period to some extent ... Callaghan oversaw a huge expansion in the Department, so that was good. He had the drive and the contacts at a political level. He managed to kick off the appointment of a big, new team of younger people, the expansion of the advisory services and a huge expansion in research capability during his reign. But I certainly was never close to him. I just knew him, the way you knew everybody.

You were at a more junior level, of course, when Callaghan was Director. At the other end of the spectrum Peter, when you were at Executive level working with Jim McColl and his successor, John Radcliffe. Are you able to comment on Jim and John as Directors, Director-Generals?

Right. I've said to you before that I thought the appointment of Jim was a kind of a break-off point in my feeling about the Department. He was different and he was unknown to us. Most of us couldn't believe that the government would appoint a fellow that we'd never heard of. But, nevertheless, it had happened. We got to know Jim, but soon after he was appointed I took long service leave. I got in his bad books straight away because I'd never had any proper long service leave and I was tired and a bit sick of things really. I never wanted to be the Director, but some guy talked me into applying for the job that was designated Assistant Director but with the proviso that the person who got this job would be appointed the permanent head of the Department in due course. A couple of us got talked into applying for that. We both got knocked down, not because Jim beat us but just because we were considered not what they wanted. That probably upset us a bit. That was Lex Walker and me. When Jim was appointed, I was a bit low although, as I say, I wasn't jealous of his appointment. I never really wanted the job. I can see now that was just as well because I didn't have what it took, but I was an applicant. Jim and I got on alright, but I wasn't up to the standard of the people that he wanted. Honestly, that's the absolute truth. He brought in … He promoted John, which was terrific,

John Radcliffe, through the ranks into an executive secretarial sort of position. I forget what they called him, but he was sort of a liaison officer. They appointed a new Director of Administration, or whatever they called him, Barry Greer who was really a great administrator. My feeling was that I was not in their class and I've just got to be honest about that. They were good operators. We had a few other pretty decent people. I had a lot of regard for Peter Trumble. I've known him most of my life. I thought he was a good operator. He was extremely loyal to Jim. He was the ideal public servant, whereas I'm afraid I wasn't. But we struggled on. We got our job done.

Of course Peter, he'd been overlooked for the top job as well.

He wasn't an applicant for it at that time, because he was not technically … What's the word? He'd rejoined the Department. Peter had been an assistant to Dr Callaghan, like a personal scientific liaison officer working with Dr Callaghan in the early days. After his graduation from university he worked in an outside job for a while and then came back and he was recruited by Dr Callaghan as a personal assistant and looked like he was going to have a good career. Then he left. He probably went to CSIRO at one stage, but his main job when he was away from the Department was what might have been called the secretary or the senior administrator of the Waite Institute where he made quite a good name for himself, but it was a non-technical position: he looked after the books and he looked after the salaries and one thing or another. He came back to the Department in a job which looked at the time as though that's what it was going to be like. He was one of the Assistant Directors that were appointed under this scheme that I had been involved with. He was still called the Assistant Director, Administration (probably) and it didn't seem like the jumping off place for a Director-General of Agriculture. I doubt if he applied for it at the time that Lex Walker and I did. He would have been satisfactory I would say looking back at things because he was a good operator.

There's almost, in many cases, a sense of turmoil, when there's a turnover at the top.

Yes. That's right. You go through bad periods. Marshall Irving was pretty sick really. He had a fair bit of time away and various ones of us got temporary appointments as Acting Director-General. Peter was good. He took it on and he was good at it and he probably did it longer than any of the rest of us did because he was good stuff.

You had a turn yourself?

Yes. I've only got a vague recollection of one fact and that was that I was Acting Director on and off for about nine months. It wouldn't have been in one lump. It would have been in bits and pieces. Good experience, but I was just holding down the chair really, waiting for whoever was going to be appointed and the Department could get on to its next phase which was what we hoped was going to happen with our new Director.

A bit of a holding pattern?

Yes, that's right. This is during the time when the … We didn't know who was going to be the Director-General. It wasn't all that wonderful I don't think while we were just sitting, waiting and then along came Jim. It started a new phase for the Department. Improvement for the better without any doubt. He had ideas that no-one else had ever dreamed of and he had a sense of recruiting strong people, which might have been lacking previously. There was a tendency for all progression to come up through the ranks up until then. My relationship with Jim was very friendly. We got on alright, but I didn't satisfy him totally, I'm sure about that. A senior administrator has to be honest about the sort of people that he's lumbered with and that was the situation that I felt.

Also, your career had changed over time from when you first joined the Department and at this stage with Jim coming in, I'm supposing there was probably limited opportunities for you elsewhere.

Yes. I'm just trying to think of the timing.

Jim was about 1975.

Jim came right at the time when I was doing a bit of overseas work and I wasn't close to the daily operation of the Department all that much, so that made it even more difficult. I was overseas quite a bit from 1973 till 1976. 1976 I would have taken a large lump of long service leave and I had a period then back in the Department when I wasn't too involved in overseas work and that was when I was more deeply involved with, to some extent, research management with John Radcliffe and I was learning the ropes in this pest plants and pest animals area. Because I was a member of the Executive, I kind of got automatically appointed as Chairman of the Pest Plants Commission and it all followed from that. Then around about 1982 one of our projects – the project in Iraq – was due for a change of manager, field manager, and someone suggested I should apply for it, which I did. The guy that approached me said, 'I hope Jim's going to agree to it'. I said, 'Don't worry, he's going to agree to it alright!'. (laughs) I saw Jim about it and I said, 'You can do what you like with me. I'm going away for a couple of years, if you'll let me, and when I come back you can do what you like if you want'. I wasn't exactly retiring age, but within spitting distance of it. From then on I spent my time spread between the management of these overseas projects and the management of what had become the Animal and Plant Control Commission.

[31:55] We'll come back to the Commission in due course. That sort of suggests that you had a little bit of distance from the Department because you were away.

Yes, indeed. I felt isolated from the Department. I told you a week ago that I retired the day after I got back. It was one of the sad days for me. There was a new Minister of Agriculture. What was his name? He'd been the Member for Unley.

Would that be Kim Mayes?

Yes. Kim Mayes that's right. He was doing the rounds of the Department, meeting the troops and there was me in my room frantically trying to tidy up my desk, get rid of all the waste paper and take home all that I wanted to because it was my last day of work. I never even met the bloke. No one sort of said, 'You better come in and meet Peter Barrow. He's leaving today'. I just didn't lay eyes on him and I felt a bit sad. I walked out of the Department virtually hardly even saying goodbye to people and then I did get given a very nice farewell about three or four months later which I appreciated very much. But the actual last working days weren't all that wonderful – six months in Saudi Arabia and then retirement.

[33:30] **End of Side A, Tape 4**
Tape 4, Side B

[0:04] … circumstances were favourable with superannuation and so you retired a bit on the early side for that era. Could we just explore a little bit about that.

John Bromell was the head of the Animal and Pest Control Unit as the senior administrator in that. He and I worked reasonably close together. I was chairman of it at that stage. John came in one day and said, 'I'm going to retire on Monday'. His wife had got very sick and he said, 'I've just been across to talk to the superannuation people and they're telling me that if I stay at work I'll be working for something like (strictly speaking) [$7000]–$10 000 a year on a salary that looks like it's a 40 to $50 000 a year salary'. Because of the superannuation arrangements, he found that financially he could handle it, could live off his superannuation and stay home and look after his sick wife. It set me thinking and I set as a target to retire as soon as I could afford to, which I did in 1986. It was purely that. I was going to be out of it and the superannuation made it possible for me to live on what was going to come out of it. It was the South Australian government superannuation scheme which was extremely generous. We'd been paying into it, of course, for 40 years and we had a bit of a fund there. Nevertheless, the State government put in a lot of money. I'm still drawing on it to this day – very, very generous.

You're one of the lucky ones! So you had the idea for some time then because you went off to Saudi Arabia and so on.

Yes. When I left to go to Saudi Arabia I probably had an idea that I wouldn't be staying in the Department for too long after I got back. My wife and I corresponded as best we could when I was in Saudi and she actually went to see the superannuation people and got the facts of what my financial situation would be. There were people in the superannuation department who were then encouraging people to retire, on the basis that if you stayed at work you were working for peanuts because you were entitled to a reasonably good pension and for no less …, a pretty attractive proposition and that's what happened. I just had it all sewn up when I got back home. I set it rolling and away I went and never regretted it. Never … I went back into the Department one day to look up something in the library. That's the only time I ever went back into the

Department. I cut my ties pretty well. I did attend Tom Miller's twice-yearly functions pretty religiously for a while, but in recent years we've drifted away from going … a number of the people that I used to work with.

You maintained those friendships?

Maintained friendships but no professional contact with the Department of Agriculture as such, none at all. I went back and did a few days work for Sagric International when they were pressed for someone to show overseas visitors around. I did a bit of writing work at one stage but very minor and no contact at all with the Department.

A real severing of the knot.

Yes. It was a career change, out of something into nothing and it was wonderful. It was great.

[4:45] Given the timing of your retirement, did you have much to do with John Radcliffe as the Director? He would have been in just for a short while.

Bernie, do you know when John Radcliffe was appointed Director-General?

It would have been '85.

Right. He was in the chair. He must have become Director-General while I was away overseas. No probably not, probably before that. I'd had some contact on and off with John during his and my career. I was a Senior Research Officer in the Agronomy Branch when he came in as a Dairy Research Officer but wanted to carry on research programs in more of an agronomic field than a dairy field. So we had a bit to do with one another. I got to know him then and we got on pretty well. Then when I had been appointed – I can't think of when it would have been, but when I joined the Executive as an Assistant Director (I was Assistant Director, Technical and Industry) and after my … I eventually got taken out of that job. I should say it would have coincided with the institution of the Callaghan Report. I became Assistant Director, Research and my immediate assistant was John Radcliffe. So we worked closely together. In fact, he was the driving force in that. I don't make any bones about that. I was becoming involved in the Pest Plants Commission a bit at that stage so John was largely responsible for research management and it was a big improvement for the Department. So I worked with him then. As Director-General I can't even remember him, I'm sorry. I just can't remember him chairing meetings of the Executive. I must have been there, but I can't remember.

Again, you were overseas ...

We finished up on good terms. Whenever I see him I'm pleased to see him and vice-versa I hope. We never had any rows or anything like that, but I was pretty different from John. He was a terrific operator.

A bit of a dynamo?

Really great, really great no doubt about that.

It's interesting that you went through the McColl experience of someone from outside coming in and then to go back to a John Radcliffe coming through the ranks and rising to the top. Since John's time its gone back the other way to outsiders.

Yes. John didn't stay very long did he? I don't know what the dates of his move on were, but he was Director-General for a while then he left and went off to CSIRO after I retired. He had a marvellous career, he has. He's probably still in it I guess to some extent as an older citizen.

He's a dynamo, a busy bloke.

I could never understand how he could get through what he did. In the middle of all this he got a gong from the Order of Australia for looking after the trams! (both laugh) Wherever, St Kilda.

[9:00] In your own case Peter, your career had a few shifts and changes, swings and changes.

Yes. I went from job to job. About every three or four years I changed jobs, which is pretty well the only way to progress in an organisation. You're very lucky if you can move in a straight line through an organisation to a senior position. I jumped to where there were vacancies, all in the field of agronomy, my specialty. They were routine changes. It wasn't as though I had to learn a lot of new stuff. It was just a different field of work, split between research on the one side and advisory operations on the other side. Until this overseas projects thing started, 1973 was the beginning of that, that was a change for me, I don't think I was ever the same after that! I must say it was quite a good experience and enjoyable while it was going on. I enjoyed the overseas work better than the work back at the Department.

That was an opportunity that didn't exist when you joined the Department. That's something you were able to grab hold of in a sense.

Yes, that's right. From the point of view of administrative work, running overseas projects became a new thing for the Department. Prior to that individuals had gone off to take jobs overseas, on leave. We've spoken a bit about that before. Tom Miller and Graham Itzerott are two that come to mind. And Alan McCardle, a Poultry Officer. They did major jobs overseas with FAO. But once we got going in Libya, we had our own control over new projects which were ours. We were doing a job for the South Australian government. It was attractive work from the point of view of politics and we didn't have a lot of trouble recruiting staff even through no-one got paid big money. Most of the people would go away to work on these projects on their normal salary, but tax-free. That was enough incentive for people to go away. Most of us had never been away overseas and it was pleasant to be over there. A bit hairy at times, (laughs) but nevertheless everyone enjoyed it. It was a good period.

[12:10] As you've sort of indicated in the previous chats and again today, that you were just in a sense grasping opportunities, this is something that arose that hadn't been there when you joined the Department. So looking back over the career of 40 years or so, did work in the Department meet your expectations as a young lad coming in, where you might go and what you might have done?

Sure, yes. I'm a reasonably humble person. I never expected anything out of the Department. I can remember being in Jamestown when I was a young officer and my wife said to one of our

senior people, 'I hate it up here'. This bloke said to her, 'You needn't worry. You won't be here for very long'. And it rocked me. I thought he's going to shift me out of the field, but quite soon something came up and they said we want you to apply for this job. I'd been a Soil Conservation Officer and they said, 'Please apply for the job as Barley Agronomist', and that kind of got me. I was tired of applying for all these various jobs over the years. There was nothing unusual about that. The opportunities came and I was good enough to be appointed. It was a pretty standard sort of a career really.

Were there any times where you thought you might move on to another area, another department, private sector or interstate?

Honestly, no. My career was in the Department of Agriculture and I had no wish or intention of ever shifting out of it, until I finally broke the ties and left. That was unusual. Most people have several jobs don't they over the years, but I got my variation in work from within the Department fortunately for me. It was pretty good work and very worthwhile.

It's been good to capture some of your thoughts about the organisation.

What I'm worried about Bernie is that I'm talking about me, whereas your brief is to find out about the Department, so I don't know what you're finding out.

[14:35] We'll bring it all together. I sent you a list of topics and themes and so on. I just wondered (we've got a few minutes left) whether you could talk about just a couple of things there. I know you wanted to mention the industry-funded research aspect.

Can I just touch on that?

Yes.

The job that I was brought back to from Jamestown back to Adelaide in around about 1956 was to be an employee, a Research Officer, with the Barley Improvement Program. That, people have said, was the first industry-funded program in Australia. It was a joint funding arrangement between the industry, which was the malting industry, the farmers – the South Australian Farmers Federation [sic] – and the brewing industry on the one hand, they were the industry people; the Commonwealth government on the other hand; and the State government on the third hand. It got set up with control committees. No-one had a clue really how they ought to administer such a thing. There were committees. Actually there were two States involved – Victoria was in it at the same time as us. These committees were more or less national committees. The Commonwealth government had representatives in the senior committee. The Director of Agriculture in South Australia was chairman of one committee and there were representatives of what might have been called the Farmers Federation or whatever in those days. Certainly representatives from the malting and brewing industry, the Waite Institute, our Department and the Victorian Department of Agriculture. Those three bodies – the Waite Institute, the Victorian Department and our Department – were the recipients of the

research funds. This enabled appointments to be made. There was two in our Department – myself and an assistant called Glyn Webber, who became quite senior in the Department in later years. We worked on that. In the Victorian Department they had a barley-breeding program, a genetic-type program, and some agronomy work. And at the Waite Institute they had a couple of programs: one was plant breeding, quite a brilliant plant-breeding program to produce improved varieties of barley; the other one was in plant physiology in fields which assisted the malting industry – it was more laboratory type work. My work in that program was agronomic techniques, helping farmers with simple things like what variety to plant, and what time of the year and how deep to sow and how you harvested barley without getting blown away in the wind and a few things like that. It was no big deal. Quite soon after that the Australia-wide wheat industry research program got underway and its pattern was somewhat similar. There was funding that came from the likes of the bulk-handling industry. Certainly wheat growers. By the way, I didn't mention it, but the contribution from the growers with barley and wheat, and under all the other schemes that got set up was on the basis of a levy. It might have been a cent per bushel or some such thing, I forget now, so much a ton of wheat or barley to produce the growers' contribution to this fund. Levies became more or less standard for any organisation that felt they wanted improvement in their industry through research – they started talking about a levy. The wheat industry improvement, or whatever it was called, the Australian Wheat Industry Research Scheme was a big deal. It was a big fund and there were operators in every State. There was a wool scheme which had lots of money: it changed the face of research really in that they were able to make a promise. It never would have been possible under the old funding arrangements.

We saw the development of far better cooperation with other research organisations then we'd ever had before. In the case of this barley program that I worked on, we were in the pockets of the Victorian Department of Agriculture. We used to see one another frequently. We'd share information, help them with their work and vice versa, and similarly with the Waite Institute. There always seemed to be a bit of an aloofness between our Department and the Waite Institute, which I hope someone else has touched on. We thought the Waite Institute wasn't really working for the farmers. They were working for themselves. The Waite went through a period where their job was fundamental research into growing plants. The start of this Barley Improvement Program with the appointment of a plant breeder at the Waite Institute to work on barley was a bit of a start to a change in the Waite. Changes at the top of the administrative tree in the Waite Institute also changed some of the attitudes there. In fact, the Waite became very much aligned with the applied research needs of industry, partly because that's where the money was coming from and partly because it was changing in attitude. We developed very good liaison with the Waite Institute in these research programs where they were involved. It

wasn't always their field of work, but certainly to some extent the wool industry, certainly the wheat industry, the barley industry.

Now the fruit industry. Let me think. Yes, the Waite developed some capacity to do fruit industry research as well from a horticultural side and our people got to know them. Eventually, as we know of course, the whole Department shifted out on to the campus at Waite Institute, which was just a marvellous time. I don't know when that happened but it was around about the mid '80s I would have thought or perhaps a bit after that. I never saw it, of course, I had gone! I thought this industry research was a big sea change in the way research was done in the Department. It was a bit similar I must say to the Commonwealth Extension Services Grant when here was outside funding coming more or less for a specific purpose.

[23:10] Can I talk about the Extension Services Grant? The thing that came out, it was a lot of money, a real lot of money that was shared around amongst various organisations in Australia and the feeling was accepted at Commonwealth level that as long as the work you're doing is for the benefit of farmers, that's OK. It was called the Extensions Services Grant but extension included applied research in their minds. We must have spent half of our money on extension and half of it on research, roughly speaking. It kept us going for God knows how long, probably six or seven years and that allowed a fair bit of expansion in some of our rules of operation. My interest was in research at that stage and it certainly helped us a lot. There was a period when I was on the Executive where I was responsible for putting together the annual budget for the Extension Services Branch – who was going to get money? Certain people were better operators than others and they finished up getting the money unfortunately, which I've got to say was partly my weakness. Anyway, it was valuable and then it got cut off like throwing the switch. Suddenly one day they said, 'Cut it out'. We couldn't believe it. We had a whole mass of people who had been appointed under the money available from the Commonwealth Extension Services Grant. We didn't sack anybody. We got out of it alright, but the money just disappeared and the State government found enough to keep people going. It had served it's purpose. It got the Department … Kicked it on a bit at a time when there was a need for a lot of industry-based research.

Those two things, the [Commonwealth Extension Services Grant] and industry-funded research, were two fields which really kicked our research work along and no doubt helped with our advisory services in the field that I didn't know that much about at that stage.

[25:55] You used a phrase in that description Peter, 'to benefit farmers', and that was the underlying ethos, to benefit farmers. Was that something that was a principle of the Agriculture Department itself?

Of course the Department had been developed in its early days to benefit farmers. There was no doubts in the minds of Parliament of South Australia that you had to have an Agriculture Department that helped farmers. Where I talked about the [Commonwealth Extension Services Grant] to be for the benefit of farmers, farmers were just seen by the Commonwealth as another area of voters and they had to be serviced. This was one of the ways they did that.

Because for the Department it meant an expansion of staff, expansion of activities.

Yes. We appointed a lot of new people. We bought a huge lot of research equipment. The Department had run on a bit of a shoestring as far as equipment was concerned. You couldn't buy a microscope, you couldn't buy this, you couldn't buy that. With this money that was coming in from outside, we were able to lift our game a bit and it was good. It also … With the Extension Services Grant we established pretty good liaison with some of the people in the Department of Primary Industries and in the Commonwealth government. That was an advantage to us too, we really got a better understanding of what they were on about.

[27:45] That's one theme we haven't touched on, and that's linkages with the other States and the Commonwealth and their departments. Did you have any ...

There was a broad linkage which I hope you will have got information on, especially from Pete Trumble and Jim McColl. The Australian Agricultural Council was a council of all the Ministers, including the Federal Minister, and kind of a sub-structure under that was the Standing Committee on Agriculture which was a committee of the permanent heads of all the departments. We had close liaison (when I say we, the people that were involved in it) between the States on all matters relating to agriculture – how much money have you got for extension, how much money have you got for research? Things like legislation became very important, some crisis might have cropped up and they said, 'We'll have to have a new scheme for controlling grasshoppers' or something. It's useless for one State to legislate and the other State to legislate in its own way so this liaison enabled complementary legislation to be developed so that Australia-wide schemes became possible, particularly in regulatory type activities such as quarantine, pest control and, to some extent, in research.

Did you get involved in that sort of area yourself, personally?

No, not in any worthwhile way. I attended meetings of Agricultural Council and the Standing Committee on Agriculture on two or three occasions, all as an assistant to Jim McColl. We used to go along and hand him bits of paper when he had to speak and things like that, and write briefs for him for the Minister of Agriculture for the various subjects. These meetings were held over a week and there was actually a fairly extensive agenda that was developed for each of these meetings. It meant the preparation of briefing papers, especially for the Ministers of

Agriculture, and I was involved in plenty of them over the years in one way or another. I occasionally had to get up and speak, but very rarely. I wouldn't have wanted to be involved in it I don't think! It really wasn't my sort of thing.

[30:40] What about linkages again personally with people in other Departments in the other States? Did you form any … have the need to form any great connection with people to find out what they were doing or to share ideas?

No, not in any formal way. These things did develop, certainly in the research field. I was a Barley Research Officer and I knew exactly what was going on in the Victorian Department. Fortunately, I had good relations with a few of the fellows there. At one stage I got put on the organising committee for an International Grasslands Congress it was called, it was an international pasture research type meeting which in that particular year (about 1971 or something) was held in Australia. For nearly two years I was attending meetings of that organising committee, mostly in Brisbane because that was where the congress was going to be held. I got to know a whole heap of departmental people in that particular field. They were friendships and useful technical contacts that I was able to maintain over the years. They were good. Apart from that, it was just by chance. You had to go interstate for conferences and you'd meet people from other Departments. Sometimes you'd follow up contacts on something which you might have heard them talking about. I don't recall tremendously important continuing relationships with people from other departments that were interstate.

Of course, everyone's experiences are different and you've been able to, in the course of our 3 hours or so on tape, give us some indications of the Peter Barrow experiences.

Yes. A pretty waffly lot of talk I would say, but nevertheless that's perhaps the way you view things, and your job is to try and drag something out of it.

We'll see what comes out of it then Peter but we might call a halt to it for the moment. Thanks very much for your input.

It's been a pleasure.

[33:10] **End of interview**