AN INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY BERNARD O'NEIL WITH MR TREVOR DILLON OF KADINA. INTERVIEW CONDUCTED IN THE CONVENTION CENTRE, ADELAIDE ON THE 16TH OF FEBRUARY 2005 IN REGARDS TO THE HISTORY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA. TREVOR IS ACCOMPANIED BY HIS WIFE VAL. [Square brackets incorporate corrections or comments supplied by Don Plowman in June 2006.]

Tape 1, Side A

[0:30] Trevor, thanks for agreeing to be involved in our project. I'd like to have a bit of a chat about your experiences in the agricultural field. But obviously we should start with a little bit of personal background, if you don't mind, just to give us some context about Mr Trevor Dillon.

I was born on the 3rd of January 1938. My interests in agriculture started in the first four or five years of my life I spent at my grandfather's farm out at Warnarka in the Murray Mallee. So I've always had an interest in agriculture. I did most of my primary school education … We lived just out of Adelaide, it was then … It's Hope Valley now: it's in the middle of the suburbs. But it was certainly rural. When I finished high school education, somebody decided I might like to go to Roseworthy. My father was killed in the war so that meant that I was funded, federally, to do study. So, decided to go to Roseworthy and that's where all the horrible stories started.

[2:00] Did you have any input to that decision? You say somebody decided …

Yeah. No, no, I did. Being a repat. child, at the end of each year – certainly in high school days – we used to sit down with a committee to look at where my education was going. I reckon it was the bloke that eventually finished up Bishop Gleeson said, 'Well, what about going to Roseworthy College?'. I said, 'Never hear of the bloody place. Oh well, if it's agriculture it sounds alright', so that was it. Yes, I certainly had a say in the matter but it was his suggestion. Very grateful I was ever sent.

[2:50] But you had an interest in agriculture …

That's always going back to the grandfather's farm and obviously I spent time on that and as I said Hope Valley where we living was in the middle of … it was a winery anyway, but there were livestock everywhere and [?possibly a breed?] horses, so I was always sort of interested in agriculture.

[3:25] Did you see yourself having a possible life as a farmer or …?

That would've been nice, but never finished up with the wherewithal to buy the land so it didn't happen. (Both laugh.) … Left Roseworthy and worked on a station at Wilcannia and another one at Wentworth for three or four years. I worked on a farm down the South East for two years. Sold irrigation equipment for three years. Went over to the West and worked on properties over there for a couple of years. Came home and joined the Department of Agriculture. That's where it's been ever since, more or less.

[4:10] Well before we pick up on that joining, let's just back track a little bit on the things you were talking about there, the different experiences. What were your interests at Roseworthy for example?

Nothing. No particular interest there, it was just general. I suppose if I had an interest then it was livestock. I'd been keen on horses and that's where employment with the cattle and sheep on the stations basically came from there. So, that was the start out there.

[5:00] This would've been what – the mid 1950s?

'57. [Wife concurs.] Yes '57 when we left Roseworthy and I went to the station, yes.

So you graduated in '57?

Beginning of '57. There's … system in those days you graduated in March. Had your final exams over Christmas. (Both laugh) There must've been some logic in it somewhere.

And you were supported during your study by the …?

Yes, by the ...

Repat.?

Yes, the repat., yes. They supported me right through my study years. That was fortunate.

[5:45] So you weren't a cadet in the Department or anything of that type?

No, no, I wasn't. I was a free agent when I finished and headed bush.

[6:00] What was the attraction in going bush? A job or …?

I suppose it was just a job at that stage. Jobs weren't hard to come by, of course, in those days. It was very easy days. The first one was probably something different. I don't know how I got the opportunity anyway. Any time you changed jobs in those days, you just – I only changed a couple of times – but you just left because there was always a job around the corner. In those days bloody jobs were falling off of trees, but …

[6:50] No trouble getting a job, but you had to decide what sort of job.

That's right, yes. Of course, by the time I went to Roseworthy then my direction was … employment was set from there, there's no doubt about that. Even the selling I did for three years, that was with irrigation equipment and windmills, so I was still dealing with farmers and it was definitely agriculture.

Were you working for a company?

Yes. Southern Cross Machinery. Southern Cross windmills around that went through my books but we never sold that much ...

You were a salesman?

Yes, that's right. I covered the South East for those years.

And work in the South East?

Yes. I covered the South East, that was my area, but I'd been working down there for a couple of years anyway, but on the farms down there.

OK.

That all worked out nicely, sort of fitted in.

What sort of farms were you working on in the South East?

Basically livestock, basically a sheep property, sheep and some cattle, it was a grazing property.

Be a bit different to the Wilcannia experience.

Yes. It was quite a bit damper, very different, but it was still livestock and they tend to be the same anywhere.

From the hot and dry to the cold and wet.

Yes, it was a bit of a shock. When you're young, it doesn't worry you.

[8:30] That transition period working for the company, just there working as a salesperson, so to speak, what was the reasoning there? Any experience or …?

I don't know. It just seemed like a good idea at the time. (Both laugh.) Although three years of it and I'd had enough because the trouble [was] I couldn't sell to farmers who'd be keen to buy something that I knew that wasn't in their best interest, so that was enough for me. I couldn't sell something to somebody that I reckoned didn't need it, so there wasn't much future in hanging around with that. I went over to Western Australia to see what was happening. In those days, Western Australia, they were clearing country and there was new country developed all over the place. That seemed like an opportunity for managers of properties or something like that. Then I realised that that probably wasn't going to work out all that well. So, two broken legs later, I came back and joined the Department of Agriculture. I came back to Adelaide. I had in mind that the Department of Agriculture wasn't a bad way to go. I had a few mates that were in the Department then and they'd told me how good a job it was.

[10:20] It sounds like, from the description there, as we're looking back, one thing leads to another but there's no sort of defined career path for you.

No.

You were picking up things as you go along, getting experience?

Basically working with livestock and then I developed a ??? for a while which was really just selling it to farmers, so that it was in the same line and then went back working with livestock again and then joined the Department in agronomy, so that seems a bit perverse about that time.

Yes.

…

[11:00] Just to round out a little bit there: the West Australian experience – in the 1960s?

Yes. Mid ’60s.

Mid ’60s?

Yes. That was the stage when they were clearing property almost burning tens of thousands of acres a year, it might’ve been millions, but it was really jumping over there then, clearing big area of land and that’s why I went. Saw opportunity there for good jobs on properties, but the good job on the property didn’t seem so good when you were 100 miles from anywhere and batching. I mean life is a bit bloody short for that. (Laughs; Val comments off microphone.) I wouldn’t fancy bloody batching out there anyway.

I was going to ask about family life, whether you were going around as a bachelor at that stage?

Yes. We never got married until a few years afterwards – 1970. (Val: ‘Hmm That’s right!’.) I seem to remember that’s after I’d been in the Department about five years I suppose at that stage.

[12:25] I was going to ask you when you joined the Department: it’s about ’6…

Yes. Joined in ’6… I went to the West in ’63, so there 4 and 5, beginning of ’66.

’66: we can get a date for that later.

Beginning of the year it was. In January ’66 I joined the Department and went down and did around about two years in medic breeding although the job was built up to medic breeding, medic pasture breeding, out at the Northfield Research Laboratories, looking after the trials in the country at that stage. One of the senior guys, who’d been at ICARDA, called John Doulette, he might come up in other people’s ramblings along the way. John said, ‘You’re not cut out for this bloody job, you’d better get out and do a bit of extension. That’s where you’re going to enjoy it more’. He couldn’t see me as a research scientist. Looking back, I couldn’t either. So I got a job in herd improvement up at Jamestown: went up there in would’ve been March ’68.

And you got to the Jamestown office?

Yes. Worked out of Jamestown office for a couple of years. Then when we got married on the 1st of August 1970 moved down to Nuriootpa, still in the same job, and worked with Andrew Michelmore, at that stage our visitors, Rob and Andy. Andy was one of my mentors; guided us along the way.

At Jamestown?

No, no. That was at …

At Nuri.?

At Nuri.

Just to clarify that. So the first couple of years, '66 to '68, were out at Northfield essentially?

Yes, medic breeding. We had some trials all around the bush and I used to go and carry [on] those in harvest and do that sort of work.

There's a small team of people that you're working with?

Yes, me. No, there's Murray Mathieson and I. Murray was the breeder and I was his offsider and we used to have field assistants (uni students, that sort of thing) to go and help us. One day we'd been out up at Wanbi up in the middle of the Mallee and it seemed a bit hot and we were up there working all day harvesting these bloody medic pods and we'd consumed a fair bit of water. I said, 'Gee's it's hot'. When we got back to civilisation, got back to the pub that night, it'd been – in those days 110 I think. We'd been out there quite basically reasonably happily, just consuming a lot of water. Gee's it was hot.

But you don't think of those things ...

No.

… when you're young …

You're doing it and it was hot, we knew that. Whether it was bloody 37 or 40 it really didn't make much difference.

You didn't stop working in those conditions is the point.

No, that's right. We were dedicated people in those days. (Both laugh.)

You reckon they were tougher then?

I wouldn't say that. No, I wouldn't go that far. We were probably more dedicated, but …

Also we look at things now and with the modern situation and warnings about sunscreen and wearing hats and taking water and so on, in those days you just went and did it.

That's right. You just took your shirt off and went out into the sun. (Both laugh.) If you were lucky you took … because you had all your hair in those days, you didn't even bother about a bloody hat. No. That was the medic breeding days. The medic breeding did set up an extra knowledge and interest in pastures as such and that's something that because we were dealing with medic pastures, medic pastures had been the staple part of the pastures in the areas that I've worked, particularly on Yorke Peninsula, so that couple years background was invaluable, it was great.

[17:30] You said you'd worked with Murray. But other people in a broader team, in a broader group? Did you have much interaction with other …

I'll tell you heaps. Paul Heap. Have you've talked to Ted [Higgs]? Ted I think was Murray's boss. Then we got out to … then it went up to the Chief Agronomists and up the bloody line.

Did you have much contact with those people, the Chiefs and so on?

In those days it was a pretty small department and you saw the Chiefs … There was this sort of a conference like this [at the Convention Centre] every year, but it was something that the Department ran. For the Agronomy Section, the Department used to run this workshop and over the years that got a bit lost and now Jon Lamb runs it basically [for] the GRDC of course. At those sorts of things you always met and particularly when you're … and the bosses used to … The fact that it was a small department, they all used to manage to get around the bush and catch up with you fairly regularly. Yes, you knew everybody that was in the bloody Department, even the Livestock and Soils guys, you probably knew a hell of a lot of those.

[18:50] I was just wondering how much interaction there was, but ...
It was quite good. It was probably as good as you wanted it to be through most of my career in the country. If you wanted to go and do your own thing you did because while you knew them all and you were quite comfortable talking to the Chiefs, you never saw enough of them to upset what you wanted to do. So if you decided that you wanted to do something you did it. You always had a pretty good reason for doing it anyway, so that just didn't create problems. But yes, we saw our Chief when he came … Had a pretty good relationship with him, put it that way. So if we wandered around we always called him. But most times we stayed out of their bloody way and they stayed out of ours and everybody was happy about that.

[20:10] You mentioned you had a couple of mates in the Department: the people you'd studied with, Roseworthy people.
Yes. That was Peter Magarey and Jack Blencoe. A couple of different people, but at that stage they were in the Department and they used to tell us what a bloody good job it was and so that was fine and it was too.

[20:40] Did you see this being a job where you would stay?
Yes.

By this stage you were settling down a bit?
That's right, yes. I was 28 and I'd had a pretty fair look around. That's nine years I'd been wandering around the bush and around the place and had a pretty fair look around. As I said, when I came back from the West, I had ideas before I left the West that the Department of Agriculture might've been a good option. [As soon as I] left the West to come back, I had that in mind. I suppose I'd been talking to those mates before I went away, probably before I went to the West. I was going to have a look around and if didn't work come back anyway. When I joined the Department there was no thought that it was there for the long-term situation. Not necessarily as long as it turned out to be, perhaps.

We're going to get to, hopefully, get through the whole story in due course.

Went through the medic business and then Jamestown and worked for some good guys there – Gavin Young, Peter Marks. Is Peter on your list?

Not yet.

Isn't he? He ought to be. Peter Marks at the place between Pt Elliott and Goolwa.

We'll track him down.

Yes, between Pt Elliott and Goolwa, little bloody village there.

Middleton?

Middleton, that's it, yes. Peter dealt with … here. So Gavin Young and Peter they were a great start for me. Then, as I said, that was two years and I just transferred from there to Nuriootpa doing the same job. We were working for the graziers up in the hills with pastures and fertilising and the range country. Plenty of it up around Jamestown and through Nuri. and the Barossa and through up to Clare.

[23:30] What was involved in this sort of work?

Basically just talking to farmers encouraging them to sow more pastures and put more fertiliser on their horticulture. That was the job I was employed to do, but I probably might've done that for half the time; the other time I spent with the other agronomists and soils people, This was pretty much a training job, a training position. Spent as much as time as we could with the district agronomist and, particularly, soils guys.

So it's a combination between educating the farmer and perhaps your own education. (laughs)

Definitely. It was more educating me than the farmer probably. Plus I was learning from the farmers as well.

What were your relations like with the farmers, in general, talking in this early period?

Very good, always has been, yes. You always get a few that 'The bloody Department's a mob of arseholes', but it's been very minor. Probably at this stage now, the farming community and the farmers, singularly, their appreciation of the Department of Agriculture is by far the lowest it's ever been in my time, because they're working differently. They're not out working with farmers like we did. It's a change, for better or for worse, but it's certainly changed the appreciation of the general farming community to the Department of Agriculture, because they're not out there helping them. You've heard the story about 'We're from the government, we're here to help you'. But the relationships were always very good. I've never had any trouble walking on to a farm and introducing myself from the Department of Agriculture. Never had any trouble.

[25:45] Did you find this transition where in the old days farmers might say, 'Yes, you are from the government, you're here to help, and we need help' ....

Yes.

… did you find they were very receptive?

Exactly, yes. This wasn't the way that … usually used. [Possibly an indication of a farmer's response?, missing word possibly 'Tom'] No, they were very happy to … because in those days the Department of Agriculture really did have a hell of a good name through the bush and the extension. Obviously because there'd been some pretty good guys in the jobs before that's why it was like that; because the staff, the guys that'd been out there, had done a hell of a good job and were very accepted. They built their own bloody image and own appreciation.

[26:20] Of course, being at Jamestown and Nuriootpa, you're part of the local community.

Yes. At Nuriootpa not so much, because at Nuriootpa I was basically dealing with broadacre cereal farmers: the closest guy I used to deal with was about bloody 10 ks out of Nuri. We were living in the middle of a big vineyard horticultural area and the grain farmers and the sheep farmers were outside of that little circle. So there wasn't so much at Nuri., but certainly at Jamestown and the other places we'd worked at there had been, yes.

Someone said at one stage that if you went to Nuriootpa, it was a place where you did nothing, there was nothing to do. (Laughs.)

Yes, I know about that.

So you kept busy, found something?

Yes. Our area used to take in Clare and Mallala, through that Mid North end right across to the coast at Windsor and Dublin, we didn't do much around there. In those days there was a research centre there (obviously it's a viticulture research centre), but our office was in the main street so that we weren't part of the viticulture centre as such anyway. Now the office is out at the research centre which is a little bit different story, but in those days we had nothing to do with the research centre at all. Went off and found plenty to do.

OK. Just a small mob. You mentioned Gavin and Peter.

That was at Jamestown.

That's Jamestown. You're a small mob there. Then at Nuriootpa, you've got a small mob again.

Yes. I'm mentioning the ones particularly that I worked with. We had quite a number there as well. The ones at Nuri. were Andy Michelmore, Bill Matheson (he was the Soils Officer), Chris Rudd wasn't there then, was he? [Val: 'No'.] He came after Bill. So they were probably the main two there – Andy and Bill Matheson. Bill was a Soils Officer. Andy was the District Advisor, Agricultural Advisor. Andy was a great … Andy was an incredible guy. He had an incredible memory. He'd always been very interested in agronomy, plants growing and crops growing. Andy would go out and he'd see something out in the paddock, something had

happened to the crop, and Andy would say, 'Now I remember I saw a crop like that back in 1940', 30 years ago, and he was right. It was the same symptoms in the soil out. He was very observant. If he saw something like that he'd check it out and work out what was going on and that gave me a … I've always done the same and remembered those situations. It's always made me a bit different to a lot of the other agronomists. They'd say, 'Bloody hell, how did you know that was going on?'. I'd say, 'We saw it …' (I was nearly as bad as Andy!) '10 years ago and checked it out and that's why it happened'. They'd say, 'What the bloody hell …'.

[30.00] … trouble you learn nothing.

Yes. … give you that detail about that. The only trouble with old Andy was getting him going in the morning. [Val, 'He couldn't ever say goodbye'.] Plus he couldn't say goodbye, yes. (All laugh.) One of nature's bloody gentlemen, he really was but he couldn't say goodbye. You'd be with the guy for a couple of hours and you'd sorted out this is what you recommended he'd do and that's how he will do it and instead of saying, 'See you mate. If you've got any other queries give us a ring Andy Cook'. [Andy Cook = name or slang?] He'd stand out and mumble stuff, but if you didn't do something he'd stand there for bloody hours! He was excellent background for me with his basic knowledge anyway and he was honest in his approach to managing agronomy stuff.

You were able to learn a fair bit off of him?

Yes. That was very valuable: 12 months we spent there, just over. We were there for 12 months.

[31:00] How long were you at Nuriootpa for?

Twelve months.

Just the 12 months.

Just the 12 months. Then they decided that … At that stage the Department was actually expanding! There was an Agricultural Adviser, Keith Bicknell, at Murray Bridge. Keith then was a guy who worked for us. He was at Murray Bridge and there was one at … [To Val:] **Alan Hicks**? [Val, 'Hmm'] Alan Hicks was at Loxton and there was nobody down in the southern Mallee in the Pinnaroo line, so …

[31:45] **End of Tape 1, Side A**
Tape 1, Side B

[0:10] You were just describing the move towards the Pinnaroo region.

Yes. They decided to open an office, as I said, down in the southern Mallee. They took a bit of time to make up their mind whether it should be at Pinnaroo or Lameroo. I think the Lameroo Clerk of the Council there had a fair bit to do with it. They decided that Pinnaroo's too close to the border and so they decided to set up at Lameroo. If you know anything about the

relationship between Lameroo and Pinnaroo, it's a pretty interesting one. Pinnaroo were always very upset that we moved into Lameroo instead of there but anyway. We found a sort of an office: it was the old fish and chip wasn't it? Had been the fish and chip before in a little arcade in Lameroo, so we set up an office there and I was the only person in the office. As we were saying before, Val used to answer the phone for me at home. We got a phone system, didn't we? [Val: 'That's right'.] I used to have a switch in the office. I didn't switch you off did I? I probably did. We had the one phone line split between the house and office.

The house was adjoining the office?

No.

Completely separate.

… down the track with it. Initially we had an old house we lived in, but it … They built us a house and it was a bloody disaster. In those days the Department of Agriculture owned their own houses. They built this and then they built a couple didn't they? One for somebody else there. Then they built this house and it was a bloody disaster, but that doesn't matter. So we set up there and we stayed there for three years.

That was 197..?

'71 to '74, yes.

'71 to '74.

Yes.

[2:30] You said a couple of times there Trevor, 'they': 'They did this …', 'They set up the office' and so on. They being the Department. Were you involved at all in any of that decision?

In the decision no, I wasn't involved in the decision. The decision was made at Lameroo and then I was sent down there to sort it out with the help of the clerk, they found us a house to rent and the local council ...

[3:00] Did you have to apply to go down there? You say that you were sent …

They decided that perhaps it a bloody good place for me to go. (laughs)

OK.

I don't know for what ... At that stage what used to happen was that most of the people that came into the Department (graduates) came straight from uni or Roseworthy and went straight in. They were pretty keen to get me out in the field or to get me in the first place, because I'd been out and had a bit of a look around. As I said, I was 29 then, I'd been around a bit. So they sent me down there on my own to set that up. … I suppose.

[4:00] A bit of a challenge.

Wasn't just a rural graduate out trying to find my way around. Got involved with some very good farmers there (that wasn't hard) and went from there. Then it definitely was the farmers teaching me then, because my contact and my mentor still at that stage was Keith Bicknell at Murray Bridge. Keith was one of the senior guys. If I had any problems I'd give him a ring or I'd go out and see a couple of farmer mates and sort it out with them. One of the main ones, I suppose, was Jim Pocock. Jim: was he the advisory board then? [Val answers.] Don't know. The thing that allowed us to find our way around in the district was the Bureau set-up. Have you heard about the Agricultural Bureau set-up?

Yes.

They were at Karoonda, …, Lameroo, Geranium, Coonalpyn, Coomandook. There was about six or seven Agricultural Bureaus then. They were very strong in those days. I'd get dragged out to Bureau meetings and, of course, that's where you got the farmers. Through that, that was always a connection back to get you a base of people around the place to catch up with if you wanted to know what was going on in an area, if you hadn't been there for a while, you always had somebody to ring.

I should've asked you earlier, Trevor, were you a member of the Ag. Bureaus at all?

No, we weren't a member.

But even in your earlier days, you hadn't …?

No. We didn't and the Department of Agriculture people weren't members. We'll get on to the heavy Bureau stuff when we get back to the Yorke Peninsula. No, you didn't become a member. You went along to … They'd want you to talk at meetings, but if they had a meeting with an interesting speaker you'd go along anyway. You were always welcome, you'd go along in any case. If you had somebody else speaking there that was interesting you'd go to those.

I was thinking in your pre-department days whether you'd been a member.

That was more in Western Australia and as that State was developing, they didn't have a Bureau or an organisation. Down the South East, I suppose they had one when I was there but I didn't take part.

[7:25] What about something like the Rural Youth?

I was a member of the Rural Youth when I was at Roseworthy. After that it didn't feature.

Short-term member.

That's right, yes. Wandering around.

[7:40] You were talking there about setting up the office in Lameroo. It sounds like you didn't get much of a choice: this is where the office is going to be and you're going there.

Yes. There weren't too many options. That didn't faze me. By that time I was quite happily doing what I was doing working with old Andy Michelmore and the guys at Nuri. Arthur Tideman I suppose, it was Arthur in those days that said to me, 'You're going down there'. I suppose somewhere along the way they asked me if I wanted to. They probably did, and went through the details. It didn't matter, because the idea of going down and setting up an office in some ways was probably daunting being there on my own, working was probably pretty bloody daunting for a start but it was also interesting, so away we went. Valerie was having babies at that stage.

A family is underway.

Yes, that's right.

It's interesting though that … for so long, you've got an office in Murray Bridge and Loxton and so on, why there's this perceived need for one at Pinnaroo or Lameroo …

Yes. As I say the Department was expanding and we still did after that because even in ??? days when I was Senior District Officer at Kadina we opened up … I remember arguing about whether it should be Minlaton or Victor Harbor next. Victor Harbor got the nod and so that would've been in the '80s, in the '80s I reckon we set up Victor Harbor. Then as well as that Wudinna or Lock or wherever it was, that central Eyre Peninsula one, was the set up in those days too. Things were expanding.

[9:40] So just looking at the Lameroo office, before we move on. What's involved there? Obviously you're setting up the office itself and getting to meet the local people and so on. But one-person show: what did you do?

What did I do?

Everything?

Yes. We did, started off the … …

Livestock?

Yes. There was a Livestock Advisor, Dave Yeo was basically based at Loxton. He used to work from Adelaide. He lived in Adelaide and was based at Loxton so he used to move through now and again. Hang on, I think there was Warwick Hack was the Animal Health Advisor at Loxton, so that that gave the Livestock back up and a lot of that was enquiries that had come through me to them. Went there first in '71. '72 was a rip-snorting drought, it was a cracker, and that year there were no crops to look at and I spent most of that year helping farmers to feed lotting lambs and drought feeding stock, so I was just about a Livestock Officer that year. But some of the agronomists have always just been on the fringe of the livestock stuff anyway. There had been some of the livestock problems that relate to agronomy anyway. So that we were sitting on our medics, our pastures had been grown in many ways, so that you always

teamed it up with the livestock. Being on your own, but most of the enquiries came through you and the animal health crowd, Warwick used to handle them, and Dave Yeo used to handle the general, the breeding stuff and the livestock just passing, with that sort of more production stuff for the livestock, so those two girls were the livestock support – if you'd like to call it that. Certainly in '72, I spent more time on livestock than anything else. Sort of way back, my background was in livestock and I probably should've been a livestock officer, but I was always pretty keen on it and it worked out fine.

[11:45] Having explained some of your background, being aware of that, I thought maybe in the Lameroo office you're getting people coming in with all sorts of issues, not just agronomy.

That's right, yes. Fruit trees, the lot, herds, you name it.

Between the two of you, you had to suss …

...

I say that jokingly, but did you have to refer things back to the head office or to one of the other …?

… that's livestock support and then the agronomy, anything that I was a bit unsure of I'd ring Keith Bicknell. There's always been the specialist type people, even though they would've been the barley breeders, the wheat breeders and the plant pathologists – I saw Alan Dubé out there [at this conference]. There were always the specialists that you contacted with any special issues ...

[12:20] I was just wondering how much connection there was between Lameroo and head office in Adelaide: phone calls, paperwork, that sort of thing?

Yes. There was always a bit of paperwork: I used to avoid that. But if ever you had a problem, the agronomy ones and all those problems, you worked out it was a management or a personal problem away from the job, away from the agronomy, they were always approachable. I suppose Glyn Webber would have been about then no doubt of course. Jack McAuliffe and Glyn Webber would've been in head office at that stage up there. They used to come down on a fairly regular basis. We used to have meetings with the Loxton guy, Murray Bridge, myself, we used to meet up and those blokes would come down for those meetings. They'd be around reasonably often I suppose. They never used to bother us but they were certainly always available if ever we wanted some help and some support.

[13:30] Did you have come into Adelaide?

I suppose we did. Yes. We'd come up for workshops like this and by that time we'd started statewide meetings of the agronomists. We used to have them now and again. It might be a special issue that we were looking at: the group of agronomists that had that issue or problem would come and meet. We used to come to town fairly often for work, but …

It gave you a chance to keep up with not just people but the current themes and research and findings and so on.

As I said, we've always had pretty good contact with the research guys. We'd ring them and they'd be looking for trial sites so they'd be coming out seeing us too. It'd work out. They'd want to know what was going on with this as well, so that's always been a two-way street. I'm still very close to some of the researchers anyway: have a good relationship with them even when I've been out of the Department for a while.

[14:30] The activities in that area, Trevor: what sort of farms were they and …?

At that stage there was just wheat, barley and sheep and cattle. Wheat, barley and livestock. Probably while I was down there they started to grow a few [alternatives], a few peas and a few vegetables, they hadn't grown them before it was just wheat and barley and pastures. So it was pretty simple agriculture at that stage.

Were there any particular problems or …?

Year in, year out – no. There was one that I'd become involved in, and I became involved in it down there, that probably set me up with any amount of credibility I had over the years, notoriety, was cereals cyst nematode. I reckoned it was a problem in the paddocks. Our best man was working on it at the Waite. There was a couple of guys and the plant pathology people were just starting. We knew it was a problem and when I was working in the Murray Mallee material, it'd been sitting there in the background and nobody had worried about it too much. I started to get a bit interested in it and I studied the research type … This nematode was year in, year out, it's a root disease problem, so it was always there as a problem. Some of the others would come and go. The next one that came … So that was the cyst nematode. I started working on it, started to get interested in it. Then '73, of course, ('73?), we had 5 inches of rain in January '73 and the whole bloody house was just about under water. That triggered off a stem-rust outbreak and probably for till this day, '73 and '74, I think we only had 5 inches, but 5 inches of rain one January and 8 the next … That was crucial to setting up this bloody stem-rust outbreak and we had a hell of a mess. I'll try and remember whether it was Lameroo, it was all wet there, certainly up through the northern parts of the Mallee, Karoonda and through there. It's very bad stem rust and we had it again the next year as well. So that was an issue of disease ... They probably didn't have a lot of problems down there, we were always trying to do things better, we were saying that's always the case, the ongoing problems of the CCN. Then the rust outbreak in '73 and '74 was pretty bloody horrific for a lot of farmers, they're still remembering it. The last stem-rust outbreak we had was 30 years ago: we're probably getting a lot closer to the next one.

That puts a bit of pressure on you as the District Agronomist.

Yes. You did what you could in those days. You couldn't spray for it or anything so you were just advising him on varieties to grow next year if they got less bloody rust that's all you had to do, you couldn't spray for it, there was no fungicides about to be used. It was really a matter of holding their hand and helping them get some varieties next year growing less risk. That was the time we told them that stem rust never occurred two years in a row, a mistake we made, even experienced ones can ...

It's observation, the history of what's happened before.

That was it. The stem rust had never occurred two years in a row. What we got … Nobody had put together was … Who knew about these bloody floods two years in a row either in January, because that carried over and built up the disease. That had never happened two years in a row: the living memories that were around then, or the people that were around then, or the farmers that were around then. They're aware of that now: if it happened again, we wouldn't make the same mistake – that it doesn't occur two years in a row. If the weather conditions were right, it could. That's just about the time we got this stem rust, that's the end of Lameroo.

[19:15] Yes, almost! You mentioned fungicides.

Yes.

Moves on to a point we talked on briefly before the tape started – herbicides and issues like weeds and plant control and pests, animal pests, and so on.

Herbicides – at that stage we had 24-D, a hormone herbicide, that's all we had. While I was at Lameroo, we started looking at diuron and trifluralin, a couple of brand new herbicides hit the market. That's why I was … In about '72 that diuron was released first: that's pretty significant because diuron is still used on just about 70, 80% of the hectares that are grown to this day, so that's 30 years it's lasted, an extremely valuable bloody herbicide.

Weed problems. Soursobs were a hassle, and ryegrass. That's why we were looking at diuron for the soursobs and then trifluralin came. We were also looking at diuron for ryegrass, but then the trifluralin came and did an excellent job on the ryegrass and that was fine. Do you want to go … There's a bit of a story going right through with herbicides and if you want to follow that through now.

Yes, we've got a few minutes here, so yes.

Right through?

Yes, we'll follow that through, yes.

That's something that stands apart from.

I was wondering, that's why I asked you Trevor, how you get on as a single officer with all these sorts of problems coming up and you've got to know all the herbicides, you've got to know everything.

Herbicides and ??? were up there

I'll give you your steam.

There was the diuron and then trifluralin started in '72. As I said it's still probably the most common herbicide used now. What happened then was the trifluralin got rid of the ryegrass, that did an excellent job of that, and also worked on some of the other weeds. The diuron we were using to try and control the soursobs, that was pretty unsuccessful. The trifluralin controlled the ryegrass and then the soursobs really went mad because it took away their main competitor so they went berserk. Through the late '70s soursobs were a real problem through the Mallee, right up through the Mid North, Yorke Peninsula: most of the cropping areas in those days were older cropping areas, soursobs were a hell of a problem. Then in the early '80s, in '82, we got a sulfonyurea herbicide called Glean and that did a magic job on the soursobs. The soursobs had gone. By then we'd got rid of the rye ... We had the ryegrass under control, we had the soursobs under control, so things like bedstraw and bifora. By this time I was on Yorke Peninsula really bobbed up on some grassier weeds. Ball mustard, musk weed, they came in to fill the hole because we'd taken all the competition out. My general comment on dealing with weeds is we stumbled from crisis to crisis.

They were reactive?

Yes. Then we still had some ryegrass around must've been in the early '80s. The trifluralin did a good job, but we had hoegrass was released. Hoegrass is a selective herbicide you can use on wheat and barley to remove the ryegrass. That was started then so that really put a lid on the ryegrass. Then we had trouble, we didn't have anything to remove the grass of the barley grass, the ryegrass and brome grass in the pastures. Fusillade was released in about '85, so that took care of that. Everything was going along and then we had … There were other herbicides came along and until we got into the '90s and then we found that some of these herbicides weren't killing the weeds anymore. Ryegrass particularly became resistant so that was the next crisis we were struck with and we are right in the middle of it now and it's getting worse. Then through the late '80s and '90s there were a lot of new herbicides, new chemistry, new ??? taking grass out of soil which is not a bad effort because it's a ??? grass out of soil and out of our legumes. That's a pot pourri on the herbicides, but that's been in incredible change in my career since 1973 to 30 odd years. We've just about done the full circle: we've had all the herbicides to kill all the weeds and now the bastards have become resistant, [so we have to go round?] to finish the cycle.

The other thing that comes through out of your description there Trevor, is you've got a lot more herbicides and control methods versus the early days where you've just one or two.

For sure.

You've got a lot more testing, you've got to be a lot more aware of the impact, I guess.

That's right and it's fortunate that you got a bit … that another one comes in another couple of years and you've just managed to sort out where the previous one fits so that ??? too. It must be difficult for people, from out of uni or something, though, to land in and have to pick it all up. Research work it's not easy, it's manageable.

Have you been involved in any of these developments of the herbicides, not the scientific side of it, but testing or anything?

[Shake of the head.]

Just in the application?

Yes, testing and the application, yes.

[26:00] Thanks for outlining that. We've just got a moment left on this tape. A very quick question. You mentioned the problems in Lameroo with floods or rain. What about fire? Particular problems …

I've never been in … Pretty lucky, we've never been in a really bad fire. No. The numbers of fires aren't all that great, the bad ones. There was one that they still talk about at Kadina in '61. There hasn't been a bad fire in the Yorke Peninsula since ??? ... For the people that get burnt out they're bloody serious … I never knew [anyone?] that's been burnt out: it didn't happen down at Lameroo whilst we were down there.

We're just going through that Eyre Peninsula stuff at the moment, people being burnt out and so on

We've been pretty lucky. The nearest we got was … When was bloody Ash Wednesday? '83?

'83.

'83. There was some damage around ??? and I went over and gave some assistance to sorting out the problems and that sort of thing over there. But I've been lucky: I haven't been in no bushfire.

That's good.

Yes.

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

[0:15] OK Trevor we're still learning about the Lameroo experience. [Had been talking off tape.]

Yes. We sorted it out – the last year at Lameroo with the end of the drought. Mice usually followed some droughts into wet years. That's the way it went '72–'73. We had a very bad mice plague at Lameroo. We had them in the house and all over the place. It was tied in with the wet weather. The wet suits the mice so we had a mice plague when we left, I suppose. No, that was '74, no we got over it by the time we left. The point being, of course, was that we had these two wet years following the drought where the stem rust had a big effect. From memory it wasn't so bad around Lameroo but certainly in the Karoonda area that was part of the district, it

was bad up there, I remember that. Somewhere in the middle of ’74, one of the old bosses Jack McAuliffe came down and said, ‘Do you want to go to Yorke Peninsula?’. I said, ‘Sounds alright. What about Mattsy?’. At that stage Noel Matts was the agronomist at Yorke Peninsula. Old Jack said, ‘We … …’. I said, ‘They mightn’t, what about me?’ He said, ‘You’re … …’. I’m still trying to ??? So the move was on. We moved to Yorke Peninsula in September ’74. There was an office in Kadina then. They were pretty well established: been established in ’66 when I joined. … We landed there in September. Before we got there people had started talking about the Libyan project. So November ’74 we were heading for Libya, we were on the plane to Libya.

Instead of …

With the two kids in nappies. [Val talking in background.] Yes, we were going to have to sort that out when we got on the plane. You’ve probably got something on the Libyan …

[3:40] I’d like to hear a little bit about your personal involvement, just …

You have the basis of it, you’ve got …

Yes. Arthur Tideman’s book on it. [*The Medic Fields*.]

Henry [Day] and Sally, and Val and I with the two little ones. We landed there in the middle of November, early November, in ’74 to set up this demonstration farm. Henry was the officer in charge: he also had obviously background in agronomy and research stuff. I was pastoral agronomist, wasn’t I? Keith Bicknell basically was the same work but they followed a couple of months later. He was a cereals agronomist. [Note: AFT’s book shows positions reversed.]

How did you feel about this? I mean you’re going …

…

Had you actually been considering it?

No. We had sort of talked about it before we shifted. Eventually we got to Kadina – we went there in September so it was about two months in Kadina. We didn’t think we had a snowball’s chance in hell of actually getting selected because a couple of other people were a lot more experienced. Thought [they’d] probably have got the position before us and maybe afterwards too. As it worked out, remember that we were the right age to go – others were a bit old or …

Did you have to volunteer for Libya?

Yes. It wasn’t conscription. We were scrambling over it. There was fair bit of competition to go. We were quite keen to go. There was no worries about being told we were going, the first to go … not too sure we weren’t a bit naive at the time. The summary, and I’ve always quoted Val on this one, that we had nearly two years there. We were away from Australia for two years. We came back to Kadina again on the October long weekend in ’76, so we were away and while it was very hard work and not easy living there with the Muslim lifestyle, but Val always

said that it was bloody hard work but it was an experience we didn't regret at all. It was particularly hard work for Val.

We got our demonstration farm going. We did a lot of seeding that first year we got there: we did seeding as soon as we got there. We must've got some gear from somewhere and sowed some of the demonstration farm. As it turned out, despite what anybody else might think, I probably finished up Henry's offsider, more or less his 2-I-C and that was probably because of age – I was still young enough to run around all bloody day. I lost a stone while I was there: used to run everywhere because it was the only way you'd get anything done. You really had to work at it. Along with the normal induction and stops and starts and then – what, we'd been there 12 months? – Henry had to go in to … we'd been there 12 months, Henry Day had to go in to an operation, the plumbing operation – what do you call it? bypass – an operation in England. I was officer-in-charge for three or four months, because they hadn't got back by the time you had … [Val answers 'No'.] No. So I stepped in to the role of officer-in-charge for the two or three or four months they were there [in England]. Henry came back and we left. We had two growing seasons over there but we we're pretty happy with what we achieved really because that was a start we were on.

[9:20] These were early days of the overseas projects for the Department.

That was the initial one. There'd been some of the more scientist stuff … Ted Carter was a pasture guru and he'd been over to Algeria. He may have even been through to Tunisia. He was as much as anything, probably out of a uni. As far as the Department went, it was the big step up anyway.

[10:10] You mentioned Ted Carter: is he with the Department at the time or is …

No. He was always in the uni. He had been in the Department [of Lands] when they cleared Kangaroo Island but he was a lecturer out at the Waite by then. They'd been around a bit but this was the first serious step into overseas agriculture as I remember it.

[10:45] It's a big step for not just you but the Dillon family.

It was. We were fortunate in that if the kids had been any older we wouldn't have gone because their education would've been too important. But it was just ideal. When we came back Simon went into kindy and straight into school. The timing was just perfect for us. The idea of going to Libya was incredibly good. Probably in the end it worked out that the big plus was that – my father was killed at Tobruk in the Second World War – I actually got to see his headstone and saw Tobruk. We could never workout what the bloody hell people were fighting for. [All laugh]

It's a common story.

??? and Gallipoli, that was a hell of lot of different going through that. That could've been worth fighting for. But this one is a big bloody desert at Tobruk. That was a plus in going to Libya.

[12:15] What did you get out of it? I don't mean in your career, but more when you come back after a couple of years, how did Trevor Dillon benefit from that experience?

You got me. Some of the senior guys at that stage, Lex Walker, certainly onside with Lex afterwards, Lex Walker and Peter Barrow, they were seniors in the Agronomy Section of the Department at that stage when we came back. They carried me through a couple of … [Val, 'Changes'.] No. [Val, 'Promotion'.] Promotions, a step up from there anyway. They carried me through those. Lex and Ellie came over to visit. We had quite a few of these guys used to visit at different times. Lex and Ellie came and visited. I took them … You were with me? [Val, 'I was in England'.] Oh, you were in England. Val got out of Libya, she was only a temporary guest in Libya. I took Lex and Ellie and might've been a couple of others then to Benghazi went into a market-like place, a poor man's [Adelaide] Central Market, but it was a very interesting place. Lex started taking photos. The next thing about four or five guys appeared out of the crowd and wanted to confiscate the camera. I sort of immediately said, 'It's my camera. It's not Lex's camera. It's my camera'. I had some idea of what went on in the country. Lex was very impressed and still in debt to me because I spent all day in the police stations in a couple of different ones in Benghazi trying to hang on to his camera. Eventually they took the film out. They said, 'You can have that'. They took the film out and we got the photos back a month or so later. So the work that I'd done over there and more, not so much the agronomy stuff but helping manage the show and get going, that certainly opened a few doors for me when I came back.

[15:40] And what about for agriculture, generally, and the Department here when you came back? I'm still trying to work out what sort of benefits South Australia got out of this.

We sold seed. We sold a lot of pasture seed. We sold cereal seed at that stage. But certainly the pasture seed. That was the catalyst that started it all off. The seed growers, South Australian Seed Growers, had been selling this medic pasture seed into Libya. Because they'd been there before us, this particular guy, Bashir Jodah (a Libyan), was pretty keen. Very bright, brilliant guy. He'd been out here and he'd worked out that this system we had of the cereal medic system suited them – very similar in climate and soil types. The seed growers had been selling seed from here and this project was seen as enhancing those sales because we were to go and demonstrate to the farmers on a farm how they should manage it and also to help them manage it. The Seed Growers' people used to go in and help them plant some and then they would leave. They'd be short-term people. They were looking to have this project to actually demonstrate how the whole system worked together. That was the idea and once we had that

whole system working, then we would sell them a lot more pasture seed and machines – Horwood Bagshaw and Shearers sold a lot of machinery, quite a reasonable amount of machinery, there while we were there. [Val inaudible.] … So that was the trade. Trade was the background to the whole thing and the reason for being there. Don Dunstan was very excited about the whole bit. This one Libyan guy who was in charge of the whole project, Bashir Jodah, … He'ad been out here a couple of times and he was a ??? bloke. He'd sorted out that this was the way they should go. It certainly didn't do any harm with the trade. Things got a bit sticky by the time we got through to the '80s and the project folded. [Val, 'Perhaps it was a bit earlier than that'.] Yes but by the time … [Val speaks.] ... That wasn't what I was getting at really. Perhaps we'll discuss it: that stuff went on all the time – arguing with Tunisia, arguing with Egypt or somewhere else. But as far as the project and us working with the Libyans went, that virtually wound down and by 1980 the last ones were out.

[19:45] That was a one-off experience for you, those two years?

While I was there I went to a couple of international agronomy conferences. One was in Tunisia, went to Tunisia for a couple of weeks. There was a lot of FAO people working on food and all sorts of scientists working in the Middle East. The second one I went to Baghdad. Went to Iraq. I was over there for 10 days, a fortnight. All those countries were grabbing any South Australians around because a lot of them had visited the project farm in Libya and were looking to see what they could with it. Then Iraq enters with Iran in '78. Iraq's '78, '79, somewhere. Iraqs were interested in doing a similar deal so we went over there to ... that's where I spent a fair bit of time in planning. Don [Plowman] was the head of the group: there were four of us – Peter Carr, Ken Holden and myself. We had six weeks in Iraq. I don't think I'd [possibly 'even been asked to work for'] for six weeks but anyway. (Laughs) Six weeks in Iraq setting up this project, doing the negotiation with the Iraqis and the planning of it and all the vehicles, how we were going to manage the fertilizer and what we needed to set up the project. That was my next step overseas: six weeks helping to set up the Iraqi project.

A much shorter term.

Yes. A much shorter term on a different basis.

You mentioned, Trevor, going to these conferences: were you giving, papers there or …

I did one of them. They couldn't understand me. Me speaking good agricultural strine. Probably a lot of them could speak English. The agricultural strine didn't mean much to them anyway. We were still talking a different language. I gave a paper, certainly for the one in Baghdad I did. It's amusing when I … …

That's a fairly discrete episode in the overseas experience for you.

Yes, it was. As I said, it was hard work. People would always ask us when we came back, 'Jesus, you must've enjoyed that?'. We said, 'No'. And they would say, '???'. 'No, you don't enjoy it, but it was a very different experience that we wouldn't miss out on'. You've probably said the same at times Val.

[23:25] Was there any perception within the Department, or even outside the Department, of some sort of junket where people were not jumping on the gravy train in a negative sense, but it just …

Not that anybody ever … There may have been a few grizzles that it had taken some of the better agricultural people out of the State, away from the farmers. I can remember, 'They're flying you off there. What are we going to do?'. That sort of attitude. [It might] bother them that I'd come to the Yorke Peninsula and Yorke Peninsula was pretty poorly serviced for the next couple of years while I was away. That would've been the only reaction. I never think anybody really had any concerns that way.

For the people going, a few weeks there would've dispelled any notion of …

Of being a great holiday, yes.

Tough environment, tough work.

It was an incredible experience of living in a Muslim world with their different attitudes to life. Also in Libya. Gavin Young used to say, 'The only thing older than 200 years old in Australia was bloody gum trees' and we were looking at aqueducts and things there that went to BC. The ??? of the Roman Empire and that sort of thing. A very different situation. From that point of view, very interesting of course. I used to spend a lot of Fridays, Fridays were a day off of course, around the ruins. What did one of the young Libyans say, 'What do you want to go down there for? The only stuff down there is old'. (All laugh)

[26:05] In a sense those sorts of observations underlie your comment about you're talking agricultural science and the audience couldn't understand it, because it's not just one generation but there's a couple of lifetime's difference!

Agriculture was ???. Australian agricultural language is a language all on its own. There was a Bulgarian guy and he used to talk to Keith Bicknell and I quite often. He was a forester, planting trees and everything. He had trouble understanding us and we'd have to [say], 'Your English is not good' we'd keep telling him and he couldn't understand us. He turned up one day and he said, 'Aha, Mr Keith, Mr Trevor, I went into the airport last night and I met an Englishman and we can understand one another. It's you people who aren't speaking English.' He could only talk to Australians. It was very interesting. We met people there. Part of the deal was that you were flown out to anywhere you wanted to go for holidays, in taking a holiday. We decided if we were going to go (and the best time for us to go was in the winter over there, of course, in July–August). We said, 'We're going to do the bloody snow', rather than doing anything else so we went to Switzerland and Austria. We met another forester family, young

family that were from Switzerland. We went and stayed with them. We had a couple of weeks in Tunisia, ??? ??? and Cyprus. Val had some time in England. They were the side benefits.

Did you come back to Australia at all in that two years?

No. Some of them did, but they had particular reasons to come back. [Val speaks.] We had no intention to come back to Australia while we were there. We wanted to take advantage of the opportunity of seeing some of Europe and a lot of countries. We didn't want to come back to Australia for a holiday because we were only there short-term. When we left it was probably two years: we virtually stayed there two years. [Val speaks.] It was really only short term. So we knew we were going to get back to Australia fairly soon … …

[28:55] Would that have been a fixed-term, two years, or could you have stayed a third or left after one for example.

Yes. We could've stayed a third. I don't know if there were any problems with that. We could've stayed as long as we liked. [Val speaks.] The eldest one was starting to get to school, and I'd probably had enough. It was, as I said, bloody hard work. I was fading away: I lost a stone and a half I reckon. [Val speaks.] No alcohol, no bacon, no pork, so we were pretty keen to get out. It was long enough for me. Val left earlier because there was a polio scare on so she went over to England and stayed with her aunty and I stayed on.

Took the children?

Yes. You realised how hard it is and you never relaxed. You just didn't relax because you were either working or there was some of the life pressure that was just niggling around. I don't think I've ever been so ... I remember when I left at ???, I was leaving on my own and at the Rome airport when I saw the last case come around the roundabout, incredible feeling of elation because … Well I'd had holiday and things ... It was a wonderful experience and we were pretty happy with what we achieved, we'd love to go back and see what's happened since.

It might be a bit heart breaking though.

Could be. [Val speaks.] The effect it had on my career was that these guys when I came back, they're really helping along with advancement and … It's not promotion, it's reclassification, re-classified under the next category, that's right. That certainly helped me with that.

I guess we're going to have to pick up on that story of what happened when you came back because we're just about out on the tape here and we haven't really got the Kadina story and onwards yet.

No. You've got 30 years of agriculture to come. The things that come with the Bureau, the Agricultural Bureau, that was always a big part of my work on the peninsula and the CCN story …

[32:30] **End of Tape 2, Side A**

AN INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY BERNARD O'NEIL WITH MR TREVOR DILLON OF KADINA ON THE 6TH OF MAY 2005 IN REGARDS TO THE HISTORY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE PROJECT, CONTINUING THE INTERVIEW OF THE 16TH OF FEBRUARY 2005. TODAY'S SESSION IS CONDUCTED IN THE OFFICES OF PRIMARY INDUSTRIES AND RESOURCES SA AT 101 GRENFELL STREET.

Tape 3, Side A

[0:35] Trevor last time we started the story and we got up to the time of your overseas experiences and we'll pick on …

I'd just got back.

Yes, you'd just got back and life begins in the Department again proper.

It was a bit of a shock to the system going to Libya and it was a shock to the system coming back again. The significant thing about working on Yorke Peninsula compared to a lot of other districts in the State and as an extension officer in the Department is the Ag. Bureau system. Most of my time there I helped look after 16 Ag. Bureaus. I used to do a couple of meetings a year and but the key one was doing the harvest report meeting in February and March. I used to do 16 of them in four weeks, roughly. Some down in Yorketown and on the way back. I was pretty proud of those because we used to … There was a figure of, according to stats, something like 800 farmers on Yorke Peninsula and probably a thousand in the area covered by those 16 Bureaus. In those four weeks, those 16 meetings, I'd talk to probably 400 farmers which was getting bloody close to half the farmers in the district where we worked, which is something. The Bureaus made it bloody easy, put it that way, because they were laid on. I've always been able to talk to farmers pretty well and we used to have a good meeting.

How far did that region cover?

Down to Warooka and Weavers which is Yorketown down the bottom and I used to go across to Balaklava as well and up to Pt Broughton.

It was a heavy number of Bureaus in a …

Yes. They were good strong ones in those days. Things have happened since that they've dropped off a little bit, but they were good and strong. We used to do a fair bit to support the Bureau in those days, as a Department. We saw them as crucial to our extension effort. If something happened, if we had an outbreak of stripecrust, you'd just ring the Bureau secretaries and say, 'We want many at a field day at 9 o'clock on the morning' and go to organise a field day and you could have half-a-dozen in a day and this sort of thing which made life possible for us. Those harvest report meetings ... Another thing, most of them had a field day in the spring that we got out and had a look at that. The harvest meetings were the key to it all.

[3:55] I know what we started talking about was – when I started doing them, it was back in '77–8 somewhere, I used to get the trial results from the wheat and barley trials on Yorke

Peninsula and we used to put them out on a big piece of card a metre square. I'd stand up in front of the guys and go through the variety's performance and then I'd take them down, throw them in the car and go home. I thought, 'That's a bit bloody stupid'. I'd talk about those there and they've got nothing to take home and look at. So we started just a couple of sheets of those varieties. I wasn't all that popular at the time because the office girl … You know the old Gestetners?

Yes.

Used to crank, well she …

The duplicating machines.

Yes. She'd be cranking it and there'd bloody ink flying everywhere and they'd get out there with a cap and a white coat with ink flying everywhere. Anyway, we'd do these notes, start handing them out. That started with a couple of sheets and somebody said, 'Why don't you put some comments on those sheets?'. So we finished up, until I left it might've got to 130 pages at one stage. That included input from soils people and livestock, it wasn't just me but I wrote most of it. It was always referred to, jokingly, as 'The Gospel according to Dillon', so that's gone around the State. We started that off and a lot of the farmers in the other districts saw this booklet and they put pressure on their offices to produce similar. So eventually we had about six around the State.

All modelled on …

Yes. That was the idea that just came to me out of the blue somewhere in a moment of great bloody importance.

You got contributions from other people say like the livestock area and so on?

Yes. It was probably mostly mine, but certainly there were livestock people, they were an important part of it, and soils people from other regions, economists when we had them there and this sort of thing.

Were these just duplicated sheets and maybe …?

They started off duplicated sheets stapled up in the corner but then we got things like photocopiers, they came along the way, so we could photocopy them and put them together and that's where we got the 130 pages. At different times there was pressure on from above and from my peers that we'd come out and do a statewide run rather than everybody doing their own. I, probably impolitely, said, 'You can please your bloody self what you do. We're doing ours'. So it stayed that way until I left. The first year after I left there was a statewide one, so I always reckon I achieved that. But there's something that again worked well … These harvest reports and the importance of a Bureau. But they had these documents and my comments and

the other guys' comments on livestock to take home and sit down and have a look at. It all worked very well. It was all a lot of fun.

Is this something that you went through and updated regularly or did that …

No. It was done once a year. Yes. They wouldn't want to read it too closely because some sections were put in a couple … 'whether your going to burn stubble or not' was the standard one that was probably reprinted a couple of times. No, it was just put out once a year, that was it. Yes, that was good. There's extension. The Bureau system on Yorke Peninsula is … to some extent, there were Bureaus in other parts of the State, but none of that as an area was as strong as the peninsula and it just made life so bloody easy.

[8:35] It's interesting you have so many Bureaus in such a small, relatively small, area.

The horticultural areas, of course, you've got more up there, but that's a different situation. Also, you got a lot more population stuck into the area too. Not too sure why. A couple of guys that were there before me – Glyn Webber and Noel Matts and Harry Nash, the livestock guy – they put a lot of effort into the Bureau. We used to help them with their programming and this sort of thing for the year as well. So we didn't just go to meetings. We'd help them with their programming and some support service along the way. But I had a lot of fun going. A few arguments, we'd argue until about 11 o'clock at night. As I said, they'd reckon they'd had a good night there. There was a couple of old regulars and they'd sit down the front and make leading comments and stir me up and get me going and away we'd go.

What sort of things would they prompt you about?

It could be anything.

Price of eggs?

Yes, that's right. Yes: 'Was burning stubble a good idea?' or 'Fallowing a good idea?' or some bloody thing. One of the techniques that was going a bit at that stage, but since dropped out, was people used – the fertiliser used to [be] spread on the ground in front of seeding. That's the phosphorous fertiliser. That was, as far as we were concerned, always the wrong thing to do. Somebody would start me on the current advice, particularly get me going on that one and so away we'd go.

[10:30] The other thing that happened at that time was that cereal eelworm [also called cereal cyst nematode] was waking up. I'd got a bit of an idea that it was a pretty serious problem before I went overseas. While I was overseas the Department of Agriculture pathologists got to do some work on it and so did a bloke called Albert Rovira and CSIRO. They were using nematacides: they'd put them in the row alongside of the seed and knock off the nematodes alongside of the seed and were getting phenomenal increases in yield. I'd been in on the basis

with that and it gave me a bit of a name along the way. I made the best of all the kudos I got out of that lot. But it turned out it was a key bit of 'technology' – I'd suppose you'd call it that. Once we realised what a big problem it was, they started breeding cereal varieties that were resistant, that stopped the bloody nematode living on those varieties. You dropped the level in the soil and you're virtually growing crops without them whereas before they were taking 30 to 50% off the yields. We didn't realise until … That started, as I said, when we came back. It's still an ongoing problem, but now it's just a matter of managing it.

[12:25] This is not meant to be a rude question, but how much of that was trial and error and how much of that was luck or research?

I'm not blowing my own bags but I have always been pretty observant of things happening in the paddocks and I'd see things that indicated that there was something going on in the soil and the only thing that made sense was the nematode. The guy that I started work with out at Northfield – Murray Mathieson – had been doing some work with oats and some of those were resistant and some weren't and so he'd a bit of a background and it went on from there. The luck bit came. These guys were doing the work on selected … They'd find a trial site that had a fair few nematodes. They'd do the trial there and come up with the results and their peers were … Old Albert Rovira used to drag me out to the CSIRO when he gave a paper to argue that that happened in the field. What had happened, back in '74 we had a very bad rust outbreak and people raced off in all directions just picking up varieties of wheat that were resistant to stem rust and one of them was Festiquay … So they were planting part of a paddock with Festiquay and part with something else. When I got back in '77–'78, farmers, old Harold Paddock and Alf ?Pascobiak – I remember all this stuff pretty well – came to me and said, 'Look, we got some funny things happening in the paddock. Part of the crop is this 3 foot high and the rest of it's 2 foot high'. I said, 'What have you done different?'. They said, 'We planted Festiquay there'. So they started looking at it and found that the Festiquay was resistant. It was the only wheat at that stage that was. So we started looking around for these situations and they were getting on broadacres exactly the same results as the scientists were getting in the trial so that really did seal it. That indicated that what they were seeing in the trial wasn't bloody atypical. It might not have been quite as bad as the real story. So a couple of blokes renamed the variety 'Dillonway' instead of Festiquay, I talked about it so bloody much. I got going on that and that gave me a bit of a leg up, technically.

[15:30] It's interesting you talking about Ag. Bureau members might have some discussions with you about an issue that's practical for the farmers and in a sense you're between the research, pure research, scientists and the advisors in the field. A bit of luck perhaps, a bit of, as you say, old observations, a bit of deduction …

As I said, I always remembered things that I saw in the paddock. I always prattle on about the fact that in some of that root disease stuff, I'd come up with an idea that I'd seen in a paddock

and looked as though it might be alright. They'd come up with a broad research project, couldn't be right, to prove me wrong and it'd prove me right a few times. So that made me feel quite good about it too.

[16:35] You're doing this work and liaison with the Bureaus and giving your talks and so on, you were based in Kadina?

Yes.

In the office there?

Yes.

Perhaps we'll talk a little bit about that office. How was it run? How was it organised?

Should talk about the office first. I took over as officer in charge in about early '78 from Harry Nash. Harry shifted to Adelaide. I took over as officer in charge and they were kicking us out of the building we had, so I went home one night and was talking about this and Val said, 'Why don't you buy John Allen's place and we can live in that and you can make our house, our government house, an office'. So we had a look at the place. It was a two-storey giant and so eventually we bought it and it was the only government office with a swimming pool in the backyard. The office house was organised pretty well. I was officer in charge. At times, we had a lot of people go through the office. Back in those early days in the '80s it was looked on as a good office to send people, the Bureau contact and this sort of thing. We used to have chook people and a number of livestock people, a farm management officer quite often. Never had a soils person there, but the rest we did. At different times I had an offsider, a trainee agronomist, and they were pretty bloody handy for me, someone who'd do a little bit of legwork. That went along pretty well.

Was the soils person based elsewhere?

Yes. They were at Nuri., or based at Nuriootpa, Jamestown and then the Clare office started up so then there were soils people there. We didn't have the soils problems on Yorke Peninsula from the point of view of water erosion that they did in the north and through the Mid North, through the whole of that high rainfall belt. We didn't have the chronic problems. We were up through there so we didn't warrant one, but we always had one – Chris Rudd from Nuri. He and I worked together pretty well.

How many people did you have? I mean it probably changed over time but you ...

We'd probably have at different times 8 or 10. We probably had up to 10: invertebrate pest plants guy, myself, an offsider and a couple of animal health as well as livestock and we had plant protection agronomists. At the best we had about 10 there.

Was that when you were officer-in-charge, about '78?

I was officer-in-charge then and then …

… a lot of people to look after.

Yes. One of things … They looked after themselves pretty well. They didn't …

Independent reliable types?

My Irish used to get the best of me now and again, and roar and rant around the bloody office for half-an-hour and then I'd settle down and everything would be alright.

[20:40] It would've been the late '70s ('79, '80 or somewhere like that), regionalisation came in. At that point of time the idea was that the office would, instead of each guy having his funds, his salary and his operating expenses out of a bucket in head office, they'd put it all out in our bucket in that office and we'd manage it within the office ourselves. That was a change. They reckoned they'd needed a senior district officer that signed every bloody thing and basically made sure that everybody was doing what they should've been. It was decided that I had to come down for interviews. So four of us all came down in the one car for the interview. I got lucky and won it. That had a fair effect on a few others around the State – Ken Holden, Peter Marrett. Ken was at Lincoln, Peter Marrett was at Naracoorte, probably Andy Michelmore was at Nuri. They were agronomists. Because we could take a step up without shifting from our district in the country, it stopped us shifting to Adelaide. There was one or two positions in Adelaide that we probably would've taken up but because we could get the next level and stay doing the things we wanted to do and talking to farmers, talking to real bloody farmers, that suited us down to the ground. That allowed us to stay there and go on doing the things we liked.

So like a rural bureaucrat rather than a city-based one?

Something like that. Yes. No-one liked to be known as a bureaucrat of any bloody sort.

That's a very good point that.

It made a difference in some ways in that what used to happen was one of the senior ones around the State used to come and take this Senior Agronomist role in Adelaide and disperse information to the rest of the agronomists. We, the three of us, were probably the ones that, logically, one of us should've taken that role. When we didn't, then we complained like buggery about the guy that took it, because he wasn't from the old agronomist school. He did quite a good job but he didn't have the feel. But we couldn't bloody well complain because one of us should've been down there doing it anyway. That was interesting.

That's often the way. Just to clarify for the record: the senior administrative officer position, was that the officer-in-charge role or is that …

It was a step up on the officer-in-charge.

[24:15] So you were an officer-in-charge first, then …

Then we took a step up. 'Officer-in-Charge': all we did was – I don't know what we did – we used to manage the office girl, that was all the Officer-in-Charge did – make there were stamps there. When we became Senior District Officers we were given the responsibility then of making sure the rest of the other officers, the office as a whole, worked and that the officers were doing their bit. That role gave me a bit of authority, which is probably bloody dangerous. Val always reminds me … Two lads came: Chris McDonough was a Landcare officer and Chris Shied was a Sheep and Wool Advisor. They're about the same … about early 20s when they came. Eventually Shiedy went and got married. He'd left and gone to Keith by then. He got married and we got invited to the wedding. This poor young so and so got up and roasted me at Chris's wedding, I couldn't quite … They didn't need to do that. Val said, 'You're a bloody embarrassment even when you're not saying anything!'. One of them said, 'When we went to Kadina first, we had a lot to learn. One thing that we learnt very quickly was there were only two ways of doing things – the wrong way and Trevor's way'. I thought at least they learnt something. They turned out to be very good lads as well, despite my influence probably.

[26:10] You've got this office in Kadina and you're part of what, the Eyre Peninsula, that region?

No, we were Central Region there ...

Central Region …

… which took in – it varied a bit – but basically, most of the time in regionalisation it took in Jamestown, Clare developed later, Nuriootpa and the Adelaide Hills. There was an office at [Victor?] along the way. So that the extension in that area, not the research … There was a horticulture research no, Viticulture Research Centre at Nuri. and a dairy research centre in the Hills, that didn't come in to the Central Region in extension terms. In its way, it was different. It worked better because the officers worked together more instead of being in their own little staff managed by somebody from somewhere else. It didn't work because of the quality of the Senior District Officer it was the quality of the officers, yes. It had its real plusses from that point of view. We worked together pretty well when we needed to, a lot of time on our own.

[27:40] At your level Trevor and being a senior officer, what level of contact would you have had with the Jamestown, the Clare …

We used to have monthly meetings. The Senior District Officers would come together monthly and sort out …

Rotated around to different offices or …?

Yes, we did but then we worked out it was a bloody sight easier to come to Adelaide anyway. The head office was in Adelaide, with Ron Webber, Glyn Webber would've been for a while, Ron Webber … I can't remember who they were.

We can fill it in later

It didn't matter. They were based around in Flinders Street, the head office round there. We figured it was just as bloody easy to come to town, rather than everybody carting … We did it sometimes, carting out ... We used to do it just to go and have a bit of a look around.

[28:45] That was at your level. What about the people working in the offices, the Kadina people, the Nuri. people? Did regionalisation have much impact for them?

Yes it did. It depended on the person and the office. Some people were always bloody loners and always going to be and they work on their own. Some officers didn't gel as well as others. But it gave them … the idea of the exercise. In varying degrees it worked as part of a team rather than just an animal health advisor sitting in that corner, an agronomist sitting over there and never the twain shall talk to one another. We used to help one another out in different roles because a lot of the roles do cross over, as you can imagine. Certainly soils and agronomy do, and Landcare and the livestock. I always used to say about Shiedy's livestock, 'They're shitting on my grass so I suppose I should take an interest in them'. The animal health situations: we used to have ryegrass toxicity in some areas – the management of that was really agronomy … the answer to it was agronomy. So old Scotchman, Animal Health Adviser; we used to go and do meetings together.

[30:30] As well as having that sort of independence and autonomy, obviously you had to work within the overall departmental network?

Yes. Each section there – the agronomy guys, the agronomists, the animal health advisers, the livestock officers – they had their own structure, the technical content. Of course, they had supervisors from Adelaide that made sure they had all they needed in technical knowledge to do the jobs. They used to have meetings, of course, three or four times a year where they compared notes and their stuff. That was all part of it. We used to have what we call the branch structure, which meant that technically there was that base for them. They needed that. People had to keep up to date.

[31:30] What about yourself: did you have to keep with the …?

Yes, with agronomists. I used to meet with the agronomists as well as the Senior District Officers. We had a lot of meetings. (laughs)

Going to meetings. I was wondering whether you were doing things to … giving papers or doing things to …

We went …

… for development type things I'm thinking.

No. Generally … Well, we did. When we had agronomists' meetings, somebody who was on a particular subject in front of the others on it would run that section and …

For you personally, were you one to do a lot of background reading, the journals and things that have come into your office? Did you read them?

I didn't read a hell of a lot. There was too much for me to catch up on what was happening out on the field. There's too much to read out there. (Laughs.)

Plus all the paperwork.

It wasn't too bad, the paperwork. We had very good office assistants. I selected all those so they were very good. It was pretty simple. When computers came in I needed somebody to manage the computer stuff for me: that was a bit much for me to manage. We had very good office assistants. They were great. They'd do typing for us and manage all the finances and the vehicles and they did all that.

Did people stay around? The people, the workers, did they stay in the organisation for a while?

Yes, actually the …

[33.30] **End Tape 3, Side A**
Tape 3, Side B

[0:15] I was just asking about the length of time people will stay in the office there.

They didn't stay too long working with … [phone ringing].

[0:30] We just had that little interruption from modern technology. The office keeps in touch with you even though you're retired!

That's right. Definitely. It was interesting that the girls we had in the office, young women that we had in the office, most of them finished up, apart from the present Lyn Chapman that's there now – she was the last one when I left – the others all came to town and shifted to other offices and did particularly well for themselves. There's still some in SARDI and in head office and in other offices. The girls that did come in there did particularly well. It was something like putting up with me, they could put up with any bloody thing. But it was a difficult place for … especially we were picking up … we used to like to give girls coming out of school a chance for a job, because we had one that'd come up every so often. It was a bit tough with them. They're sitting on their own. In those days there was one female in the office with anything from six to ten males, so nobody to really talk to much and without a lot of experience. There were times when they weren't busy and that got awkward at times. It worked out pretty well and we started a few kids off on the right leg.

[2:20] What about some of the officers, the livestock people and so on. Were they long servers over at Kadina or did they tend to come and go?

They came and went. We always encouraged them to take an opportunity when it came. There hasn't been a livestock officer there since Chris Shied left probably 10 or 12 years ago now. We knew at the time that it was a risk that if he went to Keith and I literally pushed him and said, 'You've got to. If you're going to be in this game for the long haul, you need to be able to work

in different districts, high rainfall, whatever. You've got to go'. So he went and that was the last bloody livestock officer we ever saw, because they're just not replaced at that stage. There was quite a few came and went, basically on that basis, moved on. Some had trouble putting up with me and they shifted to other offices, but that's life.

[3:40] We went off on a slight tangent, but you mentioned earlier the Gestetner duplicators and we just had the mobile phone ring and you mentioned computers. One of things we're looking at in this project is some of those impacts of technology: that's technology in the office, as you mentioned, technology/techniques in the farm, for the office. What sort of … about 1976 to ….

What date? In '76 the Gestetner was the only thing we had to reproduce any typed words. Of course, the trouble with that was that I was a shocking writer. I'd write it out and hand it to the girl to type it and she'd type it onto these Gestetner sheets. She'd make mistakes, she couldn't read my writing, so she had to re-type the whole blasted thing again, just for making a couple of changes. It really was hard work and then having got that sorted out, then you'd have to get out and crank this bloody thing, one sheet at a time. I can still remember ink flying up the walls.

The other thing that to me has made a big difference to my work. Somewhere back whenever mobile phones came in first, we had to have bag phones. I rattled and ranted and raved until I eventually got a mobile phone and it just made life so much easier. I'd be maybe working down at Warooka for the day. I'd come home and I'd call in the office on the way home and there'd be a heap of bloody notes, people trying to contact me. I'd go home and have tea then go back to the office for two hours making phone calls. I said, 'This is bloody crazy. If you give me a mobile phone, I can ring the girl in the office. She can give them all to me and I can finish making those phone calls by the time I get home. Then I can go home and talk to the kids and my wife'. I ranted and raved about getting a mobile phone. They said it was our [bag job?], but it was effective and they'd just make life a bit … I don't SMS: text messages, I just ignore the bloody things; I don't want to know about them. But for making phone calls when to communicate with … You've got an appointment, you're half-an-hour late, you can ring them up and say, 'Look, I'm half-an-hour late'. You get there, everybody's happy, raring to go. When I leave working down at Warooka or somewhere to go home, I ring up and tell Val 'I'll be home at quarter to seven. I'll be home a bit late tonight'. She knows exactly what I'm doing and it makes life – you don't call it living, but just those bits and pieces around work – so much easier. If I have got a problem and want to contact a scientist, somebody out at the Waite or one of my peers, you can say, 'Just hang on a minute, I'll give Fred a ring and we'll …'. There's a farmer, 'We'll give Fred a ring and we'll see if we can find out something about it'.

As long as you've got coverage in the area, you're OK, but …

Yes. The peninsula's pretty good now …

Yes.

With CDMA it's pretty good. The one thing I do with the mobile phone, when I'm with clients I switch it off. It's the last thing you need when you're sitting down deep in discussion about some particular point and the bloody mobile phone rings. If it's a farmer, it's an invariable reaction: you say, 'Gee, I'm busy Fred. I'll only be five minutes'. You know that's a quarter of an hour. So you just turn it off. The messagebank. When you leave that farm you catch up on the messages. How the hell we worked without them, I don't know, I really don't.

[8:25] We're looking back at that sort of thing. At one stage horse and buggy days and now it's huge tractors and very fast cars and all that sort of thing.

Yes. Well I was …

You're talking about not quite pedal radio …

Yes.

… right through to mobiles.

Yes. That's right. When I went to the peninsula first we still had the old … I reckon the manual exchanges had gone. There was still manual exchanges around the State, but it still used to go through the exchange: you'd have to dial the exchange and then the number and get through. The communications and certainly now … I was around a bit early to be able to master e-mails and stuff like that, but certainly now the communications effects on … bloody type up something. Faxes, of course, just about did it for you: if you had a document, you'd say, 'Look, I got a problem with mice out in the bloody paddock. What can you tell me about it?'. 'We've got a fact sheet here'. I'd fax that through to them and they'd sit down and read. I'd say, 'When you've read that, then ring me up and we'll have a yarn about it'. Just the fax, there was something that you could transmit the written word to somebody else so they could sit down and look at the detail. Otherwise, what we used to do, of course, was we had the fact sheet, we'd post it to the guy where it took two bloody days to get there and the problem was all over by then and it didn't matter. To be able to fax something through was a bigger breakthrough, from agronomists communicating with farmers, than the computer. But the farmers are doing all sorts of things with computer, marketing grain, daily, hourly. It's a big difference.

[10:40] Do you think it makes … You were saying before the mobile's made life a lot easier. Do you think it's put more pressure, in the working sense, more pressure on people? These instantaneous things: e-mails there, a phone call.

Probably. A lot of the e-mails, people going to websites and communication, they're being bombarded with a lot more information but in many cases they can't sort out the relevance for themselves. Some of it's just crap anyway … As we said, we were always between the research and the farmer. That's all happening quicker: instead of it taking two years for them to find out that a bit of research has been done, now they find out in five minutes. I wouldn't call it pressure. It's just a little bit of a different role. It's strengthened one part of our role in sorting

out the grain from the chaff, the farmers on what the advertising blurbs that they're pushed to do more research results that they get so much quicker now.

[12:15] In terms of the farmers and I say the person on the land these days, and thinking here about Yorke Peninsula, have they taken to this technology? I mean, are you getting people ringing from the paddock on the mobile?

Hell, yes. Yes, the mobiles. Yes. What used to happen was you'd get the wife ring up and before mobiles it was CB radios. It was the radio and they'd radio into mum, 'Can you ring Trevor. I've got a problem', so we'd be relaying, I can hear him talking on the radio in the background and by the time she got back to tell me what he'd said, 'I know what he said. I heard it. It's alright'. That started but with mobiles we're two seconds away. Something happens to the guys going to do a job in the paddock and providing I've got it switched on, I'm not with another client, it's instantaneous: 'We've got to put out urea today. How much shall I put out, 50 or 60?'. I said, 'Well, what's the situation?'. In two minutes we've sorted out that it should've been 55 anyway. It's probably a lot of those things that if they were left to their own devices the farmers would make a decision that was bloody close to where we'd finished up anyway, but it gives them a bit of support. A lot of our job, over the years, has been hand holding and giving farmers confidence to do things and assuring them what they were going to do was right. In some cases told them it was bloody wrong: they're mad. They still went and did it anyway. It's always been a lot of our role, that support role, support the decision making.

I was thinking in your earlier times you'd be on call, basically. You were saying there you'd come back and do a couple of hours in the office after tea. You probably get people ringing you up at home.

Yes. Our phone numbers were in the book under Department of Agriculture, private number. The Department used to pay for our phone, that was a big incentive. (laughs)

Because you were on call

Yes.

All the time basically.

That's right, yes 24/7. Just as well Val's not here today otherwise she'd have had a few words to say about that.

[15:10] I was going to ask about her role … (both laugh)

The Extension Officer's role, and that's not agronomist or livestock or anybody else … In the good old-fashioned Extension Officer's role, the wife and kids were part of it, they really were. I don't know whether we got into that – we probably did – at Lameroo. When I was on my own in the office at Lameroo, I used to have switch on the wall and when I left the office to go and see a farmer, I'd hit the switch and that switched the phone through to home, so any calls coming in from anybody, Val was the unofficial bloody office girl so that was really the

turnaround. Apart from that, when we had a little bit better technology she would answer a lot of phone calls, she almost got to the stage of giving the guy the answer at times.

I was going to ask whether she'd got to the stage of being able to give answers!

She'd heard me talking about it so bloody long that she … I don't think she ever did: to somebody she did, and I can't remember what it was now … I remember she's very proud of herself: this guy rang up … Because the farmers would ring and they'd say, 'Oh that's you Val. I want to talk to Trevor'. Val would probably tell them that he'll be home later on tonight, he'll ring you back. But the farmer would then proceed to tell Val the whole problem, and she was too polite to say that she didn't really need to hear it. Half the time she reckoned she could answer it just as well as I could.

She could've given the answer and just …

In some cases she'd heard me talking about it for so long that …

It's important that you had that support: an office-girl's role, even if it was only answering and …

Yes. That's right. It was important because we had such a service role. A service role and we used to see it mostly with an obligation: we were there to serve the farmers and whatever that bloody well took, within reason, we did it. Most of the old Extension Officers in those days saw that as their role, to service the farmers' needs.

[18:20] Did the Department recognise the role of the women in that …?

Yes. Most of it, yes, because of what they did. But in how they recognised it in …

You got some practical support like assistance with housing and the phone bills and so on, but that would've applied whether the person was married or unmarried.

That's right.

But the women were pitching in. I was just curious whether the Department ever said anything or …

No. It was always known and appreciated, even if unofficially, because most of the guys in head office in those days had been Extension Officers or Research Officers in the field anyway, so they knew what happened. They knew what was going on and if they came and visited they'd always catch up with Val and see how she was going and have a cup of coffee.

[19:30] Well that leads me to ask about the head office people, the Director, Director-General. Did you get to see them over at Kadina …

Yes.

… and in the field?

Not often. I always worked from the basis that if they stayed down here, I wouldn't worry them and I'll stay up there and not worry them from that end. We didn't see a lot of the Director-General: a lot of my time, Jim McColl.

Jim McColl.

Jim and I got on pretty well. But we wouldn't see them very often up there. We were pleased to see them any time they found the time or desire to go and have a look and see what we were doing, very pleased. I personally didn't expect them to be up every bloody month or so. We were a small part of the State and their role was to make sure that the Minister knew what we were doing and to make sure that the government was providing enough resources for us do our job well. That was their role rather than being out looking to see exactly what we were doing along the way. There was a structure that took part of that: the people, the Senior Agronomist and Chief Agronomist in town, they were based in head office. We'd see them quite regularly, but that was on that level, the technical level. Then when it became a regional level, we'd see our Chief Regional Officer. As I said, we'd have a formal meeting once a month, apart from in-between, so that we saw enough of them, yes.

What about the Minister? You mentioned the Minister.

Minister.

You got a Minister coming over to you?

Yes. Well the field days, of course, was a big attraction

We haven't talked about that yet, but.

One of my highlight days – Lynn Arnold was the Minister of Agriculture and John Bannon and his wife and I had them in the wagon showing them around Yorke Peninsula for a day. I was driving, got bloody lost and driving the Minister of Agriculture and the Premier around my patch that I'd been in probably for 15 years at that stage and got lost, wasn't badly but that was something that … I suppose Lynn used me: he knew what was going on, he would ask the leading question and, of course, he's asked the right question and I'd come in like the bloody tide and give all the information. He'd more or less turn around to John Bannon and say, 'I told you so. That's what I've been trying to tell you. That's what happening out here'. Talking to a couple of farmers for a coffee and tea: that was probably the highlight as far as dealing with Ministers …

What were they doing over there? It's interesting that …

Come to have a look.

But why would Bannon tag along, just to …

At stage they must've been doing a bit of a series … It was to get out and meet some farmers and see what was going on. It must've been at the stage where we were having some problems. There's always been farmers in tough straits. We had a few more than normal. I just don't know. That might be in the late 80s with interest rates and things ...

Rates and so on.

Yes. It may well have been. It might've been. It was probably around then. Anyway, they flew into the airstrip behind BHP's quarry at Ardrossan in the morning and I put them back on a plane at Kadina in the afternoon. They were flying on then.

The other Minister that I probably had a bit to do with as well was Dale Baker. Dale did a series of meetings on the peninsula over a couple of days. I, along with John Meier who was the local member, organised the farmers that he was going to meet at the meetings. I carted them around again for the day. I always used to say to Dale – I played footy against him out in the South East – 'You little bastard. I always tried to catch you when we were playing footy together. You used to annoy me. I was the one who could never catch you'. He had a big strong brother and he and I used to lock horns. I said to Dale, 'I could never bloody well catch you. If I could've, I would've'. Of course, the field day was a time when you'd see Directors and Director-General and what all that staff for field days that they would (Ministers or Director of Agriculture) they were always there and it's fine and you expect them to be …

So that's about as much interaction you had with them, so it's very interesting …

Yes. Not very much.

[26:05] It's also interesting that case with John Bannon in particular, the Premier will turn up, but …

Yes. He did. I reckon it must've been … The reason I reckon it must've been in the high interest rate days, the late '80s somewhere. It wasn't long before the State Bank fiasco …

That's about the time.

Because Lynn went in as … to go from John …

As Premier.

Then he got slaughtered in the next election. It would've been just before that.

We've got a few items left and we've got a few moments on the clock too perhaps.

Not long, because I got to …

[26:45] Perhaps we should round it out. We've talked before off tape about the field days. It might be useful to get some of your observations about the field days. The changes over time from experimental plots to you've left the Department and are now going along as an observer of the private sector.

They've grown out of all of anybody's dreams. The number of sites, the number of people going there. It's the highlight of the farmers … particularly the machinery and particularly these days, of course, with so much big machinery about, new machinery, new types of seeding equipment: it's not just a seeder with a timer with a [plough]share on it, it's a point or a bloody disc or there's so many bloody things. The growth in the use of agricultural chemicals: that's been phenomenal in that period. We started off with about three different herbicides and DDT

would've been the only insecticide. Now we've got books of them, big sheets of them. A lot of that information, those people selling, the companies making those stands at the field days – there's some information passes on, mostly it's PR stuff anyway, take them around the back for a grilled chop and beer. They certainly fill a role, there's no doubt about that, in farmers' communication and it's a chance for them to go out and look at all the machinery. I've got clients in Yorke Peninsula that spend the three days going methodically up the lines. They don't stop at everything, but that way they see everything that's there.

It's a big part of the local life, the community life.

Yes. It brings a lot of money into the community of course. Hell, I played a summer sport for Paskeville for the last 20 years and it's the cheapest summer sport you'd ever get. Paskeville did most of the catering at the field days: the Paskeville sporting bodies did that. Now, that's my organised part of going to the field days – I spend a day out there selling steak sandwiches and have a lot of fun. I take the money and I know just about every farmer that comes up. We have a lot of fun.

You'd know them all!

I know a lot, yes.

[29:50] You mentioned when we were talking before off the tape, the experimental plots.

Yes. I decided that it was a good idea if we could just plant some small plots of the new varieties so people could see them alongside of one another, just to see how they grew and what they looked like. It was something to catch attention while you got a chance to talk to them about problems, about technology and stuff. In a lot of those times – and that was something I didn't say when we were talking about the Bureaus, certainly was the interaction with the farmers – it gave us a terrific opportunity to promote the issues that we wanted to promote. The same with the field days. Farmers, they'd come in with a question, which you'd answer in a couple of minutes then you'd go on to other things that were a bit wider. The plots were something to attract attention just to stop people; looking at that. We started planting them out in a paddock area. We struck about three or four droughts in a row. So the field days, 'For God sake, plant little ones in front of your plot. We'll give you a hose and you can water it. We'll give you a tap and you can water them and make sure they grow rather than sort of wasting your time out there'. That was probably the last 10 years or probably the last … How many field days did I do? They were odd years, '77, '9 – I think I did 11 Paskeville field days, so it's about 24 years or something. So we did those plots.

You had to have them planted some time in advance at the field days?

We used to plant them by hand. Used to get the girls out and anybody that was still hanging around the office that day: we went out and planted them by hand, only a small plot.

But sometime in advance of the show, of the field day?

Yes. We wanted them up … I wanted them up and growing and out in head by September, yes.

So you had to give some thought to it.

Yes. I used to water, and kill all the weeds. Then there was a big day, go out and sow them. We'd be sowing them in mid May somewhere. Come the field day time they'd be flowering or looked like something. That was another thing that worked quite well, yes.

[33:00] We're probably out in just a moment.

I've got to go.

That'll give us another hour and gives a chance to reassess. Thanks again, up to this point for your involvement, Trevor.

End of interview