

**AN INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY BERNARD O'NEIL WITH ARTHUR TIDEMAN OF BEAUMONT, SOUTH AUSTRALIA ON THE 28TH OF OCTOBER 2003 FOR THE PROJECT ON THE HISTORY OF THE SOUTH AUSTRALIAN DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE.**

[Square brackets indicate corrections and additional comments provided by Arthur Tideman in August 2006.]

[0:25] Arthur, you had quite a career in the Department. We're going to cover that in part in today's session and so on.

That's right Bernie.

An obvious point to start would be a little bit of background, some personal biography and chronology and where we go from there is ... I'll throw it open to you.

Thank you. I was born on the 3rd of March 1931 down at the bottom of the Waite Institute in Smith Dorrien Street. That was then called Galway Estate and it later became Netherby. That was in the time of the [Great] Depression but fortunately my father had a job all through that awful period. He was an engineer in then the electric supply company.

The Adelaide Electric Supply Company?

The Adelaide Electric Supply Company. So that meant I had a happy and stable youth. It was interesting in that we were then on the very edge of Adelaide. There was only one or two other houses in the street. The street was still dusty: it was not bituminised. My mother, wherever she went she had to walk. My father did have a car but he had to use that to get down to Osborne every day, so my mother was isolated. I grew up without having a lot of interaction with children of my own age. I don't think that really affected me very much. (Laughs)

Any immediate family?

I have a sister who was born 4½ years after I was, so there again I was almost an only child. I went first to the Infant School at Unley. To get there and back I had to go by tram down Duthy Street. That gave me a lot of freedom because coming home, I could do all sorts of explorations and things and visit other friends after school. That continued right through primary school education which was also at Unley. They were very happy days, despite the war. It did not influence us very much except we didn't have ranges of lollies and things like that.

I suppose in that sense you were growing up in the Depression era and then into World War II – that's the norm. You haven't had any other experience to compare that with.

No, no I didn't. One thing that did impinge on my youth was that during the years of the war, I saw little of my father. He didn't enlist. He tried to but he was in a restricted profession because the electric supply had to be maintained.

The manpower restrictions and so on.

Manpower restrictions, yes. But he led the air-raid precaution system in Adelaide. Particularly, he helped establish the boys who rode on bikes to keep the communications going. So night after night he was away and I didn't see much of him during that period which went right into

my secondary education. The war didn't finish until 1945. I started at Prince Alfred College in 1944.

So your father was heavily involved ...  
He was heavily involved yes.

... over that length of time, 4 or 5 years.

Yes. In effect, he had almost two jobs and his job in the Electric Supply Company was particularly difficult because of the necessity to keep up coal supplies. At times industry had to be carefully rationed in terms of electric supply and getting the priorities right I know was a great burden to him.

[6:15] Making sure the ships come up the gulf at the right time and so on.

Correct. Yes, indeed. My education at Prince Alfred College really started to develop my interest in agriculture in these ways. Firstly, I always rode to school through the Waite Institute down Fullarton Road. I often used to look at the beautiful buildings up through the trees and I thought wouldn't that be a wonderful place to work. I can remember that. Then, particularly as I had grown up, the family had close relationships with people who were still on the land, particularly my father's family. They had a property at Oakbank, which was quite a big dairy, and quite often we went to visit them and that created my interest. And my father was very, very interested in the land. In fact, I'm sure he would have liked to have had a farm if he'd had the resources, but he didn't. That was one factor. Another factor was that I made friends with boarders at the school. Dick Rundle, whose parents had a Romney Marsh [sheep] stud at Parafield and they also had a property at Mt Barker, and also Ken de Garis, the de Garis's at Naracoorte. Consequently, [during] holidays I was privileged to be able to go and spend time with them. They had a great influence on my thinking of my future. Then the college offered an agricultural science course in Year 11 (in those days called the Leaving year). I took up that course very happily. Despite the war and the restrictions on the number of teachers and resources, that course was done very well and I enjoyed it.

Was that a one-year practical sort of course?

Yes. It was just one year and we had lessons, of course, but we also had quite a number of field excursions to dairies in the Adelaide Hills and to grazing properties close around the city. That further cemented my interests.

Was that course something put on by the school especially or was it through the education system?

It was examined as a part of the Leaving Certificate, so it was in the curriculum of the State education system at that time.

[9:30] What about Urrbrae High School? Did you have any experiences with the ...?

No.

Living in the area ...

Well I used to see the school and see what was going on as I rode past and things like that but I had no formal contact with Urrbrae at all. In fact, my father who controlled my education more than my mother did (as it was in those days) was very dubious about an education at Urrbrae because he didn't think that I would get a good grounding in the sciences and the basic subjects as he called them. So he was keen that I got a 'proper grounding' in those subjects, except this agricultural science course which was a bit on the fringe! (Laughs)

That's what I was wondering: after you picked up on this course whether you considered the possibility of going to Urrbrae?

Never considered.

[10:45] Your experiences with going on to the boarders' farms, the family farms and so on and indeed Netherby itself when it was a bit more of a rural area of Adelaide ...

Yes, indeed.

... it sounds like you were attracted to the land as opposed to some children who think that's not for them.

That's right. For example, I can quite remember (and this would have been in the late '30s) looking east from Smith Dorrien Street where we lived. It was just a paddock and I can remember my father pointing out to me the old centre furrow where the soil had been turned in both directions in preparation for wheat crops. I can't remember seeing an actual wheat crop growing, it was just paddock then but it had been growing wheat not that long before I was born I'm sure.

Did you go trekking around through the hills and so on?

Oh yes, indeed. It was great fun. I remember one of the great attractions was the mines at Glen Osmond – we explored those in great detail!

A bit of underground exploration?

Yes, indeed. These days it wouldn't happen I don't think.

Catching rabbits or shooting: did you get into those sorts of boyhood activities?

Yes I did, but that was when I was away on the friends' farms and things like that.

So you didn't go shooting in the hills or anything?

No I didn't, no.

A fairly active sort of boyhood?

Very active, because I was a keen member of the scouting movement and that gave me a love of camping and outdoors which I still follow. Gratefully, my children are very keen outdoor living people.

[13:15] It's good fun. Coming back to the ag. science course at Princes. This was coming up in Year 11. By this stage had you given much thought to what you might do for a career or for a job? You were still in the wartime.

Only a little that I can remember. I can remember talking to my father about the possibility of doing fieldwork at the Waite Institute. I had no real idea or real knowledge of what that really meant. He had a friend who did work there. I cannot remember the name. This friend said, 'Get Arthur a proper education. He doesn't want to be just operating machinery or out in the field, cleaning pots or planting this and that. Try and get him to have a wider education. Don't let him stop school. At that time, try and encourage him to go on'. And my father did. But I made the decision to study agricultural science and I started at the Adelaide University in the beginning of 1949.

That course you did at Princes: was that just the one year, Year 11?

That was just one year, Year 11, and then I did matriculation.

You did matric. but didn't do agriculture?

It was not offered as a matriculation subject.

[15:10] Just thought I'd clarify that. You were interested in going on to university to do ag. science: you said you'd made that decision. Had you looked at other courses that you might do? Did you have other interests?

I can't remember that I did. I don't know why looking back but I was fairly focused by then on agriculture. I also had some altruistic thinking about it. That was a time after the war when a lot was being talked about feeding the world. I picked this up that there was this thinking that Australia was in a position to be able to help to feed the world. That was a part of my decision making too.

Part of that post-war rebuilding exercise?

Yes. It was very strong in the community, that sort of thinking.

It's interesting you were coming through and deciding that university is the way to go when of course at the same time, jobs appeared to be quite plentiful.

They were. They were very plentiful. I could have walked into any number of jobs if I had wanted to. No, I seemed to be focused on the agricultural science course and it proved to be a very helpful and interesting and happy time for four years. It was great.

Perhaps we should just look at that in a little bit of detail. Are you able to explain a bit about how the course was conducted over four years? Four years at undergraduate level?

Yes, four years undergraduate level. It was regarded as a very demanding course and it was.

My memory is that I used to have to work at my studies, harder than many of my friends did.

They seemed to have more time to do all sorts of other things. (Laughs)

Quite a few of your friends gone on to university had they?

Yes. Friends who I had made at our church. I went to the Malvern Methodist Church and that was the focus of my life: it was where the scouts met and we went to Sunday School and church and my parents went there. A number of those people, those friends that I made there went to the university. The school friends: there was also a good proportion of those that went to the university. But if you go back to my primary school, there were 48 boys in Grade 7 class and only two went to university. Interestingly, I still meet with the remnants of that class every year, which is not bad.

They've got a long history themselves, the Unley School.

Yes, they have. It always amazes me how well those students have done in life, despite the fact that we were restricted by the war and there was 48 in the class. Teachers would have a fit these days! (Laughs)

So we're at Roseworthy: we've got you to Roseworthy College.

Let's start with the agricultural science course at the Adelaide University.

It starts at the university, so I can clarify it's not a Roseworthy course as such.

No. It's a degree course. The Roseworthy studies at that time were only at the diplomat level. In the first year at the university, we studied basically the sciences – chemistry, physics, what else?

Mathematics at all?

A little bit of mathematics and ...

Botany?

Botany, I think we did do botany [in the first year] and zoology I think. That was about the course. Then the next year we continued with more of those studies. We went to Botany II. We studied geology. We studied microbiology. They were very focused at the university and it gave me an opportunity to make my tertiary education very broad. It was excellent, aided by the fact that we had many mature men and women who had returned from the war and that was great. That added a stability and a wonderful depth to my peoples' experience at that time.

[21:15] They'd all had different sort of experiences.

They were. They were excellent and that helped me study. I represented the Agricultural Science faculty on the university newspaper, *On Dit*, and I played competitive tennis still in the church groups but I played hockey for the university. I joined the Student Christian Movement. We had a great time. That disintegrated a little in the third and fourth year because we had periods of study each week at Roseworthy College. In the third year it meant that after we'd finished some studies at either the Waite Institute or the Adelaide University at North Terrace, we'd have to run down North Terrace and catch the train to Roseworthy College where we

were met by a bus which took us to the college and we stayed Thursday night and Friday night and we had lectures on Saturday morning, which used to annoy me a bit because I then, for a while, couldn't play competitive tennis because I got home too late.

Did you have to catch the train back on Saturday?

Yes, although one of the other students, agricultural science students, Rex Oram, he bought a little Morris Minor. As there was only four of us incidentally in this year, we were able to fit in that and that helped greatly. I do remember every Thursday night getting to Roseworthy College, they kept our evening meal warm in the big warming cabinets there: every night we had stewed apple and as we called them frog's eggs, which was – what do you call it?

That's sago?

Sago pudding. The test was to turn the plate upside down and it would stay on the plate. It had congealed so much! (Laughs) But again, Roseworthy College added a very good dimension to my studies.

You were living at home at this stage?

Yes I was.

So you'd go up on the Thursday, Thursday night, Friday night come back Saturday? So you were really doing a six-day week?

Yes, we were. Looking back I was sorry that I wasn't able to live in a university college, it would have been wonderful. Two of my children lived in university colleges and they gained a lot from it, but that was not to be for me.

Because in your case it's quite practical if you're attending some classes at Waite and ...

Oh very, it was very convenient. I could do it all on my pushbike.

There was no reason for you to move out of home or anything?

No, but had there been a reason it might have been helpful.

Just another thing I wanted to ask you, Arthur, about the course itself. When you're doing the sciences, I assume something like physics would have been the general Physics I, Physics II that everyone did ...

Yes.

... but were any of the subjects specifically directed towards agriculture or ag. science students? Was there any particular focus on say botany?

No. We did Botany I, II and III really with no particular focus.

So it was a general course?

But we did geology, I think it was called IA, which was not the university main geology course.

It was designed towards soils and the topography and so forth more than the basic geology, but it was a very interesting course, very helpful.

So you were doing about four subjects in your first year?

I wish I could remember!

I'll check these out from the calendars and so on.

Yes.

In a sense I was really interested in how the course prepared you for working in ag. science as opposed to going on and following another stream of the sciences.

It gave us that basis but what really prepared us were the studies we did at the Waite Institute – entomology, biometrics, soil science, soil chemistry, plant pathology. Those subjects were very well presented and were very helpful and that really focused us.

Those subjects, were they done as individual subjects over a term or a year or were they components of ...?

They were individual subjects. As I recall, they were all of one-year duration so they were quite detailed. In fact, we used to complain that some of the lecturers expected us to be as familiar with their research and everything as they were! (Laughs) It really put the pressure on us at times.

You were still an undergraduate at a basic level too.

Yes, I was. The Waite Institute still is and then was probably the best agricultural [phone rings: research institute]. It gave the best agricultural science training in the southern hemisphere, equivalent to Rothamsted in England. In fact, much of the work was based on that wonderful institution. So I was very privileged.

At this stage, were you aware or had you become aware of the Department of Agriculture and the government's involvement in agriculture?

Yes I did.

Was that part of the training at uni or was it something ...?

Yes. I became aware (and I can't just remember how) that the Department of Agriculture was offering cadetships. I was very keen to try and be a little bit independent of my parents, they had sacrificed a lot to send me to college and so forth. At the end of the second year at the university I applied for a cadetship in soil conservation. I went before a little selection panel and I was granted a cadetship, which gave me £100 a year. That was the cadetship itself. But it required me to work with people who were already employed in soil conservation in the Department of Agriculture whenever I could. I might add that during the agricultural science course, we had to do I think 24 weeks of practical work approved by the university. So I had two sessions, for example, on Koomooloo Station as a [station hand]. I worked in other places such as at Roseworthy College, that was counted as a part of the time, and Turretfield Research Centre. Then I also had this responsibility as it were, as a part of the cadetship to work in the

field with soils officers who were already employed in the Department and that was a wonderful experience too. They were keen, young fellows (as I see it now) and I would work with them for two weeks or so during the vacations at the university. During my university course I virtually didn't have a holiday. I might have had a few days off over Christmas. But, then again, the work was a holiday out in the field.

Also, you're getting the whole package there in the sense of you've got a university life, with sport, ... a little bit of socialising and this work aspect.

I was very fortunate indeed to have been ... And then there was another element. During our course we had to go on field tours organised by Roseworthy College and also organised by, as I recall, the Botany Department and the Geology Department at the university. I can remember going on an excursion to Hallett Cove, for example, and then sometimes there were longer excursions. The geology of Hallett Cove was famous.

[31:35] Did you have people like Mawson ...?

I did, we did. I remember a funny story about that too. We had a chap by the name of Fred Pfeiffer who was doing the first two years at our university in forestry: after that they went to Canberra. He was doing this geology course that was designed for not real geologists but people who were in agricultural science and forestry. We were walking down the beach at Hallett Cove with Sir Douglas Mawson and Pfeiffer picked up a piece of concrete that had been rolled and rolled in the sea and it looked like a piece of ... He said to Professor Mawson, 'Sir, what's this?'. And he said, 'That is a piece of impertinence!' (Laughs)

[32:30] **End Side A, Tape 1**  
**Tape 1, Side B**

[0:05] ... with Mawson and some of the other geology students. That sort of work going out in the field, did you find that appealing?

Every excursion for me was a wonderful experience. One thing that comes to mind. During these excursions we often went to properties and somebody in the group was asked to give a vote of thanks to the people that we came to. Also, during the course it was necessary for us to make presentations about some of our projects. I found, rather to my surprise, that I could speak fairly well on my feet. That greatly helped me during the rest of my career. I don't know why but I was just, I suppose, gifted that way a little. I could put words together on my feet. It was always a helpful attribute.

Had you done classes at school on public speaking or debating? Had you been in a debating club?

No. No, I hadn't been in any of those but that's the way it seemed to develop.

[1:50] I asked you about the appeal of field trips and so on, in a sense partly whether you were developing any feel for a life on the land? When you were going out and working as a field hand on



the farm, doing different jobs there, whether that sort of appealed to you and maybe ag. science wasn't what you wanted to do but being a farmer was?

No. I don't think I was ever focused other than agricultural science. I'll tell you why. Because family history had shown (and my father mentioned this a few times) that if you're going to be a successful farmer, you really needed to have some capital backing to get going or to successfully farm. Because of some of the family properties that when there was a death it was divided in such a way that nobody was in a strong position for resources, that it was very, very, very difficult to be a farmer. I think I had that in my mind that I had no access to capital and I wasn't that way inclined to be entrepreneurial I guess.

When you were doing the, shall we say, work-experience situation, going out on the properties and so on, were you getting a smattering of activities – shearing sheep ...?

Virtually everything, even from pruning fruit trees to jackarooing. Looking after the sheep movements on Koomooloo Station, helping with the shearing, also farm machinery. At Turretfield: contour bank building, harvesting, seed cleaning, fencing. I had a very wide experience in all of those things that were necessary on a farm.

[4:30] When the cadetships were on offer, were there more ... I mean you chose soil conservation or did soil conservation choose you? I'm asking you whether there were other cadetships you could have done in other areas?

Yes, there were. Why did I choose soil conservation? Because I had had a little bit of other field experience with people who were already in the soil conservation area like Reg French and Peter Geytenbeek and men like that who were starting off their careers and they influenced me.

Just a particular interest ... Didn't know where it might lead you but a particular interest to come out of that time?

That's right. A lot of my friends at the university who had access to cadetships in education and all the other, they were very wary of taking up cadetships because you were bonded for three years afterwards. Again, I didn't see that as a problem. I thought it would give me a foundation from which to move and as it worked out it did and I never regretted it.

The cadetship went for a third year and then into the fourth year?

Yes. [The cadetship covered my fees during the third and fourth years of the university course.]

After then you did three years with the Department?

In the Soil Conservation Branch, yes. [I was bonded during that time.]

Your fourth year was also in soil conservation, your fourth year cadetship?

Yes. [A soil conservation cadet.]

As you were saying before, you were working all year between study and working in the Department.  
Yes, and doing my other commitments for the university course because you had to have this practical score of weeks before you could take your degree. [I had to complete 16 weeks of practical work during the course before the degree was awarded.]

Roseworthy continued into your fourth year as well?  
Yes, yes it did.

Do you remember what sort of things you were doing in the Department when you were on the cadetship in holiday time and so on?  
Yes.

Were you based in Adelaide?  
Yes. But, for example, Reg French who was a Soil Conservation Officer in the Department and had responsibilities for inspecting land before it was cleared on Eyre Peninsula. At that time there was a lot of work going on clearing land because we had to feed the world! Reg would set off from here and do a fortnights work on Eyre Peninsula. He had a little A40 and we'd fit everything in to that: surveying gear, maps, all of our clothes and off we'd go for a fortnight. We would go to those properties where the landowner had made an application to clear the land: they had to give notification. We would work with the landowner, setting aside any land that was thought to be too vulnerable for erosion, particularly wind erosion. We would walk in the scrub hour by hour by hour. We had aerial photographs but we had to go to the sites where we suspected that there would be problems with soil erosion and we would set those aside. We would leave a map with the landowner with the understanding that he was not to clear that land. That was a wonderful experience, working together in those very remote areas out from Ungarra, out from Lock, out from Cleve, Cowell, north of Cowell, all of those areas.

[9:00] You'd have to be fairly self-sufficient in what you could carry.  
We did. We never camped out. We stayed at awful hotels like Arno Bay and Cleve and Lock where the accommodation was absolutely basic. But we were not required to camp out.

Travelling on unmade roads and tracks and ...?  
Oh yes. All the time, unmade roads. I remember with Reg going from Cleve to Lock, which today you can probably do in three-quarters of an hour. It took us 5 hours because the roads by then had been graded so much and so often they were below the level of the surrounding land and when it rained they became a river. It was just very, very difficult.

Did you stay with the farmers and stay on farms?  
Not the two of us when we were working there but later, when I'd graduated and took up my position (which we might talk about further) at Jamestown, I often stayed out then with the farmers.

I'm just thinking from a practical point of view: you're working on the farm, advising the farmer ...  
Yes, but usually we had so much work to do that we had to move on fairly rapidly.

[10:40] It's interesting that there's a level of awareness about the environmental impact of the farming activity and what to clear and what not to clear and how much to clear and so on.

There certainly was Bernie. We'll go into this in some detail later because I was the chairperson of the Soil Conservation Advisory Committee. There came a time when that changed. I found all the people around me thought that conservation started in the late '70s. Here we were in the early '50s with the farmers having a great deal of concern for the environment, as were those people who were clearing the land. They couldn't afford to be gung-ho because the sand would just undo all their work. Yes, there was a great deal of keen interest in the environment then.

Also coming back to your comment about 'feed the world': you wanted to maximise production anyway, so ...

That's right.

[12:05] We're going to pursue that obviously in a subsequent session. The notion of cadetships: was that new in the Department at the time?

Yes, I think it was. I was not the first by any means. The cadetships started in 1950. I hope I'm right about that but I think that was when they started.

And you had yours in '51?

Yes.

There would only have been a handful of people?

Yes, only a handful of people.

[12:45] From your comment earlier, Arthur, on the course itself: only a few people doing ag. science.

Yes. In first year there were 14 of us. I can't just remember how they fell away but in the last two years there was only four: [Tideman], Rex Oram, Jim Davidson and Eddie Waterhouse. Eddie Waterhouse was a returned serviceman. There was the four of us who went to all the lectures and worked together and we graduated together. It's a little different today. When we did the course, if you failed a subject ... Well first of all we might have been given a supp. [supplementary examination], but if you failed it badly you failed and then you did the year again, the whole year again. So we left behind some students who eventually caught up, but most of them went elsewhere and did other things.

So if there were only four of you doing the third and fourth year, were you all on cadetships?

No. I was the only one on a cadetship.

Oh!

Eddie Waterhouse I guess had some resources because he ... He had been to the war. He was on some form of government support to do extra studies. I forget what it was called?

That's the returned servicemen training scheme. [Commonwealth Reconstruction Training Scheme]  
That's it, yes. The other two had their resources.

Did they go off and pursue their own careers?

Interestingly, Eddie Waterhouse was very much involved with the myxomatosis release program with CSIRO, which he pursued for three years, and then he joined the Anglican Ministry. He studied in Sydney in their theological college there and he became a Minister at Goondiwindi. Jim Davidson worked as an agronomist and research agronomist in the CSIRO at Deniliquin and then in Canberra, as did Rex Oram. Both of them had very meaningful ... what's the word? – excellent careers in the CSIRO. I was the only one that stayed here.

That was what I was wondering Arthur, because there's only four in the third and fourth year. There was a good chance that all four of you were going to graduate. What were four ag. science students going to do? So, it's handy to know.

Again though, as we've already said, at the end of that time we could have chosen half-a-dozen jobs.

Were they unrelated to ag. science?

No, within the various fields of agricultural science.

Arthur, perhaps if you could just outline what the options available might have been?

After we graduated?

Yes.

We could have continued our studies and done Honours and perhaps Masters and become research scientists in various areas of agricultural science like entomology or soil physics or something like that. Over the years people did that. We could have entered the teaching profession, which was much sought after at those times.

Secondary or tertiary teaching?

Those who did the Honours and went into research, they often combined tertiary teaching with that. But no, secondary teachers were much sought after, agricultural science teachers. Then there was ... Industry was just starting to employ graduates. One good example was the AMP Scheme. Some of the graduates of the years before mine and after mine went into that arena. The banks were employing agricultural scientists as valuers, assisting the banks to manage properties that had defaulted or whatever. There was a strong demand for people in those fields, all of which paid more money than the Department of Agriculture incidentally.

It may not have been as secure.

It wasn't as secure and perhaps, certainly for me, it wasn't as satisfying because by the time I graduated I felt I had a foot well in the door of the Department of Agriculture. I was known and I really wasn't at first looking elsewhere, but I did later as we'll come to that story.

That's handy to have an idea of what other options there were.

They were amazing options and they were all full-time employment. There was no casual jobs to be done or consultancy type work where you work for three years and the money runs out, as people are doing today so often.

I suppose there might have been some stock or trustee sort of companies that employed ...

I think they did, yes they did. Graduates were also employed in companies which managed other properties like AACM. Now what did that stand for? Australian Agricultural Consultant Management. Young and Tiver owned that company and over the years, subsequently, they employed a lot of staff. But there we were: early 1950s you could pick and chose.

[20:40] You were graduating in 1952 or thereabouts?

Yes. My final exams were in 1952. The graduation ceremony was in April 1953. Incidentally, I've just been to the 50th anniversary of that occasion and the university had a wonderful service the other day to commemorate that.

I saw a notice about that through the Alumni actually.

That's right, yes. Gowns and luncheon and speeches and processions, everything.

And it just seems like yesterday!

It did, it really did.

'53 to 2003 – a lot has happened. We're going to cover some of what's happened I suppose. In '53, by the time of graduation, you were well and truly working with the Department?

Yes I was.

More or less finished your study and went straight on with the Department?

Yes. I did take more than a month off. I was granted that by Bob Herriot who was chief of the Soils Branch at that time. I spent the time hiking in Tasmania with a group of friends. We went right through the national parks on the west coast and climbed Frenchmans Cape and did all those things. When I started formally my work Bob Herriot said, 'Next week you're starting work up at Jamestown' and to Jamestown I went. I was a bit grumpy at that time because I had so many other things going on around me in Adelaide. However, I very quickly adjusted.

So the Department had an office ...

At Jamestown.

Jamestown.

Yes. There were two other [soil conservation] officers there by then: Peter Barrow who was in charge of the office and Geoff Robinson who was a diplomat working there.

[22:50] What was expected of you going up to Jamestown? Did Bob Herriot say 'Here's a set of instructions?'.

In those days we didn't have formal duty statements! (Laughs) You just got to work. [One aspect of our work was farm plans.] We set out layouts of properties for farmers who were interested, which would minimise soil erosion. We fitted the layout of the properties to the land use that they were best suitable to. This section had this slope, this sort of soils, that could be cropped. This section was too steep, it could not be cropped. Or this section was of such a slope that it needed contour banks before it was cropped. That process. Building contour banks and surveying them. Soil surveys. We did a soil survey of Booyoolie Station, which was most interesting, covered in wild artichoke at the time, beautiful country. What had happened during the war, there was not enough labour to keep weeds like that in control and they were still battling to get back on their feet.

[24:35] Such a soil survey, was that the first time it had been done for the station?

Yes.

Other activities, were they also first timers: going to a property and saying, 'Don't crop over there' and so on?

Yes. It was cutting edge technology really in those days. Only a few farmers, relatively, took it up. Indeed, in the late '40s, I remember Herriot telling me when he was first out trying to survey contour banks on properties, they'd always take him into the very back paddock where no-one else could see it. He was most anxious to get contour-banked paddocks on the roadsides so that everybody would see it. It was hard work.

I'm interested in that because you've got the (and no disrespect) young graduate coming out of university going up to tell a farmer, perhaps a son of a son of a farmer sort of thing?

Yes.

Did you meet any opposition or resistance?

I can't remember it really, because there were leading farmers who came to us. We were very busy doing it. We also had, as we developed our work ... Bob Herriot was very good at teaching extension methods, teaching adult people how to go about it, what to do. We did courses on that and he was very good.

He was training you up and training farmers up?

Yes. And we were training farmers up. I never really felt uncomfortable with any ... We met some real characters. I remember going to the plains out from Yongala. I had to meet a station hand or a property hand who was going to help me contour furrow a certain area. He would hold the staff and I would have the dumpy level and we'd survey it out. I eventually found him out in this paddock. He had a bare torso; his skin was like a crocodile's almost, it was tough. I came up to him and said, 'Tideman's my name'. I offered my hand to shake, which he ignored,

and he said, 'Tideman. That's a bloody funny name!'. I didn't quite know what to do after that. My extension training hadn't told me what to do next! (Laughs)

On your back foot! You said you met a lot of characters.

Yes. The highlight of my work at Jamestown was that Peter Barrow, in effect, gave me the responsibility of promoting soil conservation in the Quorn area, from Melrose North through Quorn right up into the Flinders and out to Hawker and down over the Willochra Plain. I was able to make a lot of headway there. The people were most interested. We had some good demonstration sites. We had field days: I had the first field day in that area. I got a lot of satisfaction out of that.

[28:55] The Department was providing these services as part of its operations.

Yes.

You weren't necessarily charging the farmers for anything?

No thought of charging. That was a thing that I have always found in my later career very difficult to come to terms with. My feeling was that for the sake of sustainable agriculture, for the sake of the environment, free services for improving all of that was money well spent. That's a different case now.

To cover that area you were talking about, you know going to Quorn and up to the Flinders and so on, did you have a car?

Yes. The government did have some cars. They were Fords that were procured after the war. They'd given service in the war. They didn't last for long and the government encouraged us to use our own cars. They gave us loans at very low rates and they enabled us to buy petrol at a discounted rate and tyres and batteries and things like that. So, in 1954 I bought a Holden after [working for] a year, and ran it for the government.

Did you get a mileage rate?

Yes we did.

You got a loan to help you buy it and mileage rate?

And a mileage rate yes. I cannot remember what it was although if I delved in my records I think I would have it.

There's probably a set of rates somewhere!

It certainly was. Indeed, it was. But if I remember, if I kept my private travelling reasonable, I got that for nothing. If it was not more than a third and two-thirds for the government, so it added to my salary which, by the way, was £900 when I started at Jamestown – per annum.

This is a bit of a change, of course, to have officers using cars, whether they be the government or their own, compared to the earlier days of having to ride on a train and a ... or a horse and buggy?

There had been, certainly, advances made.

This is also the time, Arthur, of wartime restrictions still coming to a close: they carried on for some time. Did you have experiences of petrol rationing?

Not so far as my job was concerned. But I do remember in the family scene it was quite an issue and so was food rationing of course. I remember the day at school when I passed the 5 ft 3 inch mark and therefore my clothing ration improved no end. My mother was very pleased about that.

A growing lad.

Yes.

**[32:20] End of Side B, Tape 1  
Tape 2, Side A**

[0:20] Arthur after a pause there, let's pick up a bit more on perhaps your Jamestown story and the things you were doing up there. Just to clarify particular aspects. Obviously you went up as a young graduate in, as you said, February '53. They didn't let you loose by yourself. You've got Peter Barrow and Geoff Robinson with you. How did that work?

They were very good teachers both of them.

They were going to be your 'supervisors', basically?

Yes. They weren't really my supervisors but they gave me a great deal of lead. Once I had established myself, so that in the latter years particularly that I was at Jamestown, I virtually operated on my own. I should say of that period that it began my realisation and joy that the Department's staff virtually became family. We were at one. We went to one another's homes often. I helped them baby sit and things like that. That continued throughout my career. Staff were always close together and very rarely were there any problems so far as personalities or anything like that was concerned. Indeed, that's carried right on through my retirement so that every year with the retirees and their spouses, we meet and have luncheons together and then we travel around the countryside for a week. It's been a wonderful asset this family that the Department grew into. If I could just expand on that. Whenever any of us went overseas on work for example (and we had those opportunities later), we'd go down to the airport to see them off. Help them when they came back: we'd meet them and take their luggage. When they were away we tried to make sure we were in contact with their loved ones at home and help to solve any family problems.

So it was a very strong friendship as much as anything.

It became a friendship so that now when we are together, you would never know who was the typist, who was the Minister of Agriculture or who was in the senior executive. It has become a wonderful friendship.



Did that extend across the other branches of the Department? Obviously you're talking here about ...

I'm talking about particularly the agronomy, the plant side, of it. Yes, it did. Perhaps not quite so strongly because in some sections of the animal activities of the Department, vets came in who had much shorter careers in the Department. They had been brought in later and there was a little less, but never major problems so far as personalities were concerned.

[4:25] In these early days, both in the cadetship and now as a new graduate, did you take much interest in the Department, its structure or politics (office politics)?

Yes, indeed. I was very much involved and encouraged to be involved by the more senior staff. I might just add that (another thing that I remember) when I came back into the city, for quite a number of years we, about once a month, went to a cultural event at lunchtime. A gallery or a musical presentation at the university or somewhere like that: it extended very widely with our interests. We had an art exhibition with people from within the Department who had their art and were ready to display it. We did this in the library in the old Simpson's Building. We were very lucky to have such a closely knit and happy working environment.

So there were social activities. Sporting activities?

Yes. Before I got so busy with married life they had tennis evenings under lights at [the tennis courts on Portrush Rd, Norwood].

What about other sports, the traditional football, cricket? Did you have staff cricket matches?

I believe they did on occasions but I was not involved. Once I got to Jamestown I became very involved in the tennis clubs there. I was secretary of their association and we ran quite big tournaments at Easter and things like that. So I was drawn off in that direction.

[7:20] It's nice to know some of the things that were happening in that early period when you joined. When you were in Jamestown, what did you do for accommodation? Were you still there as a single man?

Yes Bernie, that was interesting. I had nowhere to go and Peter Barrow and Geoff Robinson started looking for accommodation for me but the minister at our Malvern Methodist Church, had contacts in Jamestown and they found me a board with Mr and Mrs Thomas in Gloucester Road. The accommodation was pretty basic: outdoor drop toilet and no hot water laid on, we had a chip heater and things like that. But they were lovely people and they cared for me. I was on the move a lot because I was courting my first wife. I would, about once every 4 or 5 weeks at least, come down for the weekend to Adelaide. But they did care for me wonderfully well.

In that sort of situation you get brought into the town environment, the local environment.

Yes, we certainly did. They had their children and relatives and their friends and I became involved with them. I felt very much a part of the Jamestown community. Indeed, I still have friends that I made at that time.

In that situation where you were boarding, was that left to you to arrange?  
Yes.

There wasn't a departmental house or anything at that time?

No there was not for single people. There were departmental houses for the likes of the Barrows and the Robinsons who were married. Again the accommodation was pretty basic. They were prefabricated homes, pretty cold and noisy and dusty but no, it was up to me to find my own accommodation.

[9:45] Did you get reimbursed or compensated for that?

No. That's certainly an interesting point that comes to mind. Throughout my time at Jamestown, when there was work to be done we worked. I can remember over a period of 6 months, Robby [Geoff Robinson] and I kept a diary of the overtime we did and we averaged 19 hours a week overtime. But we loved every minute of it: it wasn't a chore at all. Indeed, throughout my career in the Department, right until I retired, I was never paid overtime and I was never under a flexi-time system whereby if you worked an hour [extra] you got an hour off. But it never worried me. I must say though, for quite a long period of that time, if I needed to take 3 or 4 hours off to go to the dentist or get a haircut or something, I did. It was a relaxed, non-regimented work scene and I had no problems. I didn't feel at all uncomfortable about it. I had a job to do and it was good fun doing it really and satisfying and fulfilling.

Those things in your situation and particularly later in your career, it all balances out in lots of ways.  
That's right.

It's interesting this early period in Jamestown where you were being inculcated or perhaps just developing your own approach to work, so you were able to go out and work at all hours if it meant weekend work, it didn't matter.

Yes. It was very good. I never signed a timebook in my life. (Laughs) We had weekly reports to put in of what we did. Sounds good, doesn't it?

Reporting back to Head Office every week?

These sheets went back up I think through Peter Barrow once a month or something like that.

It was just the three of you in Jamestown?

In Soil Conservation.

In Soil Conservation.

There was a dairy advisor and [stock] inspector and there was the district agronomist called the district agricultural advisor, there wasn't anyone called district agronomist. That was the team.

Did you have an office person or a typist or an administration person or do it all yourself?

We did it all ourselves for a period, but during the last year I was there we did obtain a typist.

Yes, we did everything. I can remember when we expanded the office a little bit so that we

weren't sitting on top of one another, the government obtained another room which was occupied by Boucaut, the lawyer. We moved into this area and the government sent up this linoleum to put on the floor. It came up in a big roll on the train and it was enormously heavy. Peter Barrow, Geoff and I had to lay it. It was a terrible struggle to lay this very heavy linoleum, we did the laying.

They relied on your 'handyperson' skills.

Yes. I can remember before we laid it down we had to remove old carpets and [underneath there was] about half an inch of silt because in 1944 Jamestown got flooded out. The whole of Jamestown went under a flood when they had 7 inches of rain in a couple of hours up at Yongala and these offices were flooded. The silt was still there in 1954! (Laughs)

You weren't tempted to just lay the linoleum over the top! (Laughs)

We thought we better not. There was this heap of silt in the room: [we scraped up a large heap of silt].

Arthur, you said there was a dairy officer, an agronomist and so on. Were you working as a team all of you? Obviously you were working closely with Peter and Geoff.

Less so with the others but nevertheless we had barbecues and things at each other's homes. As far as work was concerned, it was fairly deep with ... it was very into disciplines. There wasn't a great deal of overlap as I remember.

I was just wondering if you were going out to a certain farm, there's always one person who would hitch a ride, that sort of thing?

We did that with the district agricultural advisor, but the dairy officer went on a specific case to factories and dairies and things like that. The stock inspector went to sales and things like that. So we were a bit separated in a way.

You mentioned earlier working with Peter and Geoff. They had a bit of a supervisory role. How long did that maintain, before you became an independent operator?

I became independent about half way through 1954. That was about ...

A year or so.

A bit more than a year afterwards.

They were training you up in field practicalities just for that region?

Yes. We kept very careful records trying to build up a picture of the sociology of the area so that we knew who was influencing who in the farming areas. Who was the leader? Supposing a farmer wanted to buy a tractor, who would he go to to talk to about it? If he was going to move out and plant a pasture, who would he talk to, where would he get his information from? We tried to analyse all of this so that we could fit in and help the best we could. We drew up social districts: we knew where if those people went to shop at say Hallett, we knew that they really

were in a social group. We had all these mapped out and we designed all our extension programs based on that. That was quite innovative for those days.

Was that something that you developed yourselves?

Oh no. This was ...

A departmental thing?

It was Bob Herriot [the Soil Conservator] and his branch who did this very effectively.

I suppose in that sense when I say departmental I mean the particular branch handling something.

Yes. [We at Jamestown gradually defined social groups in the region time but we did not initiate the technique.]

[18:15] One thing I wanted to ask you earlier which applies to both working independently and working under supervision. You talked before about contour mapping and so on. What sort of [soil] mapping training had you had through university and in the field? Any at all?

None at all. [Learning and using new technology was] an interesting part of my career and we'll come to this later. [For example,] I moved into weed science and weed science really wasn't taught at all at the university but we had the grounding. We'd done a lot of laboratory work and had a lot of lectures on soils, for example, so this [soil mapping] was an applied arm of the basic [university] training that we were given. In that sense it didn't matter. In fact, probably the university would be wasting its time to teach you to survey contour banks or build contour banks.

So you were learning pretty well on the job with that?

Learnt on the job.

Most of the time you were putting into application the things you'd learnt at university? I suppose I'm asking, was there a great discrepancy between the theoretical, university stuff and then actually working practically?

No, it was very helpful. For example, the botanical studies we did (from I to III), that was a very, very good grounding for a lot of the work that [I did in weed science]. We did biometrics – statistical methods applied to agriculture. That became very important. And understanding that so that you could lay out [field] trials that you could get a meaningful answer from. That training was very, very useful. The soils training was useful – an understanding of the chemistry and the physics of soils was very, very useful. I did a fair bit of (during the course) animal studies, which I never used very much but was interesting.

I was just wondering whether there was a great discrepancy between the university training and the practical world you were working in? It sounds like it was pretty close.

It was. It was well done.

Did you do anything, and I should have asked you earlier, on agricultural economics?

Yes we did. We had an agricultural economics [subject]. That was done at Roseworthy College.

Again, it just gave us the basics of it, it was not in depth but sufficient.

[21:25] Looking at the Jamestown experience again. Are you able to give some sort of feel for the amount of time you spent working with people on the farms, working with the farmers and working in the office? Were you out and about more often than not?

Oh, yes. I would say that ... In fact, I remember, Monday was set aside to do office work, the rest of the week was out.

Office work was writing reports?

We always wrote reports of what we'd done on each property. There was a file for each property so that we knew their names, who they were, what we'd done, when and any other relevant information. There were other things we had to do like the weekly report. We'd fill in our reports and put in our expenses and things like that.

Keeping up with all the paper work.

It was minor really compared with the time we spent out in the field.

If you were going out four days a week on average, and you said before you were going as far as the Flinders and so on, so you were having to cover a bit of territory. Were you visiting two, three farms in that time?

Sometimes we would line up work and we'd visit two or three farms a day but very often I would be on a property, contour furrowing say quite a big area and we would be there two or three days and then we'd stay with the farmers. One of the great achievements that I had (while we're talking about this sort of work) was on Merngenia Station, north of Dawson. This station was highly eroded because it had been on the old stock route from Burra to Broken Hill. Vast areas of it were absolutely bare. With [Ross Burford and family] we set about re-vegetating enormous areas of this property. I've followed that through the years and it was very, very satisfying in that today those areas are well covered with perennial bush and trees and the productivity of the area is vastly, vastly different to what it was in 1954 when we first started working there.

That would have been unusual wouldn't it to talk about re-vegetation at that time?

Not for people in the Soils Branch of the Department of Agriculture. It certainly wasn't [a common issue in the] community.

That was what I was thinking. For a property owner to say we'll take on a re-vegetation program in effect ...

Nevertheless, there was a core of people who wanted to do this. They wanted to know how to do it and we were able to supply that. I say again that the community of today thinks that conservation is a very recent thing but it's not. The *Soil Conservation Act* was brought in in South Australia in 1937, which raises another thing.

While I was at Jamestown, I first learnt to work with soil conservation boards. These were groups of farmers who were interested in improving soil conservation in their districts. They had a legal, statutory basis so that they could (if the worst comes to the worst) take action against other landowners. They were technically serviced by the soil conservation staff and over the years they turned the whole ethos of looking after the land right around. That board system is still very active now: it covers the whole State. There is also a board system, which I had a lot to do (proudly) to set up for [pest] animal and plant control – weed control and feral animal control. I believe it's made a great impact on the care and sustainability of our environment in South Australia – that system, the board system.

The animal board, I suppose that's a much later one?

Yes, it came in much later.

[27:10] We'll come to that.

[Incidentally, on the subject of the board system as the very successful basis of soil conservation and animal and plant control, I mention that native vegetation control does not involve the community in that way. And it is a disaster.

I'm a statutory conciliator under the *Native Vegetation Management Act*. I emphasise that I cannot negotiate for a better outcome or correct the situation in the field. I can only try to get the parties to talk.

When a landowner wishes to remove native trees or any native vegetation from his property he must obtain a permit. Often without contact, a native vegetation specialist rates trees on a scale depending on size, species and habitat for birds – the latter very subjective such as the number of hollows for nests high up in a tree and impossible to examine. If a tree receives a certain rating it remains.

No account is taken of the landowner's skills or conservation intent or what leaving single trees here or there will do to the property's productivity.

A situation I tried recently (i.e. 2002–03) to resolve without success was the Native Vegetation Council's refusal to allow nine scattered trees to be removed to facilitate pivot irrigation so the area will continue to be flood irrigated with inefficient water use and soil salinity a real possibility. No account was taken of the landowner's excellent tree planting history and the offer to plant 10 trees for every one removed. A bureaucratic disaster. A board made up with community members aided by technical officers should manage native vegetation – the process should not be run by technical officers.]

It's relevant to, as you say, the soil conservation board experience.  
That's why it worked so well.

A model of something working versus ...  
Yes.

And you were closely involved with the board up at Jamestown?  
Not as closely as Peter Barrow and Geoff Robinson were. They were the senior people.

They were sitting on the board?  
Only as secretaries. They had no direct influence on the board. They were the technical secretaries [offering advice. Of course, that work required seniority and experience. I attended a good number of meetings.] We ran soils schools for the boards to bring them up to date.

You ran them for the boards. Was that to educate the board members or ...?  
Yes. I must hasten to add that the Agricultural Bureau system was very active in all those districts. We, through them, ran soils schools as well and field days. They were a great help to our cause.

I was going to ask you about that. It's good you've mentioned it. How did you work with the Ag. Bureaus? How did you liaise with them? You said you were running the soils schools.  
Yes, we did. We were under instructions as it were from the Department to assist the Agricultural Bureaus whenever we possibly could. They had their own programs, their own field days. We'd be invited along. We'd be asked to speak on particular subjects like organic matter in soils or fertiliser treatments or land use planning, things like that.

So you'd give a presentation?  
Yes.

The Ag. Bureau: were they setting up the field day?  
Yes. They usually initiated them and we would help run them. I can only remember once a big field day being run which was entirely initiated by us and that was up at Quorn where there was no Agricultural Bureau and I took it upon myself to call a field day as it were. I was able to influence the [local government] council members and the farmers up there, the graziers [and especially landowners] who had already done some soil conservation work. The CWA [provided] the luncheon. We had a great day.

That field day and the local show concept: they are pivotal activities in a rural community.  
Yes, they are. They were and still are.

There is a great tradition of that and the fact you were able to get all these different groups to come together, the CWA and so on, they were attuned to putting on a good field day.  
They were.

Was it an annual event, the field day up in Jamestown or that region? You said the Quorn one was a special one.

They didn't have the [machinery] field days like they run today at Paskeville and [Cleve] and places like that, no. They did have the annual [general] show which had a great influence on the agricultural community.

Did the Department contribute to the show?

Yes.

**[32:55] End of Side A, Tape 2**

**Tape 2, Side B**

[0:04] Did the Department send any displays up from town?

As I remember, not until later in my career. When I was at Jamestown I don't remember, we weren't as sophisticated!

We'll come onto that: it was part of the advisory function to have these things. But you'd attend the show, and Peter and Geoff and so on?

Yes. We'd walk around amongst it and be there for it.

[0:40] Bernie there was one event that occurred right at the end of my time at Jamestown and that was an enormous locust plague which descended upon the northern agricultural areas from the pastoral areas where the breeding grounds were way up near the Queensland, New South Wales borders. Late in 1954, it might have been 1955, yes, 1955: enormous numbers of plague locusts descended in great swarms on the northern agricultural areas. We were taken away from our normal duties and put in control of particular areas. I lived at Port Pirie for 3 months. Every day I tried to track where the swarms were going and arrange for them to be sprayed. During that period I got to know those northern areas in great detail. I drove over just about every road from Pirie to Yadlamulka Station, 50 miles above Port Augusta, right out through to Hawker and down to almost Jamestown. We arranged for aerial spraying and ground spraying.

That was a dedicated three months or so?

Yes, on that job.

That took you away from all the other soil conservation work proper, but this is still an integral activity.

It was. For that [locust program] I was given two weeks extra leave!

Was it a 7-day-a-week job then?

Yes it was. For those three months I was on every day.

Those locust plagues are phenomenal.

This was a particularly big one. Of interest too was that we were using a chemical called dieldrin, which was highly effective but it became a no-no so far as the environment was



concerned in later years. It was a very long-lasting chemical so that if you sprayed a paddock you would still be killing locusts three weeks later.

Was that a concern at the time?

No. It was not a concern at the time. It was a great chemical and it was doing the job!

I could understand it being a fairly new method to use and if it's effective you use it and worry later!

That's right. That period was the beginning of my realisation that agricultural chemicals had a great future in agriculture and it led me to look outside the Department for further experience.

That and other influences took me into the agricultural chemical arena through the Shell Chemical Co.

[4:30] Perhaps we can pick up on that in a moment, but I just wanted to go back to where I was asking about the show and the Department's contribution if any. You've already alluded to the fact that you came down to Adelaide every few weeks for courting purposes. Did you have to come to Adelaide for any Departmental purposes, for training or reporting?

Yes. Once a year the Soil Conservation Branch had a week-long meeting at which we were all expected to give a particular paper or report on what had been happening and we were given training in new developments that were occurring. It was very, very good.

Basically an annual basis?

That was on an annual basis, but then there were also specific training courses like on extension. We'd have a week at Roseworthy College I remember and that was quite a highlight. When you joined the Department there was an orientation course that went for a week. The in-service training in the Department of Agriculture was very good: it went on throughout my career.

The in-service training was run by people within the Department?

Or outside if needed be. As I say, that in-service training went on. In 1975, for example, I was sent to the Australian Administrative Staff College at Mount Eliza, which was the elite management training school at that time. The Department spent an enormous amount of money on giving me that sort of training.

A lot of that would be obviously training for practical purposes, the work you were doing in the field. I'm thinking of the earlier days that were very practical orientated. Were you keen to attend these ...?

Yes I was because they were well done. They were well thought out and we were never bored.

There were no grumbles about going.

On the other hand Arthur, you said you were coming to town: did you find people from the Department were coming up to Jamestown, soil conservation wise or for other reasons? Did you get to meet some of the higher ups so to speak?

Yes, indeed. Once a year, at least, the Director of Agriculture would appear at Jamestown. I can remember a little incident surrounding [Sir Allan] Callaghan, who was the Director, saying

‘Look, this girl on the front counter, she’s the most important person in this Department’s operations here. If I drop dead as I walk out down the road there, people will walk over me and say who’s that? But if she drops dead, they’ll all go to the funeral’. (Both laugh)

Putting it into context!

That was the sort of thinking.

Did the Minister come around on an annual trip? Did the Minister ever come around?

Not that I can recall. While I was there I worked on Tom Casey’s property who became Minister of Agriculture and I got to know he and his family very well. I can’t remember any Ministers coming but they may have.

Casey at that stage was a farmer?

Yes. He was a farmer east of Peterborough. His family were hoteliers in Peterborough but they had bought this property (a lovely family) out east of Port Augusta. I did some soil work on their property – soil banking and soil conservation. I got to know them very well.

[9:35] Just a matter of terminology Arthur, we’ve talked a couple of times about farmers and landowners and used the terms interchangeably. Did the same apply to pastoralists? Did you have any dealings with pastoralists?

Yes I did. For example, the work I did on Merngenia Station, I would call them pastoralists. But I don’t think it was ever an issue.

I was just wondering how far your work extended?

Certainly into pastoral. For example, I did a lot of work up the Arden Vale Valley which goes north of Quorn. In there was one of the Kidmans. He would have seen himself as a pastoralist. But it was never an issue. In the South East, people saw themselves as graziers not farmers and they saw a different social aspect there.

I think that’s true. Also, I was thinking of the Pastoral Board, the Pastoral Branch of the Lands Department having its little patch and it an early sort of ‘The Agriculture Department’s coming along and encroaching on our territory’ sort of feeling.

Yes. This is a fair word to say that there was a certain elitism about that Pastoral Board. They operated a little differently from us.

It was their patch!

Yes.

[11:15] I was just wondering, I thought I would just clarify that about the term. You mentioned the Director coming up on an annual trip but did you have Bob Herriot or someone like that coming in at the time on a more regular basis?

Yes. The section leaders, managers or Branch Managers certainly appeared quite often. We were well serviced by them.

Did they come out in the field with you or was it mainly an office-based meeting situation?

Yes, they did come in the field, certainly they would. Not being able to spend a lot of time they'd have to go from Jamestown across to Cleve where there was an office there and down to Port Lincoln so it was staff oriented, office oriented, policy oriented. Not so much do it in the field.

A flying visit.

Yes.

Were you interested very much at that stage in things like policy and what the Department was doing or what the Department could do for farmers? Or were you still too young?

I wasn't involved, no. I didn't see myself very much involved in any of the policy matters at all.

I was very content and very happy to be working directly with farmers in the field.

[12:55] Your mention earlier of the locust plague and your experience there, and your comment about being happy working with the farmers leads on to perhaps the circumstances of you leaving the Department at this time. Would you like to explain some of that? I was thinking that might be an appropriate point too for kick off next time.

That would be good, yes. I became aware that there was a new applied development occurring in that agricultural chemicals were being rapidly developed, particularly herbicides (weed killers as they were first called, but we called them herbicides). I had come across this in my general reading, talking to farmers. I had a cousin (who incidentally is just going to turn 70 this week) whose first husband was working in Shell Chemical and I had that sort of contact.

I also felt that I wanted to have as wide experience as I could while I was young and private industry seemed to me to be another quite different arm of where I'd been. So I approached Shell Chemical having seen some advertisements for technical representatives as they called them. I came down to Adelaide to the Shell Building on North Terrace and David Bruce (who was a Scotsman and Manager of Shell Chemical) was very keen to take me on. With a lot of thought and a lot of trepidation really, because I was very comfortable and happy in the Department, I decided to move on. But I was also encouraged by my wife to be, so it turned out that when we were married in April 1956, she graduated, I changed jobs and we went to live at Clare. I did not regret it at all because not only did I get a good grounding in the new chemicals that were becoming available, which have proved to be very valuable for agriculture. Take the herbicides for example, the weed killers. Before 1950 the only weed killers that were available were arsenic, salt and a few other chemicals which were not selective, so you couldn't use them in a crop. After that, the hormone herbicides came along – the Atrozines, pre-emergent herbicides – and in the next 10 years there was this great development. I became a part of that. It was quite exciting.

You had to go on a learning curve then?

Yes. None of this was taught at the university. (Laughs) It wasn't known! I had a great learning curve and Shell facilitated that very, very well. They also facilitated management – business management, staff management. They had excellent training courses. Coming from Europe, they were far ahead of the general business/government scene in terms of management. They were far ahead.

For the era, modern management principles ...

They were just starting and I was in on the ground floor. They sent me to Melbourne and places like that for that special training.

So you had training in the chemicals themselves and in management.

That's right.

You mentioned the role as a technical representative: that's almost like a travelling salesman?

It was and that was the part I didn't like very much. Every now and again there was some selling to be done. They had their ordinary agents and representatives. I was put in to do other jobs like I had to do a survey of South Australia for the potential of urea, the nitrogen-based fertiliser. What was the sale potential? What was its use? Where would it be used? How much? What was in the future? That was very good. I was kept in the technical area largely, but there was this other selling.

You were based in Clare?

Yes.

For the whole time you were with Shell?

Yes.

You mentioned earlier you were there from '56 to '58, so about 3 years?

Yes, about 3 years.

To go back to the start of you joining Shell. That April '56 date coincides with the 3 years of your bond, more or less?

Yes.

Yes. So it's almost like you couldn't wait to get out in one sense, I mean that in a polite way but the 3 years were up and ...!

It looks like that and I suppose there was a bit of that influence. I was young, keen and I felt I had served out my allegiance to the Department. I thought I would get a different career, at least for a while. I didn't see my whole future in Shell Chemical at all.

[19:45] What was the reaction from the Department or from your colleagues?

The reaction from my colleagues was a bit glum. They thought I was doing the wrong thing.

They thought I was letting the Department down a little because they had put a lot of effort into

me. At that time people didn't go in and out of jobs, they were looking for lifetime jobs. So I was a bit different. Not that they ever abandoned me as friends or anything like that. It didn't go that far but I did feel that ...

They would have preferred you to stay?

Yes and that I was going into dangerous ground in the private arena. People who were in the Public Service weren't too sure about the private arena, it was out there and different.

Did you have any thoughts about what you might do if your experiment didn't work?

I had an open mind. Perhaps at this moment it's time to say that my termination with Shell Chemical happened in that the person in the Department, Hector Orchid, who had started to use some of the weed science technology that was developing, was tragically killed [near Morchard] while he was going to an Agricultural Bureau meeting. Some weeks later I was doing some of this survey work for Shell, I was down in the Department and went past Lex Walker's office. Lex said to me, 'We've got a job for you'. I thought, 'Right, if I could set up a weeds science group then that's the next step'. So I came back into the Department.

Was that the job that Lex had in mind, to set up something like that, or was he thinking more in terms of Hector's replacement?

Certainly firstly Hector's replacement. But, at the same time, Sir Allan Callaghan was very aware that the weed problem in South Australia was holding back this development that we needed to happen because, like I've said, we needed to produce food and the weeds were really a problem. They were holding that back. Particularly so because there'd been all these years of neglect over the wartime. He encouraged the government to bring down a new Act, a *Noxious Weeds Act*, and it had a slightly new concept on weeds control, which we might go into later. He was very keen that the Department should move into the weed science/weed control area in a much stronger way that it had ever been before.

So the set of circumstances combined you rejoining the Department?

It just happened like that and very happily.

We'll pick up on some of that next time of course as a starting point. If Lex hadn't said anything to you, presumably you would have stayed with Shell and moved to another company or whatever?

Yes, I might have done that.

The Tideman story could have been very different.

Yes, it could have been very different.

You had to wrap up and resign from the Department presumably – your cadetship, your bond was up.

Yes. I resigned from the Department. I completely resigned. There was no opportunity in those days to take leave without pay and go and test yourself in a job as they can do at times now.

Very regimented and very structured.  
Yes.

Just on a side issue. Had you had any experiences with cadets yourself, having been through the system? In your time at Jamestown did you have a cadet come up to ...?

Yes we did. I particularly remember one – what was his name?

You had more than one?

Yes. They came up during university vacation times. We had one or two come along.

So you were able to teach them the ropes yourself?

Yes. I don't know how effective I was, but yes.

[24:55] We've probably skipped over a few things about your Jamestown experience and so on. There might be other things that, as you alluded to, we'll come to in subsequent interviews. We've covered a fair bit of ground today. We've got you up to 1958 when you rejoined the Department, which gives us a kick off point ...

That's an excellent idea ...

... if you'd like to have another session

... because from there, 1958, the next 33 years I was very much involved in one way or another with weed control and the weed science scene. The latter part of those 33 years was very much at the administrative, national level and things like that. But I was involved in weed control for that time. I like to think that in many ways I was the father of weed science in South Australia.

You've given us a good grounding Arthur to pick up on that. As you've experienced, it will be very broad ranging and cover a whole lot of ground in the next session or two. So thanks for your time today Arthur and we'll catch up with you soon.

Thank you Bernie.

[26:05] **End of Tape 2, Side B**  
**Tape 3, Side A**

**AN INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY BERNARD O'NEIL WITH ARTHUR TIDEMAN OF BEAUMONT, SOUTH AUSTRALIA ON 4 NOVEMBER 2003 FOR THE PROJECT ON THE HISTORY OF THE SOUTH AUSTRALIAN DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE.**

[The first minute of the tape is extremely quiet, virtually inaudible.]

[1:00] I had formally resigned and when I returned I was re-employed. There was no continuity in the 3 years that I was away in terms of my service with the government. I came into the Department as the Senior Weeds Officer. That was looked upon by my friends and family as rather a peculiar appointment. In those days weed control, weed science was very much a term in development. So they thought I was a little bit strange going into this area of work.

You could say it was a new field of work perhaps?

Yes, yes it was. It was a new field of work. It was a new field of work because in the proceeding few years, some very big advances had been made in the technology of weed control. One of those was the discovery of the hormone-type herbicides which could select broad leaf weeds out of cereal crops. This was a very big step forward. Also, from the point of view of the South Australian Department of Agriculture at the time, the Director – Allan Callaghan (who later became Sir Allan Callaghan) – had seen that weeds were having a very big impact on the profitability of the agricultural industries right across the board. This had developed through the years of neglect of the war when people didn't have so much time or labour to control the weeds on their properties or anywhere else. He had prevailed upon the government to introduce [new legislation, the *Noxious Weeds Act, 1956*], which had some interesting implications. Firstly, it did not demand, as previous Acts had, [that all weeds proclaimed] be eradicated. Weeds were put into categories. Those which were new to our agriculture and which were serious weeds elsewhere but could be eradicated if a lot of work was done [were placed in the Dangerous Weed category]. Then there were the weeds that were generally declared noxious throughout the State. These weeds had to be controlled. No longer did the Act just say 'You'll eradicate them'. It was a much more sensible approach. Then there was a [third] category of weeds, which were [required to be controlled in] particular areas of the State, knowing that they would never become a problem outside of those areas.

[4:55] Very specific. The fact that you were saying the legislation was needed for better control as a result of wartime conditions and decline in standards, is that a suggestion that up until World War II weeds had been pretty much under control?

No, I don't think that is true. There were plenty of weed problems before the war. When you think of it, the main ways of controlling weeds in those days was by mechanical means or, at the most, using chemicals such as arsenic or sodium chlorate, which were costly, very, very costly and could not be used widely in the environment because it left bare earth. They were not selective in any way. You couldn't use them in a crop or near anything that you valued.

It would also be labour intensive?

Very labour intensive, yes.

That's a very sharp transition point you highlighted: I just thought it might have been a bit more ...

No. The war was just an added problem.

[6:20] So I started in this job. I was the first graduate that had been appointed to such a position. It was at a time when the Department, the government, had decided that graduates should be employed in key positions, or should I say in certain positions that required applied research for example, rather than the diplomats. This had a great influence over the years in the future work of the Department.

That notion of the government, in this case it's the Playford Government, required graduates to be employed, was that something that applied across the Public Service or was it very specific to ...?

I don't think it was specific to the Department because there were graduates becoming available in the other sciences. I'm sure that in the Mines Department, for example, they would have moved into this requirement or into this way of employing staff. No, I don't think it was. It didn't make it at times very easy for me in my position because there had been some excellent diplomats who had a very, very good knowledge of practical agriculture around South Australia. Here I came in to the scene, appointed as their senior. I can understand it was pretty tough on them, particularly if they had served in the war and I hadn't. While there was no overt unpleasantness, I always felt a little bit uncomfortable that these people were being replaced by the likes of me. But as time went by we were able to show that we had much to offer because weed control, as I've said, at this time started to become a real science. One needed a good knowledge of botany, one needed a good knowledge of chemistry and biochemistry, plant physiology to be able to move along with this new technology that was becoming available. For the next 12 years I headed up a team, which eventually grew to 17 people. I'm proud to say that it was probably the most effective weed science group in Australia in the early '60s because we had the advantage that we had together, as a team, weed scientists, agricultural scientists who could explore the new technologies and methods of weed control that were evolving, but we also had Extension Officers who had specialised in weed control (in other words, teaching farmers and others about the needs and the ways of controlling weeds). We also had the responsibility of administering the Act. We had a regulatory role as well. Putting these three together was a great advantage.

[10:45] The Weeds Unit was part of ...?

A part of the ...

Horticulture?

Agriculture Branch (as it was called then) of the Department of Agriculture, which became the Agronomy Branch.

That puts you in the structure of things.

That's right.

You went for about 12 years heading that up.

Yes.

[11:10] That comment you made earlier Arthur about the reaction of the diplomats and possibly other members of the staff. You're coming in as a graduate; set up a new section; they're being replaced in one sense or being put to one side; and to boot you're a person from the private sector in a sense. Can see a little bit of resentment or ...



Perhaps we should deal with that private sector attitude right now. Having worked in Shell Chemical, I had a good knowledge and I was quite impressed by the standard of the fieldwork, for example, that that company used in establishing the ways that its herbicides could be used in our agriculture. They had graduates working on this. When I came into the Department again, I brought with me that appreciation of the skills that were out there. After, it might have been 5 years, I thought it would be a good idea, because of the growing complexity of herbicides that were available (which had to be applied at a particular time in the crops' growth or even applied to the soil before they were sown) that all of these special requirements needed to be taught to the farmers. The information needed to be made available. I thought up the idea of producing a weed control spray chart which listed the weeds and the crops and the herbicides available and made it possible for farmers to open up on one sheet all the information they needed. The herbicides went by their registered company names and not by their chemical names. It's like today with our pharmaceuticals, so we had to overcome that. I sat down with representatives from the major companies at the time, like Shell, Ciba-Geigy and the others, with their representatives and we drew up this chart. I got into trouble with the then senior executives of the Department, that I was likely to get into the pockets of private industry and therefore these charts may not be free of bias. I had to work against that and I was very careful that the correct details were put down. These charts were received with so much enthusiasm by particularly the cereal farmers in South Australia that I won the day. By the way, we expanded those charts for horticulturalists, for vegetable growers and even for people who were using herbicides for [long-term weed control around industry sites, for local government use of footpaths] to replace the chipping that used to go on year after year.

[15:40] When you said that we replaced them, we developed them, do you mean 'we' the Department or 'we' your section?

As a section.

As a section; and ultimately the Department adopted them?

Yes. The Department had to be involved because they had to be printed and approved by more senior people.

That's what I was just trying to clarify. It wasn't as if you developed the weeds and the others flowed out from other sections and they all put in.

I see what you mean. No, ...

You developed the ...

Yes. We had a very important input into, say, the herbicides that were used in horticulture. Not that we did all the work there but we certainly led the way because we were in on the ground floor and we knew what the chemicals were.

[16:45] While we're talking about this, I want to bring up the latter part of the 1950s and the 1960s. As that decade went along it became more and more necessary to make sure that the herbicides available met certain standards. Firstly, that they were effective in our environment. Often these herbicides were developed in Europe and they needed to be tested under our conditions because even the ultraviolet light that was available could affect them. There were different [weeds], different rates at which the crops grew. My section had to get in to a position whereby they could field-test these herbicides. We needed, eventually on a national basis, to have them registered. Before they could be registered they had to pass through the tests for their efficacy. Before they were ever put on the market they had to pass through human safety tests; how long they lasted in the tin [on the shelf] and all those chemical aspects of the product.

To develop that just a little bit further Arthur, you have to have national standards for these chemicals. Are you suggesting there that each State was testing its chemicals in its own little patch?

Yes. We continued to do that even though there was an umbrella built over the top by the federal authorities.

But you'd be testing the same chemical? I can understand a particular chemical having a different reaction say in the tropics versus the Northern Territory desert, the dry dusty conditions. Were you actually testing the same chemical?

In very many cases we were because of the different soil types, different day lengths and particularly different soil types. But also different weed patterns made it necessary that in most cases we had to try and verify their efficacy in South Australia.

There was a logic to the overlap?

Yes.

Not to imply you were doing things illogically!

Indeed no. So I was a representative on the Technical Committee on Agricultural Chemicals, which was a sub-committee of the Australia Standing Committee on Agriculture. The Standing Committee was the meeting of all the heads of the Agriculture Departments in Australia. Then it went to Agricultural Council, which was a meeting of all the Ministers.

[20:20] Just a fine matter of detail: the Standing Committee and the Council, were they recent creations in your time? I know there had been interstate conferences of Ministers going back to the turn of the 20th century but that's the first time I've heard of it as a national council, an Australian council?

I do not know really, but those meetings were being held twice a year I'm sure at the beginning of the 1960s and they probably went back to immediately after the war.

They certainly went back. I was just wondering whether you would have called them the Australian Council in the 1960s or would it just have been 'the Interstate Conference of Ministers' or something?

No. It was certainly called the Standing Committee on Agriculture and it was certainly called the Agricultural Council. Because in my position as leader of the Weeds Unit, I very frequently

had to prepare briefing papers for our Director to go to these meetings. Incidentally, too, this was a wonderful way of operating and dealing with agricultural problems across Australia with all the different political bodies involved because the Directors of Agriculture met first, sorted things out and then the Council met behind closed doors. It didn't matter what their politics were really, they could deal with these subjects as the technical people presented them to them. I found that always a very, very good operation and it's still going today isn't it?

Were those concurrent sort of meetings, would you be meeting at the same ...

Yes. They certainly always met at the same place but the directors would meet first for three days or four days and then the Ministers would meet for one day or one-and-a-half days afterwards when all of the sorting had been done.

Presumably before then, there had been a bit of leg work done by officers in the Departments?

A lot of leg work. Every agenda item would have papers trying to brief our particular director what it meant to us in South Australia for that particular agenda item.

I was just thinking there that the meetings were being held so closely together, timeframe wise, that it's difficult for the Ministers probably to change regulations or decide on legislation.

A lot of work was done beforehand. There was always a very skilled secretariat and a permanent secretariat in Canberra that looked after these meetings. That was in the Primary Industries Department.

[23:30] We'll probably come back to the Ministers and the heads meetings at a later date, but perhaps we'd better go back to the technological committee you were on, the Technical Committee.

Yes. That was one of the first national committees that I was on. It was the Technical Committee on Agricultural Chemicals.

That's across the States and Northern Territory?

Yes. Then the Agricultural Council set up a sub-committee, which was called the Australian Weed Committee. I was on that committee for 11 years: I was chairperson of it for some time. We had the task of rationalising legislation across the States, dealing with plant quarantine issues, dealing with research to make sure that the research was not seriously overlapping, and dealing with extension and training. That committee gave me a very good appreciation of agriculture across Australia because we had our meetings in the other States and invariably we would find time to have a field excursion and it certainly was excellent in-service training for me, if nothing else.

Each State took a turn to host the meeting?

Yes, they did.

A fairly traditional sort of way ...

That's right, quite traditional.

Have you got the years for those committees Arthur, just to put on the tape?

Yes. I served on the Technical Committee on Agricultural Chemicals between 1966 and 1969 and on the Australian Weeds Committee from 1966 to 1977.

So they overlapped.

Yes.

Did the Department maintain a representative on the Technical, the first committee, when you only did 3 years there?

Yes. They did because the Department had to set up a unit to deal with agricultural chemicals in the broader sense, pesticides and herbicides and all of the other chemicals that were being used: fertilisers, for example, insecticides and fungicides and so on. They set up a special unit to deal with that.

The other technical committee that I was on during the time I was working on weed control and the weed sciences was the Skeleton Weed Research Committee which covered representatives from New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia. It was a weed of southern Australia. This was a very, very serious weed, which had prior to the war and certainly immediately after the war virtually stopped cereal growing in the southern and western areas of New South Wales. It had moved right across Victoria and in South Australia it was becoming a very serious problem [in the Murray Mallee]. A committee was set up to coordinate that research and that led to a great deal of thought being given to using biological control for weed control. Australia had had a wonderful experience with biological control for the weed and that Cactoblastis beetle that was used in Queensland to stop the spread of prickly pear, which in the early 1930s was infesting Queensland at the rate of an acre a minute.

Spread very quickly!

It did. After a great deal of work, which had started in the late 1890s ... They looked at some hundred possible agents to control this – all sorts of insects – along came the Cactoblastis beetle and it solved the problem. In a way that was so spectacular it was unfortunate because people who had weed problems (wherever) had the expectation that out of the air you could [introduce an insect] and the weed problem would disappear.

The immediate solution.

Yes. That was just not the case. But we did start to think very seriously about trying to find biological control agents for this very serious skeleton weed. CSIRO in Canberra set up a research centre at Montpellier in France because skeleton weed ... Its natural home was through the Mediterranean. I'm perhaps going off on a little tangent here, but I was sent to Montpellier in 1970 to look at the progress that was being made at this centre. Tony Wapshire was in charge. [His team] had found [a fungus,] a rust (of all things) that was growing actively on

skeleton weed. I was taught how to [infect the skeleton weed. The team at Montpellier] were wanting to move on to the biological control of Salvation Jane (Paterson's Curse it was called in New South Wales). I was able to help them find areas of that [weed] that they could work on in Spain and southern France. Eventually, the authorities approved the release of this rust to try and control skeleton weed in Australia. Our unit here in South Australia, we were given the spores and we set off to infect areas of skeleton weed across the State. Malcolm Catt was the Research Officer that I had appointed to do this work and we made the first releases mainly in the Murray Mallee in September of 1972. We wanted to assess whether it had become established in the following March. Malcolm got as far as the other side of Murray Bridge and got out of the car, walked around, saw some skeleton weed, looked at it and it was infected with this rust. He was miles and miles from the nearest release site and in no time the skeleton weed was infested with this [rust] which had the potential to control it throughout South Australia.

It had escaped a bit from your test area.

It just went because these spores were carried on the wind.

Were you aware that might happen?

We were aware that it might happen, but we certainly didn't think that it would [spread so quickly or widely]. We were dealing with a [very effective] biological situation.

[32:45] **End of Side A, Tape 3**

**Tape 3, Side B**

[0:05] It only attacked and really controlled one form of the skeleton weed. We didn't realise [at the time] but we had three forms across southern Australia, and they were subtly different. So the dramatic results that we hoped we would get did not eventuate. But, nevertheless, it was a very significant development for skeleton weed control.

So you knocked out part but didn't solve the whole problem.

That's right. It did certainly make it possible to grow profitable crops where it hadn't been possible before. Looking for biological control became quite an important part of our work.

Just to go back there Arthur. How had you selected the test area?

We had selected the test area based on density.

Your field officers were reporting in or farmers were reporting in on the problem?

We knew where the problems were; it wasn't hard to find.

You'd build up a profile?

That's right. The entomologists and the experts in Canberra had researched the details of this rust very, very carefully. They, if I remember, had suggested that we should release the spores

in areas of about a square metre at a certain density level of the skeleton weed where it was more likely to get a hold, but that proved not to be necessary.

Quite obviously you'd done the homework and had done the research and so on.

Yes, very well. This Australian Skeleton Weed Research Committee had made sure of that. The other weeds work ... Let me [talk now about] some of the regulatory aspects of our wheat control work.

Perhaps before we do that, just to clarify a couple of matters. You said earlier that you headed up the Weeds Section for 12 years until about 1970...

Yes.

... but this work now in the Murraylands and so on, you're talking about '72, '73 so you'd moved on in your own career but still involved with the Weeds Section?

I was. Yes. I became Chief Agronomist and the Weeds Research Section was under that. [I still] had a very intense interest in the work that was going on. I was relieved of the day-to-day management of that group.

[3:35] We'll come back to that as your role as Chief Agronomist then, but that explains why you were still involved – it wasn't clear before. Could you tell me a little bit more about your team? You said it built up to 17. What sort of people? You started out with yourself as the Senior Weeds Officer in '58 and we've got to get you through to 1978, obviously not year-by-year, but how was it shaped?

When I came into the position there was already one project officer (as we called them) and that was Max O'Neil. Max had had a wonderful record during the war as a [flight] navigator and had performed very bravely in Europe and then in the Pacific War. Max's health was not at all good but he was a great help, always ready to work when he could. He had his down times as you can well imagine.

The group started off as just two of us. We were able to get extension [grants], which were Commonwealth funds, and we were able to access research funds from the Wheat and Barley Research [Councils,] which were made available in this way (and still are), which obtained their funds from farmers' levies allocated from] every ton of grain they produced. The Federal government doubled it and then researchers throughout Australia were asked to apply for funding within certain guidelines. Some [weeds] were very much a problem to the cereal farmers, [so the Weeds Group gained access to] these funds. Two or three other research officers who were graduates [were employed with these funds].

They were people being employed temporarily, in the main?

In the main. They were temporarily employed for usually three or four years but then some of those positions became permanent within the Public Service. We also had a team of five or six extension officers who concentrated on helping farmers to introduce this new technology into their everyday farming operations. Then we had Weed Control Inspectors who were carrying

out the requirements of the [*Noxious Weeds Act 1956*], particularly in the pastoral areas where there was no local government. So perhaps [I should talk about] the regulatory [aspects of the Weed Science Group].

There's just a couple more things coming out of that. I hope I'm not getting into too fine a level of detail. The Extension Service Officers, you said 'We had them', were they actually working for the Weeds Section or did they still belong to the Extension and then ...?

No.

So you took them out of one branch into yours?

They came as specialists [not necessarily from another branch; some were new graduates].

I'm just getting an idea of how the group built up and so on. Also, you mentioned the extension services funding. You were saying you had the temporary officers coming in. Was there a lot of competition within the Department overall for CES funding? Was there some Departmental policy that there could only be a certain number of positions applied for, people applied for, or projects applied for or whatever?

As I remember, the extension services grants ... The various units within the Department were invited to make applications. These were sorted out by Lex Walker for a long time as I recall. He gave them priorities. Then the Commonwealth (and I don't know on what basis) allocated funds to the State and they were divvied up to the best projects.

It wasn't automatic – if you applied you got the funding?

No. [They were granted on merit.] Those extension services grants not only enabled the Department to employ staff but it enabled us to equip ourselves with projectors, photographic units and even vehicles at times to do the special jobs.

Was that purely federal funding or did the State have to meet a partial allocation?

I cannot remember, I'm sorry.

That's fine.

I was not involved directly.

Were you making application though for your ...

Yes.

It's handy to know because obviously, looking at the Public Service list, there's a huge number of temporary officers and so on and the lonely graduates – they're sitting there biding their time.

So far as I personally was concerned ... At the end of my time as leader of the Weed Science Unit when I was appointed to be, quite temporary really, the Principal Agronomist and then Chief Agronomist ... That often confused people because they used to think that Principal was the more senior position but for some reason our Department called the assistant [to the] Chief Agronomist the Principal Agronomist!

[10:45] You've only got one chief and a lot of Indians!

That's right! When I was appointed to that position, an extension services grant enabled me to have overseas training for 14 weeks. They didn't supply all the money by any means but a good proportion of that cost enabled me to get training and do some jobs for the Department while I was overseas.

Where did you go in that ...?

I went from here to South Africa because we [in South Australia] were concerned about a weed problem that was developing in the Adelaide Hills, which was called South African daisy. The Australian Weeds Committee was wondering if we could start to look at the biological control of soursob, an *Oxalis* species which was very, very common. So I went to the Grahamestown University and discussed the possibilities of us setting up a centre there, as we had done at Montpellier in France to search for biological control agents, but that never eventuated. I went from there to Switzerland where I worked with the staff in the laboratories of Ciba-Geigy [on selective herbicides in cereals]. Actually, at that time it was Ciba and it was Geigy. They joined just a little while afterwards. Then I did that job I've already mentioned in southern France. I did some extension training at Wageningen in The Netherlands. I went across to the United Kingdom where they were just starting to use chemicals to [prepare land for cropping]. They were replacing the mechanical energy needed for ploughing with chemical energy. I can tell you more of that story because a little part of that came out of our Weeds Science Group in Adelaide and that's why I was invited to look at the progress [with ICI staff who had developed] the chemicals in England. Then I went to Canada and studied the control of quite a number of perennial weeds there before I went down to Oregon State in America where I looked at weed control in cereals. A lot of good work was going on there. Finally, I represented Australia at the first International Weeds Science Conference, which was held at Davis University campus in California, which was very, very interesting.

You packed a fair bit into your trip!

Yes. It gave me a very good start for the next stage of my career.

We're going to come back over ...

Coming back now to the ...

... the regulatory. I didn't mean for you to hold your horses being the first Tuesday of November ...

Fair enough.

Thank you for those explanations. It helps fill out that picture so carry on.

[14:30] Coming back to the regulatory work. It quickly became clear to me that [for local government to fulfil its responsibilities under the *Weed Control Act, 1956* adequately and taking into account the rapid development of weed control technology so closely involved with herbicides that the weeds inspectors employed by local government needed to be trained.



Councils had had to rely on inspectors who were the dog catchers or the building or health inspectors.]

Weights and measures ...

Yes. Not trained at all. That was a situation that we just couldn't let go on because, as I've described, the technology of weed science was rapidly advancing. I set about with the help of what was then the Adult Education – was it a section of the Education Department? It wasn't a Department in it's own right at first. Mr Ninnes was the man I dealt with. I think it was just a [branch] of the Education Department.

That'd be right.

A [branch] – Adult Education. With their help, we set up a weed control training course. We developed a certificate course which lasted for 12 lectures and we did a little exam at the end. We tried to give them a practical, as a good, basis for their weed control inspection work. We taught them weed identification and we taught them about the herbicides and we taught them about agricultural rotations in relation to particular weeds and so forth. It proved to be a very, very interesting course. In fact, today, this very day, one of my old students came up to me in a Probus meeting and said, 'I remember those days. Do you remember what we did?' and so on. It did have an impact.

People attended voluntarily or they ...?

They were given a good encouragement by their local government authority, but also later on when the government was putting money in to help local government do this job, the grants were not paid unless the inspectors were qualified.

It became a requirement in due course.

It became a requirement, yes. In the history of those courses, [I taught some 300 people [who] graduated. It became popular with not only weeds inspectors but with other interested people in the community, particularly landscape gardeners, people who had the responsibilities of national parks and things.

What about the farmers? Did they come along?

Some farmers did come along, yes they did. We held the courses at what is now the Glenunga High School (I don't think it was called that in those days). We had access to their laboratories and lecture rooms. People came from Clare for the night for lectures and from Coonalpyn I remember. We took in quite a large range of people.

[19:35] Related to that, Arthur, it's not quite the inspector/regulatory role, but did you have to go through an education or an instruction campaign or campaigns with farmers?

Yes. We ran often weed control courses, but we had this wonderful system in South Australia of having access to the Agricultural Bureau. No doubt you've heard about the wonderful

system that was. The wonderful work that the Agricultural Bureau did. My staff [and] I would, during the course of the year, attend 150 meetings of the Bureaus. They were designed to help the farmers to start to use this new technology. The officers in the field would often have face-to-face work with farmers [to help them select the right herbicide for their particular weed problem and apply it at the right time or what to do if it rained too soon after an application.] That had to be sorted out.

[21:10] How tough was the Department in terms of regulation, enforcing these regulations? You were training up the inspectors. You were trying to get farmers on side to do the 'right thing'.

We tried to keep the regulatory work as practical as possible and as closely related to our extension work as possible. Really, the only time the big stick was used was in the situation – how do I put it? – the marginalised farmer who was not a part of the community in anyway and was a nuisance and was neglectful and was not a good farmer. On a very few occasions.

In that case it wouldn't be just the weeds, it would be a whole lot of other things: they wouldn't mend fences or something.

It was certainly not our policy to use the legislation to enforce particular weed control when it was not practical.

I think that's a point we'll come back to so I'll probably put you on notice about that one. Just the law enforcement role, it will come up later in your career I would think.

Yes, it does.

You're on notice for that. (Both laugh)

Oh good.

That regulatory role, the training through the education process and so on, that went on through your time with the section and as Chief Agronomist?

And, of course, the unit kept that going.

Kept that going. You continued to run it through the Education Department or the adult education stream?

Yes, it did. In fact, in the later stages, the adult education system – was it TAFE?

By the '70s you'd be getting into a TAFE situation.

They provided their own lecturers to do this course. That was good because they had the time to do it and the resources.

Did you have to support the lecturers, pay any of the salaries?

No, I don't think so.

So it was all done.

Yes. By then the students paid a fee. It wasn't very great, I don't think, but at least they'd have to pay a fee.

The TAFE explosion, to use that term, is talking mid '70s into the late '70s and so on.

Yes.

[23:55] As part of that regulatory role, were you devising regulations and implementing regulations? Were you finding out that something didn't work and you had to modify it?

Yes. Under the terms of the '56 Act it set up a Weeds Advisory Committee. I was secretary of that (I was executive secretary they call it today) during the time I was leader of the Weeds Science Unit. It was that committee's task to put weeds on the proclaimed list or take them off or shift them into different [categories]. That was a constant job that had to be done. It was not an easy job because, as you could imagine, often the pressure came from the community or the farmers or whoever to put weeds on the list that were 'showy'. They looked around and they were everywhere but their actual seriousness, their economic impact, was sometimes very small. Having the resources to establish whether they were really going to be serious weeds or whether they were really serious weeds was sometimes not easy.

Were there weeds (and I'm confessing my ignorance here) that could be harvested with the crop but have no impact? Were there weeds that were harmless in that sense that you didn't have to worry about them, let them grow?

Looking at it the other way around, rye grass is a serious weed of cereals but it was never a proclaimed weed because until quite recently it couldn't be taken out of the crop. When it was not in the crop it was a valuable pasture plant. So you get all these subtleties that make it quite difficult.

If something might be harvested, I can't think of any particular example, but if there was something that could be harvested that would have no great impact on the cereal product for human consumption or animal consumption?

Yes, that happened. Wild oats falls into that category. By and large you can remove the wild oat seed from the wheat seed – it's not a problem in the seed itself but it certainly competes before the crop is harvested. There are other difficulties. People tended to argue at great length about the control of boxthorn. Should they be left in a hedge? Was it alright to leave it in a hedge? If you left them in a hedge, birds fed on the seeds and distributed them anyway. But the hedges were quite valuable for wind protection. Did you have the hedges 4 ft wide or 6 ft wide? A whole Act of Parliament was formed on that sort of argument in the 1920s!

Weed control had its social implications as well as obviously its financial implications. That brings me to the next thing I should mention. During the latter part of my work in weed control, and really it didn't become an issue until I was chairperson of what became the Pest Plants [Commission], but it started in the 1960s. It was the ... [break] I was mentioning the social implications. There became a need to deal with plants that we called community pest plants. These were pest plants which were detrimental only to people's health. Poison ivy, for example. Very little of it in South Australia compared to what it's like in Canada, but it's a very

nasty plant and people can become very sick if they try and pull it out or work with it. We had to start dealing with weeds like that. [Also, weeds] which were a serious problem to our native vegetation and our national parks. Those problems have grown in significance over particularly the last decade, particularly because we are now conscious that we have got to be very protective of our native vegetation. That was another angle that we had to deal with in the Weeds Science Unit.

You're still involved in the native vegetation area I believe.

I am.

We'll come back on to that point as well! (Both laugh)

I'm trying to deal with three cases at the moment, which worry me because in the times that I've been talking about now, we were able to keep bureaucracy to a minimum. Although we had the regulations, they were always used after lots of discussion and care and thought. Now authorities tend to be rushing in and 'bang' – 'This is the regulation' and whatever.

And there are a lot more regulations too.

There are too many regulations. My work [as a conciliator under the *Native Vegetation Management Act*] is being made very difficult because I'm not used to it.

Arthur, just briefly: you mentioned the Weed Advisory Committee and you were executive secretary. Who else would have served on that with you?

The farmers. Wonderful men, and they were men I'm afraid in those days, who gave their time and experience. People who had served in local government. And there were people from other government agencies as the time went by.

You were the only one from the Agriculture Department, basically?

No. I was the executive secretary. The chairperson was my boss who was formerly an executive at the Department, to begin with anyway.

That helps fill in the picture a bit better. We've probably done enough today on the weeds area and we'll pick up some other things on the next session.

Let's do that.

[31:40] **End of Side B, Tape 3**  
**Tape 4, Side A**

**AN INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY BERNARD O'NEIL WITH ARTHUR TIDEMAN OF BEAUMONT, SOUTH AUSTRALIA ON THE 20TH OF NOVEMBER 2003, CONTINUING THE INTERVIEW OF THE 4TH OF NOVEMBER 2003 IN REGARDS TO THE HISTORY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA.**

[0:30] Arthur, thanks for joining in again. We'll pick up on one of the themes that we've talked about in our preparation work and that's the theme of your involvement with overseas activities for the Department. Perhaps we'll follow that through with your early overseas travel and so on.

Thank you, Bernie. Yes, 1970 saw me appointed as the Chief Agronomist. That was not without a little bit of trauma. The position was contested and it went before the tribunal, which in those days sorted out any problems about appointments.

Someone within the Department also had a claim for the position?

There were two others in the Department, yes. Fortunately for me it was sorted out in my favour. I was appointed to the position and then there were these appeals. I was able to hold my position, mainly because I had a proven record as a manager, more so than a higher degree of technical expertise. The Department had grown to such a size that one's ability as a manager came before one's special technical abilities. However, I had had by then a very good range of experiences with my weeds work because it had taken me right across the State and, indeed, into agricultural scenes across Australia. I was able to hold my position.

That suggests, Arthur, that there had been a transition from professional officers being higher up the rung and that a manager-type person could come in and supervise.

We touched on this before in that it had gone through the phase of the Department relying on diplomats who had had a very practical training. It switched into people who had an Agricultural Science degree who were professional in that way. Then there began to be a greater need for people with management ability, backed with technical knowledge of course. But there had been that transition and I came along at that point.

You were saying then, the previous time, that that was a slightly earlier development, but here you're pinning it down to more 1970s, late '60s.

Yes. The move to input by scientific trained people with an Agricultural Science degree, that started mid 1950s and by 1970 it was well in position.

There's also the Public Service culture too of seniority and how long you had been there.

Yes. That was becoming less ... It used to be very much so that your length of service was very important. By the 1970s that was phasing out too. People were judged on their experience and their ability and their professional training.

[4:25] I stepped into the position of Chief Agronomist at a time when the agricultural scene in South Australia was starting to change quite dramatically. Agricultural production in South Australia had very largely depended upon sheep and wheat. Sheep and wool and wheat and some horticultural products but that was where the emphasis was. As we came into the 1970s, diversification became the general theme of our agriculture. We were looking in all directions to fulfil new markets that were arising. We started to try and provide research and extension services to support new industries like oil seeds [canola] and green legumes and even, a little later, odd crops like jojoba and guayule (the rubber crop). All these were looked at. [To deal with the development of these new crops required new skills in the Agronomy Branch]. We needed cereal breeders [and plant pathologists]. We needed people who could improve, for

example, the pea crops and introduce suitable broad bean cultivars and even maize. We needed those sort of people. We needed entomologists.

So you were taking those sort of people on?

Yes.

Was there also an element of retraining existing staff?

Largely, we were able to find people who were well trained in these areas because they'd been coming through very good courses at the university. Also, because outside funds were becoming available which we could lock into. Extension services funds but also industry were providing funds for research and development. The wheat industry. The wool industry. It was from those funds that enabled me to build up within the Agronomy Branch, these vital new units which certainly expanded my job and my interests. They proved as time went by to be absolutely crucial and of great benefit to South Australian agriculture.

I did mention the Plant Pathology and the Entomology Units. We had quite an interesting cereal breeding and development program, not so much in the wheat crop because there were wheat breeding units at Roseworthy College and at the Waite Institute. So we took up a great deal of interest in barley and oats and we had breeders for that. Also, we developed a very detailed field trial program assessing new varieties of wheat and barley and oats. The cereal variety trials became a very big part of our work. They were carried out on farmers' properties and on our research centres, but mainly on our farmers' properties throughout the cereal belt. We had to develop special mobile machinery to be able to put our plots in and to harvest them and to statistically analyse them. It was a new field and quite an exciting one.

[9:10] That reminds me that virtually in league with that, we developed a crop estimates program so that we could report to government, particularly, and to the industries in South Australia our estimates of what the wheat crop was going to be, what the barley crop was going to be and what the oat crop was going to be in the season that we were in. That proved to be very well received because those people who were trying to plan how to best shift our wheat from one place to another and into silos and into ships, they needed to have some estimate of what was going on. People who were providing herbicides and fertilisers, they also needed to know how big the crop was going to be, how it was going and what was likely to happen next year. We became very much involved in that and we had a very good record of producing estimates that were pretty close to what really occurred. We were able to do that because we had such a good team of district agronomists, agricultural advisers as they were called in those days, district agronomists. They had their ears very close to the ground. When it came time to do the estimates of the areas to be seeded, they could ring 10 or 15 people in their districts and they could get a composite picture very, very accurately indeed.

That sort of estimation work, you were saying that's a new development. It hadn't been done before or it had been a lower level?

It had been done in less detail by the previous agronomists and Chief Agronomists. They'd say, 'This year the season is very good and it is likely we are going to have 40% more than last year', but it was never done in the detail that we were able to do it.

I'm just wondering also, Arthur, about the Department keeping statistical records in other areas of course, other herds, livestock and so on?

Yes.

So there is a bit of a culture of statistical work being done, but that seems to be after the event isn't it really? Production records of the amounts produced or the number of stock or ...

That's right. This was looking ahead. We were very proud of that work. It used to get a lot of press coverage because of the interest in it.

[12:20] Another unit that was developed in this time was our pasture-breeding group particularly our medic breeding and selection team. We had started to gather medic cultivars from around the world, early in the 1950s. One of our staff in particular, Eric Crawford, had the opportunity of making collections in the Mediterranean. This collection gradually improved and increased until we were able to claim the medic cultivar repository for the whole of Australia so that any people who were interested in breeding medics could look into this seed collection and use the material. That became of all importance. We were able to send seeds to all sorts of breeders and people interested around the world. It is still today a very important asset.

Do you know the origin of that terminology, the medics? (M-e-d-i-c) It was peculiar to a field of agriculture?

It comes from the genre of plants, *Medicago*. This was just a shortening of that term. It's a specific type of legume that grows well in alkaline soils. We were interested in it because we wanted to grow these medics in between our cereal crops to put nitrogen into the soil and to keep the soil well covered and to provide good feed for sheep, particularly, in the years between the crops. We needed to have particular cultivars for particular environments in South Australia, which varied quite a lot from the far West Coast to the Murray Mallee and the fringes of the Adelaide Hills and places like that.

We also did do some work with other pasture species and grasses and at various research centres. That was very important too.

Thanks for the explanation. It's good to have it on the record.

I don't think I've mentioned before but the herbage seed industry became very important in the 1970s because it provided an export market for pasture seeds and later for vegetable seeds. It is still a very important industry, particularly in our South East. We were able to produce seed

under very stringent conditions so that we knew exactly its genetic label and we knew exactly how clean it was, that there wasn't any foreign material or foreign seeds in it. We were able to export these seeds throughout the world and still do. It became also very important when the lucerne aphids, a pest of the lucernes, hit Australia. It just destroyed our lucerne crops throughout South Australia and we had to start from scratch and build up cultivars which were resistant to these aphids. We were in a very good position to do that, particularly because we had on the staff Ted Higgs who had made a study of this virtually all of his working career. He worked it out that one day we were going to get these aphids. He had seen how bad they were in other parts of the world and he was well prepared for the time when they started to wipe out our lucerne crops. We were able to set about finding cultivars that would resist them. Ted with some help from myself (more in the management area), we were able to set up an Australian-wide program to make sure that we could recover from the devastation of these aphids as quickly as possible. South Australia was looked upon Australia-wide to do this job although it was done in the other departments as well, but we largely directed and guided that work and Ted Higgs did a wonderful job.

Can you put a time frame on that, Arthur, when you were doing that work?

When were we doing that work? The pasture aphids work was in the early '80s.

We'll come back to it. I wasn't too sure if you were talking retrospectively there or looking ahead, so that's fine.

I'm talking as we roll along.

[18:35] Sure.

That was the agricultural scene that I moved into. Within the Department we were able to handle this in many ways through our extension programs. Each week I was able to give a brief talk on the ABC rural session and that [helped keep farmers] up to date. It often put me under a fair bit of pressure to get out an interesting talk once a week, but I'm sure it was well received. I got a lot out of it, it disciplined me in my ...

A regular radio spot?

It was a regular radio spot, yes.

How long were you talking for?

Oh, three minutes.

But you had to prepare for a succinct talk?

Yes. It was very largely read. I still have a collection of many of the talks that were given, which are quite interesting.

They're the sort of things that wouldn't make it into Departmental files probably!

No it didn't, I don't think.



[20:00] One thing that I was disappointed about was that during this period, I think it was 1974, the journal of the South Australian Department of Agriculture ceased. That played a very important role in our work and we lost that to a certain extent. By then there were other means of extending our knowledge, but to me it was a loss because it was such a well-disciplined way of us getting our extension information out to the public.

What was the role of the journal? What had been the role of the journal? To publish new research and cutting edge technology?

Yes. [Break.]

Arthur, I see you've got the last issue of that *Journal of Agriculture*, so perhaps if we could just spend a few moments talking about this.

Yes. Sorry I thought the last issue was in 1974 but it was not, it was 1976.

Well, the publication date is 1976! (Both laugh)

That's right. That issue alone was dealing with salinity and that's a big issue now 30 years later. It covered diseases of cereals, it covered the legume research program, leafing through it, the grey spot of lupins. We had introduced lupins as a new crop in South Australia. A lot of wonderful breeding of that crop had been done in Western Australia and we were able to introduce the crop here. There were diseases and problems with it. I notice also there's a good article on the cereal diseases and also the cereal eel worm. It was a very valuable publication.

The issue you have there is – although its gone to be A4-size – a much thinner volume than the 1897 first issue and the issues subsequently. It's almost a glossy type presentation there.

Yes. The journal started off really as a publication of the Agricultural Bureau and it used to report all the Bureau meetings and what had happened at the Bureau meetings. That had gone far past that side of it.

In your time, in your earlier period with the Department and then when you recommenced, was the journal more of the type here, the '76 issue?

Yes, it was. All the technical officers were required, periodically, to produce articles and that made wonderful records of the work that was being done.

You had an editorial/publication section?

Yes, we did.

Part of the extension service was it?

Yes, it was.

[23:30] We might move into other areas of my work as Chief Agronomist. The Department, with some external funding, very generously sent me overseas in the middle of 1970 for overseas study. I visited South Africa. I visited France and Switzerland and Holland where they had excellent agricultural extension programs. I went to the United Kingdom and Canada and

America. I was able to do a few specific jobs that I was requested to do. For example, we were wondering whether it would be possible to look for biological control of soursob. I approached the Grahamstown University in South Africa to see whether we could set up a program ... They couldn't do that, it was not suitable. And also to look at African daisy which was spreading very rapidly in South Australia and to try and see if we could work out its true biology. Then in France the CSIRO [had established] a research group to look at the biological control of various weeds and other [problems] that would help Australian agriculture. I was trained there for a couple of weeks on skeleton weed research, which I think I've already mentioned. Then I looked at the agricultural chemical industry in Switzerland and the safety measures and the registration issues that were being developed for herbicides and pesticides. In England I looked at minimum tillage, that is putting their crops in without a great deal of mechanical work and without a great deal of ploughing but using pre-emergent chemicals and so forth to get the crop in. Finally, down through Canada [to look at] their agricultural extension work and I represented Australia at the first Weeds Science Conference in Davis, California. So that started my overseas connections and very valuable it was too, because I made contacts that I could refer back to in the extension fields and the research fields, it was very valuable indeed.

Four years later I was invited by the Minister of Agriculture, Tom Casey, to accompany him as his Technical Advisor while he tried to interest Asian interests in our agriculture. Everything from orange marketing to the selling of our breeding cattle and our extension services training of people. We went to Indonesia and through Korea. We called in at Hong Kong and we went across to Canada and America. Again, I was able to get a great deal of interesting marketing experience, what overseas markets were looking for in our agriculture. Beef and wool were also covered. That was another extension to my work as the Chief Agronomist.

Were you away for a lengthy time?

We were away for seven weeks with the Minister. [Privately I took] long service leave I had due while my family had a year in England. We thought it was good for the children to have education overseas and my wife and I organised that. While they were living in England, I took long service leave and went across, but I did have an opportunity to do some work, particularly with minimum tillage that was developing at that time.

When I came back in 1976, there started to be a great deal of interest within the government here and within our Department to try and sell our dryland farming expertise into the Mediterranean area in particular. In 1973–74 we had already been able to set up a very good project in Libya. I had a peripheral interest in that. My boss at the time, Peter Barrow, had the management of that area at this end. We had managers appointed on site. I inherited this work and expanded it so that I suddenly found myself jetting around the world! It was a young man's

job I can tell you. It went something like this. In 1977, by then I had established this Overseas Projects Unit in the Department of Agriculture, I was managing it, and for a period of two months I travelled to Iraq, Jordan and Libya and there I serviced the Libyan Project but I also started to negotiate projects in Iraq and in Jordan. The Jordan Project didn't really get off the ground until late 1980 and the Iraqi Project didn't start until 1980. There was a fair build up and I was involved in the negotiations with the various government agencies in those countries.

In 1979 I negotiated the Ksar Chellala Project which was 300 km south of Algiers in Algeria. That was more developing pastoral-type work, in effect their pastoral areas. I continued that work through to 1980 when largely at my suggestion the government developed SALGER as it was called which was a government company to deal with this work that we were doing. We needed to be able to operate it more as a company because we were getting large funds from these governments and also to a lesser extent from the World Bank. We needed to be able to handle those funds, going in and out of government funding agencies was slow. We needed to be able to hire and fire people quite quickly for short-time jobs, for specialist jobs to fulfil these contracts. It was decided that ...

**[32:50] End of Side A, Tape 4**  
**Tape 4, Side B**

[0:04] ... stop there because I had first hand information on the lead up to all of these contracts so I kept closely in touch. Indeed, in 1984–85 I managed the project in Iraq which was north of Erbil and covered 5000 ha of country, which we developed as we would farm our country here in our cereal belt. A large part of that contract was to train [Iraqi and Kurdish agronomists]. We ran the property, as much as we could, just as our farmers ran it here. Indeed, farmers came over and did many of the farming operations. I managed the last year of that project and wound it up and wrote all the final reports.

In that situation, the Iraqi government or whoever would contract ...  
Directly with our government.

They would pay for the services of the staff?

That's right. They paid us as we fulfilled each section of the contract. It was a business operation. A lot of people have the idea that these dryland farming projects which we undertook were aid projects, but they weren't. They were commercial projects and we were paid if we performed. That was very good from our point of view. It disciplined our inputs because we had to perform. The countries involved were pleased to work that way because they had control of the projects and they were not receiving charity. It was very good for them. That largely fulfilled my overseas project duties.

A couple of little things, they might even become big things, to ask you about. That explanation about it being done as a contract rather than as an aid thing. I can see that quite clearly people were expecting this dryland work to be an aid-type function. It's interesting that South Australia has got the expertise and has promoted itself having the expertise and winning the contracts. Were there other States, the other Australian States, or other countries competing to do this work?

Yes, yes. The Americans were certainly competing. But let's come closer to home – the Western Australians were competing. We were in the field a little earlier than they were. But they certainly did some very good project work in Iraq and in Jordan. We led the field in that area. We also had competition from the Americans and some European countries. It came down to this: we had had experience in a dry climate whereby we would never, for example, plough a field before the crop was sown to 8 or 9 inches deep as they do in Europe. They have very good reasons for doing that (or in America). We ploughed to 3 or 4 inches and made sure there was a good firm seedbed for the seed to be dropped on. Then any moisture that did come (usually; our rainfall isn't sure, of course), the seed could germinate and the weed seeds were not all mixed up with the crop as it grew. That was largely the problems that had been in northern Iraq. They had used European techniques of seeding their crops which were pretty inefficient. Aspects like this enabled us to perform very well. The Iraqi authorities that I intimately know of, they recognised this very quickly. So did the Libyans. Consequently, they were very happy to have us in the field.

Is it a case of once you've got your foot in the door that the other contract situations opened up?

Yes. Indeed, when I was negotiating the Iraqi contract, I was able to persuade the Iraqi people to go to Libya and have a look at what we were doing there. They came away quite impressed. This work interestingly at home had its repercussions because first in Libya, then later in Iraq and particularly in Jordan too, our agronomists and our soils officers were employed in these projects. The farming community here were concerned that they were losing out on their expertise: there weren't enough district agronomists to go around to be doing this sort of thing. There was some backlash from that, but we largely overcame it because the district agronomists, for example, who went to these projects, they were paid by those projects. It left their salaries open to have people put in to their positions back here. Possibly they were not quite as skilled people, they didn't have the experience but nevertheless we got by.

You did take people on on a temporary basis then?

Yes, to fill those positions. That whole exercise enabled South Australia to increase its exports. I should emphasise that with these projects, they were done hand-in-hand with industry in South Australia. There were those who were selling seeds. There were those in the Seed Co-op. There were people who were (like Shearers) manufacturing machinery and they had got large sales of machinery because of this work. There were people who were experts at putting up fences with all of our fencing materials and they got a leg-in in these countries. We worked

hand-in-hand with industry, which was good for us departmental people and, of course, it was good for the projects. There was that spin-off.

You mentioned, Arthur, you were involved in setting up the Overseas Unit and running it and also the establishment of Sagric and its predecessor. A couple of issues with both of those I suppose. The latter one: was there any talk of you going off to head up Sagric or to be involved in it? The notion of governments running a corporation or whatever at that time was fairly well understood.

Yes. I was invited to continue, but by then I'd had 3½ years or more [as Director of Overseas Projects. I did go back with my wife during 1984–85.] I felt that it was very much a young man's job, I wasn't terribly old by then. (Laughs) But I felt that I had put my best into those projects and it was time to move on. The first manager [of Sagric International was] Bob Hogarth, a highly trained person who had [graduated from] Duntroon. He was very skilful at getting himself around the world and managing people and projects like this. I was happy to step aside. I did enjoy it so much that I've written a book about it as you know, called *The Medic Trials [Fields]*.

[10:25] I moved back quite happily after I'd finished the project in Iraq into my substantive job in the Department which had expanded by then because I became leader of the Plant Industries [Division]. The Department by then had been divided into the animal side and the plant side. I was then heading up the Plant Industries within the Department. My job was expanded to [manage] horticulture, [soil conservation, and pest plant and animal control].

[11:10] Arthur, that explains your own situation regarding Sagric, but were there other people in the Department who had worked on these projects who decided to cut across to what was going to be a private company?

They certainly did. As Sagric International got other projects, and I'm thinking now of Jordan in particular, staff from the Department of Agriculture took up work with the company. That was usually for one or two or three years and then they came back into the Department. But there [were] others and the one notable person that I well remember was Bob Asser who was a clerical officer in the Department of Agriculture. He joined Sagric International and he made a wonderful contribution. Certainly, he helped me in my job as Director of the Ain Kawah Project in Iraq, he helped me greatly. He was a Jack-of-all-trades, not just a clerical officer. He was invaluable to Sagric International.

[12:25] Just looking at the outcome of these projects, in a sense we're getting to the end of the story, but how did they turn out? Have they been long lasting?

The Libyan Project, let's start there, certainly had a profound effect, an important effect, of enabling farmers to settle down to profitable agriculture over quite a large area of Libya. However, I must say that that influence faded away when the Libyan director of these projects died of cancer, Bashir Jodah. I think he died when he was only 43, but he was an amazing man. Gradually the emphasis in Libya [then] drifted into irrigated agriculture because they found

enormous underground supplies of water down under the desert and they piped [it] up so the importance of the dryland farming faded away.

In Algeria the projects certainly helped establish new dimensions for their pastoral industries and the revegetation of their pastoral lands and their extension methods of teaching and helping their farmers.

The Jordan soil conservation programs have certainly been effective in that they have had a big effect on starting to ease the degradation of soils that was badly occurring in those lands.

The Iraqi project which I have intimate details of, we left that project with 250 (approximate) ha set up as a mini farm of what we'd been doing. It was then to be serviced by the people we had trained in running a cereal/medic pasture rotation, integrated with their sheep production and capable of maintaining itself. The terrible events of their history overtook that project and the Iraq-Iran war, which started in 1980 and was still going when our project finished, became more intense in the north and that put strains on the project. Then there was the Gulf War. After that war the Kurdish people in that area rose up against the Iraqi regime. That regime [removed], I believe, much of the remaining equipment that was there: it was taken away. Quite frankly, I now do not think that there is much ongoing benefit from our project, because of the terrible events of their history. However, we did plant a lot of medic and maybe that is still regenerating itself and still having its influences. We did leave behind a lot of agricultural expertise and hopefully the men involved, if they survived the war, they still have that knowledge. The potential was there.

Interestingly, Sagric International is going back.

I believe they are now, yes there is a big project interestingly. Sagric International over the intervening years has expanded selling South Australian expertise in all sorts of other fields, engineering fields and particularly the education fields in Indonesia. They had a very big input to adult education, equivalent of TAFE, in large areas of Indonesia and in the Philippines. They've also been able to sell our Torrens land title systems into Thailand and other countries like that. They have maintained a very profitable business for 25 years now.

That's a story in itself.

It is. A wonderful story.

It underlies the point that you can't go in in isolation. If you want to set up a dryland farming project, you are talking about education, you are talking about equipment and talking about a whole lot of things that need to be done.

Yes. That was one of our strengths in that we, as a Department, had always had close contact with the agricultural machinery industries, the fertilising industries, the soil industries, the seed

industries. We were able to lock into them and they were very keen to come along because they got some good sales out of it.

[18:45] That was one of the other questions to ask you, Arthur: while you're taking knowledge into these countries, what were the benefits coming back for South Australia in terms of the officers going over or the companies being involved? Obviously the companies were getting some deals, but how does the Department in particular benefit?

Many of the officers that I knew, their lives were broadened tremendously. They lived in foreign countries. They saw the world through eyes they had never seen before. I suppose to put it bluntly they matured. They became much more aware of the issues of the world. Their children did too. I can remember staff in Libya had their children in international schools in Rome. The staff in Iraq – there were no children there because of the war conditions and we were constantly under guard – but those members of the staff went out every now and again for recreation leave. They were able to visit countries like Cyprus and Spain. It certainly broadened their education, and mine too – my world experience changed dramatically.

Travel is always like that in broadening the mind.

Yes it is.

Were there any particular benefits in terms of the farming knowledge acquired? You're taking knowledge over obviously to those countries but learning about their farming perhaps: has any of that knowledge been able to come back to South Australia? You always have the negatives, how not to do something!

Let's look at the wider scene. I've been talking about projects in Algeria and Jordan and Libya and Iraq, but we also worked in Spain and in France and Italy. Out of those countries we obtained their expertise with particular plant species that we had not had access to here like the subclovers and the medics that I've been talking about. That was one thing that did flow back here. I can't think of too many others. For example, all of our farming machinery is so superior to the European machinery which fell to bits [in the Mediterranean countries] because they were working with soils that were not friable and deep [as in Europe]. Our soils are 6 inches deep and have plenty of rock in them so we had to design machinery entirely different. Not much came back out of that!

[22:10] Of course, you were in a contract situation as well where you were supplying the expertise so you don't sort of expect to bring benefits back. I was just thinking there might have been something there, they acquired a technique or an idea that led to a new technique in South Australia.

It tested us all at the time.

It kept you on your toes, that's a good thing.

Yes. If I can dwell a little more on the Iraqi project that I was so familiar with. That part of the world that we were working in was the first part of the world where wheat was cultivated. Two natural grasses cross-pollinated and out of that came the very productive wheat plant and people 8000 years ago in that area realised that they could cultivate this plant. At the same time

sheep were domesticated in that area but they never put the two together. There were the nomads with their sheep and they wandered over the areas that [had been] planted for cereals and they were different tribes, different people with different skills and expertise. Our system required those two to come together and that was the secret of our system because of the [return of nutrients], the fact that if you lost your crop you still have an income from your wool and all those aspects. Our project (and the Iraqi government wanted it that way) was to set up this farm just as we would here, so we put in fences [to control grazing]. But after about 18 months all the fences had gone. I remember the first manager, [Glyn Webber], coming back to have a look at the site. By that time I was there. Glyn said to one of the opposite number, 'You know we put in 150 km of fence. Where are they?'. They said, 'Mr Glyn, they've gone to the mountains. They're growing tomatoes up in the mountains'. They'd pinched them all! We had to alter things. Those nomadic people were going to cross that country with their sheep and no fences were going to stop them. (Both laughing.)

You had to develop some fence-free farming!

That's right.

[24:45] In regards to the establishment of the unit and throughout its life, did you pick people from within the Department to work with you in that unit; people just being transferred to a small sort of unit?

Yes, it was a very small team. Mainly, I needed people who could do the paper work, make sure that the contract money was flowing and that the staff that were going over there had done all the proper paper work to make sure when they came back their jobs were still there. Travel documents were suddenly quite a big issue and the government had a contact with our Tourist Bureau that used to do all the planning for travel. That had to be taken out of our hands because we had so much of it. From a technical point of view, I could lock in to all the technical people around me and although they weren't specifically in that unit, they were a great help.

So the unit was really administrative?

More administrative, yes.

I presume then there wouldn't have been a great deal of friction with other areas of the Department, with people thinking 'They're just jumping on the gravy train' or whatever?

No. Once the Libyan project had been established and was recognised so well around the world, FAO people ... came to see our dryland farming. We were recognised and were well accepted. Then the overseas project work was integrated into the Department, in my view quite happily.

[26:40] Therefore one assumes you were getting a fair degree of support from the political level, from the Minister, and from your upper administration?

Yes, we did. It really culminated when we ran the first International Dryland Farming Congress here in Adelaide. We invited people from all around the world and that was very effective.



In about 1980?

1980 I think it was, 1980. So Bernie, we've got through that decade of history.

[27:20] In a sense. We focused very much on the overseas but I mean you've also referred to your comments about substantive positions and so on. Were you doing other duties in the Department at the same time? Obviously not while you were based overseas, but when you were heading up the Overseas Unit?

Not so much in the early 1970s. In the early 1970s I was still carrying on some of my weeds expertise. I was still lecturing once a week in what became TAFE. I was also on the National Weeds Science Committee. I was also on the Australian Plant Production Committee. I had those Australian roles. Then when I came back to my substantive position, I took on much more senior jobs. I represented South Australia on the Wheat Industry Research Council and the Barley Industry Research Council. I became the Presiding Officer of the Animal and Plant Control Commission and the Presiding Officer of the Soil Conservation Advisory Committee. They were four pretty big jobs that I took on. Then there were other tasks that I picked up along the way. Even things like I was a member of the National Coordinating Committee on Aquatic Weeds from 1981 to '84 and I was chairperson of the Herbage Plant Liaison Committee from 1975 to 1980. That committee decided what new cultivars could be marketed. The breeders had to establish that this new cultivar of subterranean clover or whatever had a role and that it could be distinguished and it was worthwhile putting into the market. There were also many hours spent on whether we should introduce plant variety rights, which eventually came in. I personally didn't think it was a good idea and I still have some doubts. We were locked in: if we wanted to sell our seed overseas, we had to [join] the plant variety rights schemes around the world. We did a lot of work on that.

I was involved in the legislation of agricultural chemicals. There came a time when we just had to be sure about, for example, when a new herbicide came on the market, that it was fit for use in South Australia and that the instructions were clear and the safety measures were clearly stated and that its efficacy was reasonable for South Australia. We had to set up a registration system which became national for these agricultural chemicals and pesticides.

So you were working on national committees and State-based committees and so on?

Yes. I was also an executive to the Department so there were Executive meetings that would happen week by week with all sorts of implications. For example, to begin with in the late 1970s, the move to Monarto was a big issue within the Department. Then there were appointments, safety issues and the budget. We always had to work out our budgets and make sure that we weren't going outside our budgets.

The bread and butter.

The bread and butter things had to go on all the time.

So how did you juggle all of these hats?

Looking back I wonder really! We worked hard. I had a wonderful team around me always. Other members of the Executive like Peter Trumble (who you've been talking to) and Peter Barrow and the Directors (Jim McColl and so forth). They were wonderful. We got along as a great team by and large.

Perhaps that's a theme we could pick up on next time – some of the relations with colleagues and so on.

Alright.

Also even a bit of a look at your daily ...

[32:20] **End of Side B, Tape 4**  
**Tape 5, Side A**

**AN INTERVIEW WITH ARTHUR TIDEMAN OF BEAUMONT, SOUTH AUSTRALIA  
CONDUCTED BY BERNARD O'NEIL ON THE 27TH OF NOVEMBER 2003,  
CONTINUING THE INTERVIEW OF THE 20TH OF NOVEMBER 2003 ON THE PROJECT  
FOR THE HISTORY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE IN SOUTH  
AUSTRALIA.**

[0:30] Arthur, perhaps today we can look at some of the little nuts and bolts sorts of issues with the Department. I thought we might start with one of your extracts from your journals about your working day. We talked about the notion of just recording a couple of examples of your daily routine and you've selected one for us.

Yes. Incidentally, I kept pretty detailed day-by-day journals of events, mainly so I could quickly look back if somebody wanted to know what happened or when or if I was challenged because so much work covered my desk that at times it flowed very fast and before I could absorb it carefully, it had gone on.

These were just an *aide de memoir*?

Yes.

How detailed were they – verbatim?

No, unless I thought it was very important. I might start with and talk about an extract that I have here in my journal, that I wrote on Tuesday the 6th of June 1976. By then I was quite well established as Chief Agronomist and my office was in the so-called 'Black Stump' in Grenfell Street. It was luxurious compared with where I had started in my career in the Simpson's Building! It was air conditioned and one of the things I did like about it was that it had a magnificent view out over the north of the city and the west of the city and I could watch it grow. Indeed, later on in the 1980s, I can remember counting 11 cranes operating from my office. That was the heady 1980 days of great expansion across the city.

The boom and so on; the signs of construction.

Yes, however ...

Those opportunities for window gazing were more thinking time on your job weren't they?!

Indeed. (Both laugh) I liked to get to the office, whenever I could, at about 8 o'clock. Good reasons for that were I could get my car in easily, no hassles on the road and I usually had three-quarters of an hour or an hour before things got very, very busy. It enabled me to look down through my 'in' basket, prioritise the work, and think about what I really needed to do for the day. Then at least by 9 o'clock the secretary came in: Marie Caskey was there for a long time, a very skilled typist, who could take shorthand. I was fortunate in that I was able to give dictation quite clearly and could get the points down correctly and lucidly. That made my work quite efficient and feasible: it would not have been if I had not done that. Now I sit in the office (as I'm doing a couple of days a week) and I look at quite senior people trying to get through their work and putting it on a screen, which I don't think I would have done very efficiently or very quickly because my secretaries were so efficient. So, at about 9 o'clock we would sit down and go through the 'in' basket and try and deal with everything as it came up. I hated putting things in a 'pending' basket because I would lose enthusiasm about them.

You had to deal with it more or less straight away?

If I could deal with them straight away I felt so much more confident about it.

The people coming in at 9 o'clock, they were the staff on a 9-to-5 roster system, worked daily from 9 to 5 basically with a lunch break, whereas at your level you were ...?

Yes, indeed. I came and went but I was not on any flexitime or any overtime payment, but that didn't matter.

So you rarely worked less than 40 hours a week?

Very rarely. I very, very rarely would've worked less than 40 hours a week.

That's what I'd expect.

And rightly so. I had been given a position of responsibility and to do it properly required that amount of input. Looking around today, most professional people are doing the same sort of thing.

[6:10] On this particular day, I note that firstly I dealt with the Standing Committee on Agriculture's agenda items, particularly those relating to the Plant Production Committee. The Standing Committee on Agriculture comprised the chief executive officers of all the departments in Australia and New Guinea and very much later it was New Zealand as well. As these agenda items came up they were carefully vetted by Viv Lohmeyer. He would send them to my area (the plant industry work) and we would need to prepare a paper which thoroughly briefed the chief executive officer on a particular subject. On this particular case, it was dealing with legume inoculants. We were very anxious that there be a proper source of these inoculants in Australia because the seed, before it was sown, needed to be inoculated and having these

quite sophisticated inoculants available for farmers to use was a very important issue. That happened to be one of the issues of this day.

The other one I note here was the establishment of the Plague Locust Commission. We had, as a Department, [faced] the plagues of locusts on our own without coordination or help from the other States. Largely, of course, when there was a plague imminent, I had enough contacts interstate to be able to ring people and say 'What's going on in New South Wales?' because that's where our plagues started from, the northeastern pastoral areas and their northern-western pastoral areas. There came a time when it was thought that these operations could be done much more effectively if there was a commission that controlled the operations across Australia and one was eventually set up. We were asked what we thought about it, how it should be set up, how effective it would be and who would pay. On this particular day I was preparing comments about that.

So you might prepare comments for the committee on a couple of agenda items at a time as they'd come in?

Yes.

There was no set pattern to them arriving, basically it just had to be dealt with?

Sometimes as it got closer to the committee meetings it became more and more hectic because, if I remember, there were at least 50 agenda items on these meetings. They had to be precise and put forward very clearly.

[9:50] I notice here that I was asked for comment about John Radcliffe's attendance at the Australian Staff [Administration] College. I suppose I had been asked to comment because I had attended that college in 1975. The Australian Staff Administration College [was situated] at Mt Eliza in Victoria. It was a very elite course and I had gained a lot from it. It was a wonderful thing that our State government was prepared to send staff there for training because it wasn't cheap. If I remember, back in those days for my 3-months attendance at that course it was \$6000 and that was a lot of money. We lived in and I've never worked so hard in all my life. Every night I was preparing things at 1 and 2 o'clock in the morning and they really put us under a lot of stress, a lot of pressure. It was very, very well done indeed.

Were you learning management ideas and management practices there?

Yes. I attended the Advanced Course no. 52 and I note that we studied 20 subjects involving our enterprises and its people, the environment of our Department and management information. Incidentally, that was the first time I faced a computer. They had computers which were connected in to a huge room in Melbourne where the operations occurred and we were taught the basics of trying to use a computer. All I remember now is that whenever we made a

mistake came the word 'What?'. (Both laugh.) There was no nice menu telling you what to do next, it just said 'What?!'

At least you had gone beyond the punch card stage!

Yes, it was one up on that. We were most impressed with all this. We had sessions on constructive information and supporting studies I noticed. We had to work in groups (it was always in groups to study). We'd have a lecture or two and then we'd go away and have an assignment to do in a group and you were either a secretary for the group or a leader. You changed around as the course went on and you had a deadline to get your reports in to the whole [college] and you had to present it in front of the [college].

The 'students', the people attending Arthur, were they all at a similar sort of level from various State Public Services?

Yes they were, my word. Private industry was very well represented and so was the trade union movement, it was well represented. There was a great mixture of people and they went out of their way to find lecturers who were very, very good indeed. For example, we had Professor Milton Friedman, the famous American economist that you may remember Bernie. He was most impressive. It was people of that calibre who presented the lectures. I gained a lot from that and if I may boast a little, we were not given exams at the end but we were assessed all the way through. The person who got the best assessments was asked to give the final speech on behalf of the students at the final dinner. I was asked to do that and I've never been so frightened in my life! (Both laugh.) I didn't eat well at that dinner because I knew [I would be asked to speak].

It's an honour but it's experience at the same time!

That's right. I was very, very fortunate to do that. I was not the only one. Radcliffe went after me. Lex Walker had been. There were a couple of others from our Department who may have gone.

I'll follow that through. The Department was selecting someone to go or you had to volunteer?

No. You were selected and asked to go. Of course, you didn't turn it down. It wasn't easy so far as the family was concerned because you were away.

You were based there for the three months?

Yes, you lived in.

It's interesting that the Department saw a need to send at least one staff member per year for a few years.

Yes. For three or four or five years that happened.

Other government departments would have been nominating people?

Yes, they were. It was to the credit of the Public Service Board that this was initiated.

[16:10] In your schedule you were referring to John Radcliffe going, so you were involved in that?

I was asked to comment. I note that coming down the list of the issues of that day, Tuesday the 6th of June 1976, I was involved in the qualifications necessary for vermin inspectors that were employed in the Lands Department at that time. It was not until three or four years later that the vermin activities came in to the Department of Agriculture. But the Lands Department were on this occasion calling for comments as to what I felt would be the necessary qualifications for such inspectors, I suppose partly because I'd had a deal of experience in determining the qualifications necessary for the weeds inspectors. So that was an item on the list of that day.

[17:35] The certification of seeds used in agriculture was an issue throughout the time I was Chief Agronomist and it still is. The need for farmers to have access to seeds of known genetic standard and also seeds which were free of weed seeds and other contaminants. On this day I was asked to start to develop plans for the certification of oat seed. That's interesting that it was not until 1976 that that was brought about whereas I'm sure wheat and barley had received seed certification for that probably 20 years before.

[18:40] Then I had to decide whether Andrew Michelmore, a District Agronomist at that time, should be freed (if that's the word), should be released to go and work in Libya. That was an issue that needed careful discussion because, as I mentioned before, there was some resentment by the farmers in the State that the best of our district agricultural advisors were going off to Libya and the information that our farmers were seeking from the district agronomists was becoming hard to find, or so they said. It was not as bad as I'm sure they made out. We had to carefully consider who would replace an officer like this: how long he might be there and so forth and then give our recommendation as to whether he should go or not.

[20:00] Having gone through the documentations of these issues on this morning, and given my comments by dictation, to my secretary, Marie Caskey, that would have been about 10 o'clock I suppose. The delightful tea lady would come around and bang on the door and generally caused some confusion because she was such a lovely lady and she knew everything and everybody.

You'd have a bit of a chat to pick up the gossip or something?

That's right. She always knew all the gossip, but she was a very concerned lady and it was lovely to welcome her. I'd have a quick cup of tea.

[20:50] Then I note here that I spent some time writing two ABC comments. Each week, as Chief Agronomist, I was invited to give a 3-minute talk on the rural session on Fridays on the ABC. I did that for a long period and I enjoyed it. On this occasion the topics were mesquite, which we were at that time very concerned about. It is a very thorny legume which grows to 20 feet high and forms very dense thickets. It is a Central American plant and it was the reason

why the American cowboys developed the leather chaps down the sides of their legs so that it pushed the mesquite aside if they ever rode through it. We had found some infestations of this in the northwest of the State, largely by accident. Then, to our concern, we found that the Flying Doctor based at Broken Hill, who thought that this would be a great idea to spread this legume around the pastoral countries, had spread the seed from his aeroplane. We were finding that quite dense thickets were developing down some of the creek lines. We started a campaign to try and get control of it. We put officers out in to the field to search for it and to draw it to the attention of the graziers, the pastoralists up there. On this day I had a 3-minute talk about that. The other topic was monitoring [the productivity of] South Australian agriculture. We were trying to refine more and more our crop estimates for the State so I was bringing to their attention how we went about that – bringing to the attention of the listeners of the ABC how we went about that. I probably would have spent at least an hour drafting that out, drafting those talks out, and then Marie Caskey would type them up and they became a permanent record and still those records are available.

I know you've got a set of the transcripts and so on, a set of the talks.

Yes. At that time Jon Lamb was the rural broadcaster. He now is quite an authority on gardening and he's heard every Saturday morning.

These talks, Arthur, as a rule were you preparing them yourself from your own knowledge and your expectations of what the farmers needed to know?

Yes, entirely. These talks were entirely my thoughts of what was needed at the time. They were always done by me. Nobody wrote them for me. I didn't have a ghostwriter!

Did you find at any times they had to be sanctioned by the Department or vetted?

No.

So you had the authority to ...?

Yes. But I kept away from political issues. That was not my role. At times I was able to talk about new policy directions and so forth but they had always been settled before I went to air. This was a very, very useful part of my duties. Even today 35 years later, farmers come up to me or people come up to me and say, 'I remember you, I remember your name – when you were Chief Agronomist you used to give that talk on the radio'. I was surprised at the interest that those talks created and the integrity of the Chief Agronomist. People liked to have a title to look to, if I can put it that way. At that time there was the Chief Horticulturalist and the Chief Veterinary Officer. The farming community and a lot of the urban people were able to latch on to those specific positions in the Department and it was important to them. Some of that has gone because there is not the coherent authority of a group of people in the Department of Agriculture. I was only speaking for them but it ...

They don't have the same identity now.  
Identity is the word, yes.

The talks. I asked whether you were preparing them. Did you call on officers in the Department to give assistance at times, to give you information or to suggest topics or anything of that type?

If I remember, usually (I think always) I was able to select the topics out of the week's work or the branch meetings (we had executive meetings later): there was always a topic that I could pull out of that. But when it came to – particularly this one that I've just mentioned, monitoring South Australian agriculture – I certainly did need to call upon those who were doing the bookwork to ensure that we got the figures right. I got wonderful support from the staff always. They were dedicated, well-trained people and never did we really suffer from any conspiracies or any unpleasantness. Generally, they were always marvellous people to work with.

The subject matter: did you get into areas of the livestock and the veterinary side of things?  
No, it was always the plant industry.

Was someone presenting information on that basis for those industries?

Not regularly I don't think. They had comments and sessions: the ABC brought them out if there was a particular animal issue or an animal problem or a disease, they would bring in the specialists and make up a session. When I first worked in the Department, the ABC had field officers. When I was at Jamestown, John Butterworth used to come from Port Pirie, by taxi, to our office at Jamestown and he would collect a number of sessions in specific areas and we would have these ready. I didn't do very much of it then, my boss did, Peter Barrow. He would always have a session ready. I did a few. He would gather half-a-dozen and drive back to Pirie and that would go to air over the next week or so.

Would they have been recorded segments?

They were recorded. Yes, he recorded them. He would come back in a fortnight's time, but it always impressed me that he came across by taxi! (Both laugh)

He was a roving reporter!

Yes, in an organisation that had more money then we did.

It's an interesting focus on rural activities: obviously in the outer areas you'd expect that transmitting to farmers and pastoralists and so on. Do you remember what time the program was on?

It would have been midday, I think it was.

Lunchtime?

Yes, it was lunchtime.

Lunchtime for farmers.

Yes, lunchtime for farmers.



They actually got to hear you!

Yes. If I remember, it was always 12–1; it wasn't 1–2 like perhaps would be the lunch hour for people in the city. It was usually an earlier lunch hour.

This is on the radio: it would have been 5CL or something like that at that stage?

5CL from Port Pirie, yes. This one was on ...

It would be 5AN now.

5AN now, yes.

OK. You had to spend a little bit of time preparing for it?

Yes, indeed. I never went without a transcript in front of me.

You went to the studio to broadcast live?

No. It was taped and then put on the air as needed.

Valuable experience for you having to not only prepare it but to present it.

And to keep my thinking up to date so that it was relevant and that it was in the time limit.

For practical senses, elocution and knowledge of language and pitching your talk at the right level and so on, that's excellent training.

Yes, it was. In the Department we had had what we called extension training and that was a part of it – giving talks to farmers, presenting details, research results or whatever. The radio was a part of that training. Overall, I am now very impressed about the in-service training that we were given in the Department of Agriculture, I think it was excellent.

The radio training, for example, was that given to everybody that went on these courses or were they given lessons?

Yes, I think so. We also had orientation courses, which [at the time we have been discussing,] June 1976, I would have been [invited] in to the conference room to talk specifically about our operations in the plant industry side of the Department.

**[32:55] End of Side A, Tape 5**

**Tape 5, Side B**

[0:05] As people joined the Department they had to attend (they were usually for a week) live in at Roseworthy College or somewhere like that. The senior people and professional researchers and so forth would all be expected to help train the newcomers and give them an idea of what the Department had to do and what was expected of them.

It's interesting that it was a week-long session, not a 2 or 3-hour induction on a CD as you get now.

No, and they were given exercise to do too during the course.

[0:55] Just going back to the radio presentation aspect. At this time, and previously, were members of staff able to talk freely in radio or even TV situations? Did you have to get permission to be

interviewed? Obviously your talk situation is a little bit different, but I'm just thinking in the course of your work.

I cannot remember ever being myself restricted, but we all knew and it was, I suppose, written down somewhere, but I can't just remember, but we knew that politics was to one side and that we were there to give our professional advice and to help develop any policy issues that might arise. For example, we found that noogoora burr was coming in on sheep from New South Wales. This was quite a serious problem in the wool. It was the Department's and the government's policy that we should intervene with this trade that was coming from New South Wales down into South Australia. So we developed a system whereby the sheep were inspected and they were dealt with if they had a lot of burr on them. They were quarantined and cleaned up before they moved all around the State and spread the seed. When it came to issues like that, I knew that I could talk on radio about that program and how it was going, how many sheep had been inspected and where they were coming from. At first this had some political implications because of the New South Wales authorities feeling that we were cutting off their trade. But I was never restricted in talking about those issues. I don't think the staff were ever really a problem for the government should I say in that they went over the boundaries into politics.

Did you see restrictions come in later, I'm thinking of the post-'76, were you were able to talk freely?

For me, no. I do recall that on one occasion that Minister Chatterton believed that one of my officers who was working in the seed industry had overstepped the mark. There was an unpleasant scene about that. I'm sure he hadn't and I can well recall that the chief executive officer, Jim McColl at that time, stood up for Kevin Boyce and myself very strongly. Eventually the issue went away, but that's the only unpleasant thing I can ever remember.

[4:50] Because the period you're referring to is when you started to get into that situation of press secretaries and ministerial advisors were slowly just starting to emerge. Then you get this clamp down on what a Department, or Departmental officers, can do or say.

Indeed. That's right. I didn't have very much of that at all. It became quite evident just before I retired or in the '80s that that was a real issue. I believe today that it is quite a problem as to where the boundaries of the ministerial minders finish, the professional people start in the government agencies and where the politician finishes! I'm glad I'm not in that situation.

It's a fine line now and even beyond that it's also very restricted as to what a member of the staff can say if approached for interview or comment. So you have to tread very carefully. That's the recent experience.

Yes. Our life in the Department was less complex shall I say.

[6:00] Perhaps we should return to what was happening in life on the 6th of June! You prepared your talk, all this before lunch too!

Yes.

I jest about lunch but obviously as well as doing this work you've got your daily activities, you've got staff coming in wanting to talk, you've got the phone going etc.

That was going all the time. I had, of course as everybody really did, to keep the doors open. As I became more senior, particularly in the 1980s, there were times when somebody had to get past the secretary to get in to me. I could say, 'Look, I'm sorry. I've just got to get this out of the way. I don't want to see anybody for the time being'. But it was a pretty open exercise.

Your secretary was also working for other people in your area?

Yes.

So if they needed typing done or they were dictating letters or whatever ...

She would do typing for my assistant and perhaps one or two other senior people, but I had first call. When there was an overload there was still the typing pool in the 1970s where excess typing went in to a pool, but Marie Caskey would control that. She would send it off and when it came back she would look through it to see whether it was up to her standard anyway, which was a very high standard before it came on.

So that was a typing room; as a pool of typists so you wouldn't necessarily take someone out of there to come and be an extra assistant in your area?

Occasionally that happened. If Marie went on leave there would be somebody there.

She'd have a replacement. That's similar to other departments having a typing pool: it's a little centralised room of typists.

I admired those women who could stick to it. It was always the women, the girls, who did it. To be typing away at 60 words a minute all day and not being able to correct it on a screen, having to stop and rub it out and go through all the copies, the pinks, the blues and behind the copying paper, what was it called?

The tissue paper and the carbon paper?

Carbon paper I'm inclined to think it was.

You had tissue paper and sheets of carbon in between and the pinks, the blues, the whites and so on. That leads to things like the filing system. I've talked to Trevor about some of that, Trevor Roberts.

[9:10] In the afternoon of that day I was contacted by a Dr Stewart at the Flinders University to talk about giving lectures to his classes. He was in charge of a dietician's course at the Flinders University. He was the senior lecturer for that. I note here that this was my first contact with him and for the next five years once a year I gave a lecture on food production, cereal production particularly, in South Australia. That was very interesting to me because I was lecturing to university students and it made me realise how, because most of these students had come from urban homes, [they] had no idea about wheat production or what crops we really produced in South Australia. I would ask them, 'What field crops are produced in South Australia?'. They might know wheat, but they would not think of oats or barley or grape seed

or any of the pulse crops or anything like that. I would have a 2-hour lecture with slides and demonstrations and questions on the basics of agriculture. I enjoyed that. That was a good thing that the Department could do.

You were relating things like wheat and oats to breakfast cereal and bread and the phase in between?

Yes. Then, of course, Dr Stewart in his lectures would pick up on the nutritional value and the calories and the science of the food. I was very much dealing with the practical production of it.

So it's a bit of a PR role for the Department and for the industry indeed?

[11:40] Indeed it was. To end that day, I note that I prepared a memo to all the district agronomists asking them for their estimates. That was an exercise I had introduced when I became Chief Agronomist. Up until my term our operations were small enough and not so very complex in that the Chief Agronomist could sit down and he would say, 'This amount of money will be spent by our district agronomists during the next year'. I involved the district agronomists in their own estimates because, for one reason, there would be issues that they felt they had to deal with. There might be the beginnings of a plague locust outbreak and they would use that as an excuse to quickly use up their budget. So I tried very hard to get them to put a priority on their travelling expenses and so forth, so that we could work more efficiently. Everybody I tried ... all the people in the Department to have their own small budgets. At our branch meetings, certainly after six months, we sat down and had a look at the estimates, the budgets to see how they were going and reallocated money if needs be. That was a contentious issue at times because some would say, 'Look we've been very careful about our money and now you're taking it away from us to give to somebody else'. As lively as the debates were, it created a great deal of proper care of the resources that we did have and an understanding of one another's resources, which was important.

There's a little bit of internal politics there in the gamesmanship that goes on! Was this part of the regionalisation idea, in that they were having a bit more authority at the local level?

Yes, of course. At about this time or a little bit later, the South East region became regionalised as a policy matter for the Department. It was a government policy to become more regionalised. Then some of our budget was taken away and given to the South East region. That was not an easy transition, we had to rework our priorities and rework how we worked.

We touched on regionalisation in the previous session. It's just interesting to see signs of it there in your daily routine.

Yes.

That more or less round out the day?

That rounded out the day.

You'd finish at what sort of time on a 'usual' day?

A usual day, at this period when the family was fairly young, I used to try and be home by 6 o'clock anyway. I always had car transport, not government car transport but my own car. I did have government parking areas and that was very, very helpful so I only had to walk across to Wakefield Street and I could be home in 20 minutes, which was very, very helpful.

[16:05] If you used your car on government business were you reimbursed?

I was. I can't remember when that gradually faded out.

But there would have been Departmental vehicles ...

Available, yes but not to take home, that came much later. Interestingly, I had a bit of a campaign about government cars, I believed that the government cars in our Department should be clearly marked 'Department of Agriculture'. I thought it was a good advertisement if we had on the side of the car 'Department of Agriculture'. I tried to get that agreed to by the Executive of the Department. Surprisingly I didn't have a very easy ride about that because the issue was that some landowners didn't want their neighbours to know that they were in the hands of advisers from the Department of Agriculture or regulatory officers like weed control inspectors and so forth. It did come in for a while. We had these magnetic plaques that went on the side of the cars but I note now that that is not the case in the [agencies which have replaced the] Department of Agriculture.

There's a lot of what they call privately plated cars now and so on.

Yes, which surprises me a bit.

Even myself, I can quite clearly visualise blue, white, green and brown symbols or the squares of the Agriculture logo or the roundel for the Lands Department and other government departments that had their name on a vehicle.

Some officers were quite happy about that, but others were not. It never became a rigid rule I don't think.

[18:20] Just looking at that day, Arthur, in one sense it doesn't seem so typical in that you haven't been referring to things like meetings and discussions. Did you record in your journal ...

In my journals I recorded all of the meetings. I certainly didn't ...

A meeting free day, that day!

Yes. That was a meeting free day and perhaps a bit unusual in that way. But I did not record all the telephone calls, for example, which some people I'm sure did.

But if you had a contentious phone call?

Yes then I would certainly record what I had said and what I'd done.

Just considering things like meetings, we could obviously pick another day at random and it would have another flavour to it but you've got staff meetings with your own area, chief meetings, executive meetings? So you might spend some time attending meetings?

Yes, certainly.

A meeting, you could write off a half-hour or an hour easily enough.

Yes, very easily. As I went further in my career, from this time on it became more and more meetings I'm afraid, which I suppose is inevitable.

It goes with the job.

It goes with the job.

[19:55] The other interesting thing just in observing about that day is that you were pretty well office bound?

Yes. Now that was not the case all the time by any means because I had responsibilities out at Northfield but I also had responsibilities out in the country. I liked to see and be with my field staff like the district agronomists at least twice a year. So I would set off and try and have 3 or 4 days out in the field working with them and hearing what their problems were.

[20:50] I don't know that I have mentioned another part of my work which I found very satisfying and that was the industry funds. I think I did mention that.

We have touched on it.

We have touched on it?

But go on.

I found that I was appointed to be the State's representative on the Wheat Industry Research Council and later on the Barley Industry Research Council. I mentioned that farmers levied themselves on every tonne of wheat they produced and the Federal government [doubled those levies] ... and then that money was put up so that it could be used for research and the development of that industry. One point I'd like to make is that I found that it was essential to read what this council was really looking for and convey that very carefully to my staff. After every meeting I had a long briefing session with them, saying this project was supported by council for these reasons and this one wasn't – and why wasn't it, this was the reason. Then I made sure that all of our submissions to the council came through me finally, before they went on so that firstly I could sell them in the council meeting. I was very encouraged to find that, for a number of years (I think 3 years), our Department won more industry funds than any other organisation except the big New South Wales Department and the CSIRO, those two – we came third. Western Australia, Victoria and even the universities, we were getting more money than those. It was mainly because of the hard work of my senior staff who responded to this challenge to get grant money. As a result, as one example, we started off in the early '70s with only one or two officers who were specialising in plant pathology. We finished up with a team of specialists and their field assistants and it was all done on industry funds through a very keen team leader, Alan Dubé. That was a very satisfying part of my work. Also satisfying to me

personally because all of these projects were reviewed, so I went from university to university, [to the government departments across the States,] from project to project in the field throughout Australia. I got to know the standards of different universities' work and the standards of different departments' work. Ours was very high, nationally, at that time.

It's obviously satisfying for you that you were securing/winning the research funding, the grants and so on. The bottom line of that is, you've got to have projects, particularly applied projects, that are going to return some benefit to the industry.

That my peers in the other States recognised as being useful and worth funding.

Were there any particular projects that stick in your mind where you had a good outcome? Personally or departmentally you felt that this was a major breakthrough?

I have mentioned the plant pathology work. That was particularly useful. The diseases of the cereals were a very big problem. They needed a lot of research and we were able to do that research.

Were you doing that on an ongoing basis then, looking at particular ...?

Yes. Usually the funds only ran for 3 years then they were very carefully reviewed. But if the project was bringing results and going along fine, then it would be allowed to continue [for another two or three years before it was reviewed again]. To determine that, one council member would choose two specialists in that field from wherever around Australia and take them to these projects and ask them to assess them in the field and in the laboratories. Then that one council officer would write up a report which went back to the council and at a council meeting that report would be considered and it might say, 'Look for these reasons we don't think that funding should continue in this project' and it would be stopped. There were some difficult issues when some treasured university projects got cut, particularly one or two at the Waite Institute when they felt that they had been harshly treated by other than academics.

Well everyone's got their own special project like that. It's very tricky.

Very much, yes.

Were the projects, the sorts of things the Department was working on, were they very broad based or were you looking at very specific ...?

No, they were usually fairly specific.

Very specific, OK.

Like issues in relation to organic matter levels in the soils, issues in relation to finding particular medic cultivars for particular regions in Australia. Those were fairly specific issues.

But you'd also then take that and extract that to a broader scenario?

Yes.

[27:05] We've covered, in one sense, 'a day' whether it be typical, unusual or atypical it gives us a little bit of an insight into what you might do or what you were doing and how a day might go. I'm

particularly interested in the fact that you had the tea lady. (Both laugh) She's a good source of gossip and news. She came around at morning teatime, afternoon tea?

Yes.

So there was someone cleaning and bringing cups of tea or coffee or whatever and taking dishes away and cleaning up and so on?

Yes. When it came to lunch time, by this time we were in the city in this big building and I always tried to get out for 20 minutes at least or so, and walk around the block and walk through a shop or something to readjust myself.

Go and pay a bill or something.

Go and pay a bill, yes!, (both laugh) because there wasn't any plastic money in those days. Yes, that was so.

I was going to ask you about the tea lady. She'd bring cups of tea around to people but did you have any sort of get together with the staff, spend 5 or 10 minutes at a morning tea?

Yes indeed. We'd wander into one another's office. Especially when I was on the Executive floor, I would do that and they would do that reasonably often: 'What do you think about this issue?', 'Do you know anything about this?'. We did work together pretty well.

[28:35] Just from your point of view, Arthur, this 6th of June 1976: where would that stand in terms of your career? We were looking for something just to describe your routine. Is this before you really get inundated with too many things to do?

Yes. This was more measured and I had more time to work reflectively than I did certainly in the years before I retired, things were sweeping around and one had to be very sharp to keep your head above water at all. No, I was at that time more measured and more thoughtful.

[29:20] Other things are going to happen in the next decade or so which we are going to have to come back to I guess and have another session. [Break] Arthur, just talking about your daily routine: perhaps we should look at a little bit of information on working conditions and the working environment. You've mentioned hours of work 9 to 5 for ordinary staff and you were there for as much time as necessary. Things like wages and the benefits – I'll use that term – superannuation, pension, sickness benefit.

The salaries in the Department of Agriculture were never very high. I don't think that ever worried me a great deal. We had, as a family, sufficient. I remember only a little while ago that I was able to tell my children, who are now reaching 40 years of age and well into their own careers, that when I was made Chief Agronomist I was on \$5200 odd a year. They couldn't cope with that! (Laughs)

Inflation's a wonderful thing!

Yes. But we did have a good superannuation scheme. We did have a great sense of loyalty and career building in our agency, in our Department of Agriculture, and that made up for it. At times I used to look at my friends who perhaps were into other professions, architects and people like that and they were having their holiday houses and boats and things which were



never available to me but I had a great working life and it didn't seem to worry me very much at all.

You'd had that experience earlier in the '50s working for a private company. Did any opportunities come up or any desire resurface later on?

No, they did not. I got very much immersed into my career ...

**[31:47] End of Side B, Tape 5  
Tape 6, Side A**

[0:17] Arthur, just talking there about your daily routine and just starting to get into some of the aspects of, shall we say, the working life. I know we've got to cover 30 years, things are going to change over time but I thought perhaps we could just follow some things through generally, general topics and just get some comments from you on things. We were talking there on the other tape about wages and the sorts of benefits of the job. One of the big benefits, of course, the public servant had until recently was job security, the notion of security. In terms of a lower wage than you might have got in a private sector or whatever, at least you had a job.

Indeed. That was very, very valuable. Under that system, there was a lot of plusses because out of it came a deep sense of loyalty that you wanted to make the whole system work whatever. A lot of people in the wider community say, 'Those lazy public servants. They always have a job and therefore they didn't have to perform'. I didn't find it like that at all.

Every organisation has a certain percentage of people who are probably ill-suited to the job or the career and I guess a government department's no different, and the public might only see some of those people.

Yes. My experience was as you say. We had some of those people but over time they were found a job that was either more suitable to them or we bypassed the tasks that they were not competent at, they were taken up by other people (usually quite happily because they were very often interesting tasks). So that issue never really got in my way.

Did you find at any time you were having to create a job for someone in that sort of situation?

Yes. I can remember that happening. But perhaps more interesting to the point, it was possible for me as Chief Agronomist to influence the appointment of a person to this degree. In my street there was a delightful woman who had lost her husband and she was destitute. We needed an assistant in the Weeds Section to do a lot of the what you might call mundane work of taking the weeds that had come in for identification and looking at and setting them up for the botanists and so forth. Madge did this wonderfully well. I was able to get her a position and she worked for years and gradually became a very valuable servant of the State. Her job wasn't advertised with all sorts of other people competing for it. It was on my recommendation and I've never regretted that.

You had some scope to do that.

We had some scope to do that and it worked well.

It's not a misplaced term in this context, but that sort of social welfare role for a department, it's manifested in other ways, particularly post-war when you have the returned servicemen with ... have got health problems.

We had the rare occasion of a marriage breakdown, a children's sickness and there was always a great deal of interest shown by the staff in other staff matters. I may have mentioned that even when a staff member had the opportunity to go overseas either on a special assignment or for study leave, we'd go down to the airport to see them off and somebody would be there to meet them with the family.

[5:00] We had other examples. When I was working in Adelaide, about once every 6 or 8 weeks we took the opportunity of gathering a few around us, maybe 10 or 15, hopping in the cars in the lunch hour and going to a gallery exhibition. That built a lot of interest.

A bit of socialising and developing a group or family sort of approach.

That's right. It was very good.

That's something you were doing just within your own group of people?

No, across the Department.

Across the Department, OK.

I remember Lex Walker had a lot to do with that: he encouraged it pretty much, it was good.

Did the Department have a social club or a sporting club or an interest group where people could ...

Yes. We had a social club. Eventually, for some period I was president of that: the Department always looked for a senior member of staff to be president of it. It functioned mainly for Christmas: a big Christmas party and that was a big event, a great event. It also functioned for the welfare of staff: we passed the news around if anybody was ill or perhaps even needed help. It was low key but again it was an element of the Department: it was very satisfying.

Did the club have things like a social get together or a barbecue or something in a national park or anything of that kind?

Occasionally. I also remember earlier in the time we used to play tennis at night. We had little tennis teams that were very effective.

Was that part of the social club network?

Yes, it was.

But did the Department have sports events or sports teams as such?

No, not that I recall.

Some organisations might have a professional versus lay staff cricket match or something.

I cannot remember those, but they used to play cricket out at Northfield at lunchtime and things like that. The other research centres, they would always do that.

You mentioned the Christmas party Arthur: did you get the Minister and the Director coming along to those?

Yes, always. They were well supported by the Minister and the senior staff. The Minister would always make a speech and so would the Director. That was great.

Where did you have those get-togethers?

Yes I can remember. A good number of them were held in the RSL Club opposite the Tram Barn in what street's that?

That's Angas Street?

Angas Street.

The RSL Headquarters as it was.

Yes. There was a big hall there and it was held there for many years.

And people would come in from ... or mainly city based?

It was mainly city based, but if they could they came in from the country for that exercise.

It's good that the Minister turned up!

Indeed. Yes the Minister always did.

Do you know much about the history of the social club, did it go back a ... Do you remember it say in the '50s?

I'm sure it was there in the '60s so it had had a 30-year history. If I remember, it too had something to do with the canteen that we had in the old Simpson's Building. I don't know if you have any information on the canteen?

[9:35] It's on my little list here of things to ask you so perhaps ...

Well, this was a marvellous idea. It was on the second floor. It served hot meals, always fish on Fridays, and for a very small sum of money we had excellent serves. It was not just sandwiches and buns. You could get those, of course, but there was always a hot dish that you could get.

So they prepared a daily meal?

Yes they did. I believe the government gave the Department that space: we didn't have to pay for that. They might have given them the staff, the two ladies who ran it. All the food had to pay for itself, of course.

The two ladies doing the cooking and so on, were they ...?

They might have been on the payroll.

Of the Department?

Of the Department.

OK, right. The canteen would have operated for morning tea and lunchtime; afternoon tea perhaps?

Yes. It was open until 3 o'clock or something like that, 4 o'clock.

Was it a smallish or biggish place, its size?

I would say that regularly at lunchtime, at the peak of the lunchtime, there would be 30 people in there, so it was reasonably big.

If you had your own lunch you might take it in and join?

Yes, you could of course. But that largely disappeared when we went into the more up-market accommodation in Grenfell Street. There was a small eating room there but it was nothing like the old canteen was.

Of course, in the new building more modern facilities, your own little kitchen perhaps?

Yes. They did have facilities for getting your morning tea and things on the floors.

I wasn't aware of the canteen really. No-one's talked about that so it's handy to have a ...

One of the things I remember about the canteen too was that it had a fly-wire door which made an awful noise when anybody went in or out and my office wasn't that far away! (Both laugh)

I don't know whether the noise or the smell of the food would be the distraction though!

I told you about the working conditions in the Simpson's Building in that the lighting was so poor, did I tell you that? I got the Electricity Trust to review the standard of the lighting. A terrible report came back. I gave it to the Executive and they didn't appreciate that: it should have gone through the Works Department!

I gather it was a bit of a hothouse with no air-conditioning.

It was terrible, absolutely terrible.

How did you get on on a normal day even like today when it was 31° outside, how did you get on working in that building?

I was never terribly stressed, but the typing pool and the typists were allowed to go home if it got over 100, they all went home.

If it was over 100 Fahrenheit, they went ...

They went home.

Someone had to bring a thermometer!

I suppose they heard about it and they just all ... I don't blame them it was awful. There were other awful things about that building too. Safety was not taken into account. Lighting was very poor. In the basement we had to store a lot of our field equipment, such things as pegs and tapes and fertilisers and small equipment for distributing herbicides and so forth.

Shovels and spades?

Yes. Storing some herbicides and so forth. To get access to these to go out into the field was an awful problem because we had to come down a side lane between the buildings. Of course, we needed to stop our vehicle and load. This lane gave access to other buildings down the back and people used to get terribly irate because there would be a vehicle blocking their way. There

were some quite heated episodes about that, which even involved the Director at the time with all the complaints coming in! We had no alternative: if you gave way to the vehicle behind you, you had to go right around the block and start again. That was an awful business really, very inefficient.

Traffic might have been less, but it still added to the inconvenience?

Yes, it was much less. It went through to the premises of the PMG where they trained staff. That was in the other portion of the old Simpson's Building: that portion faced Pirie Street and there they trained PMG and that was one of the issues.

Your comment about storing equipment and so on down in the basement: did the Department have a workshop?

Not there they didn't. We relied on some of our research centres. For example we had access to the Blackwood Research Centre, where there were basic facilities for putting things together. Also at Parafield. A bit further afield there was Turretfield. We had to rely on those places.

There wasn't a departmental depot, as such, in the way that the E&WS or Mines ...

No. Because, of course, we were not involved in big construction exercises like the E&WS was putting down all these pipes and things like that. We were not in that.

[16:20] I was wondering if there was any attempt to perhaps share some of the depot's space with one of those other departments or was that ...?

We did have some space where the Government Garage was, off Pirie Street down little Moger Lane. That was another awful business to get in and out and park the government car and pick up a government car. There was also a little area in there where we were able to store some of our boom spray equipment and we had a special Landrover set up as a logarithmic sprayer. It could put chemicals and herbicides on plots in a logarithmic fashion which enabled us to assess their efficacy quite well. That was stored in the Government Garage in Moger Lane.

You said before there was a car park in Wakefield Street.

Yes. That was later on when we had access to park there. Certainly some of us did privately. The government cars were parked there as well. Then it all changed when they set up the car park in Gawler Place, the south end of Gawler Place: became very efficient and very different.

Centralised.

Centralised and all of that.

[18:00] That work environment there, you're talking about herbicides and chemicals and so on for spraying that you've got in the basement.

It was probably awfully dangerous some of them.

Were attempts made to change that? When did safety considerations come into real importance?

I can remember when there were none. For example, during the plague locust campaign of 1954, dieldrin was used very widely from 44-gallon drums carried on open trailers and pumped into aeroplanes with very little protective material at all. That was the early '50s. By the mid '70s herbicides and pesticides were registered and they had all sorts of proper warnings and application rules for safety. Over that period it changed.

Would that be a general thing applying across departments, within the industry without fear or favour?

Yes. Certainly, that's right. Other safety measures came about. There were driving schools for the staff. There were first aid courses that could be attended and things like that.

Were there accidents either in the field or in the Simpson's Building?

Surprisingly, that was one of the things I've often commented on. Our staff in the Department of Agriculture travelled hundreds of thousands of miles in a year, hundreds and hundreds of thousands of miles and we had very few accidents indeed. I can only think of two fatal accidents. One in the South East: I can't remember the name of that person now. The other one was Hector Orchard who was leading the [weeds unit] at that time. His vehicle overturned. To think that we had, in the beginning, ex-Army vehicles and then we graduated to a lot of Austin utilities which were certainly not developed for Australian conditions. (Laughs) They were awful in that they were so dusty and all of that. But we had very few fatal accidents. As I say, I can only remember two. There probably were more ... Not very many bumps or crashes either.

I meant in terms of motor transport but I also meant just in terms of accidents generally; people spilling some acid on themselves or chopping a finger off or something.

Again, I can't remember any of those sorts of incidences.

It would be people having the flu or something like that, having days off.

Yes. Of course, there were those.

Standard sort of sicknesses. I was just curious because the work environment in that building ...

Was not conducive to good working conditions but somehow ...

[22:10] Did you have any restrictions on things like smoking in the building?

No. None at all that I can remember. I've mentioned Max O'Neil who was my assistant. He had war service and he was a heavy smoker. There were no restrictions.

Did it bother you?

I don't think it did at the time, but it would now! (Laughs)

You notice it more! (Laughs)

You notice it if anybody's within Cooee now.

[22:50] You couldn't open the windows in the Simpson's Building. Things like sick leave and so on?  
Yes. That was reasonably carefully monitored. If you were away for 3 days, you had to have a doctor's certificate and proper records were kept of all of that.

Did you take time off yourself for any illnesses or anything: anything keep you away from work for a lone time?

No. I was very fortunate. I don't think I ever had more than 2 or 3 days.

Just a flu-type thing or something?

Yes, that's all. I had a few tummy upsets under a bit of stress and strain occasionally and that might have kept me away for 2 or 3 days but that was all.

Were there any expectations about people's work behaviours? You were required to attend by a certain time and leave by a certain time, obviously clock-on, clock-off.

Yes. There was always the book whenever you came into the office and at 9 o'clock it was ruled off with a red line. But not for me because I was one of the professionals on staff, but we had to fill in a weekly report saying what we'd done each day and how we had attended and so forth. Proper records were kept of all of that.

[24:35] Did you have to monitor people's work behaviours, thinking of when you're up at the senior level, so that there was no, what's it called these days, inappropriate behaviour?

Again, there was a natural self-discipline. I'm sure occasionally people did step out of line, but I was never ... There was one occasion when I found that one of the staff was spending time with a lady friend during working hours. The lady friend's husband rang me very irately. I had to deal with that, but that was the only one that I can ever remember. Perhaps it was simpler because we had very few women professionally and that might draw some comment. When I started in the Department, or the first 10 years, I can only remember two professional women that came into the Department. They were awfully treated, because the male bosses and all the rest of them didn't quite know how to give them jobs or what to do, although they were quite well qualified. You see, what could you do in our job? If I had gone and spent a day in the field working cheek-to-jowl with a woman and at the end of the day gone into a hotel at Jamestown or somewhere so that we could start work again next day, that would have not been accepted at all. My parents would have thought I'd really been a bad boy. My wife and friends wouldn't have accepted that at all. So, socially, these women – great girls – were very disadvantaged.

They might be competent professionally and know the job, but social mores dictate otherwise.

They finished up with awfully funny jobs. One who sort of hung around the office a fair bit was given a job to survey the introduction of silverleaf nightshade in South Australia: it was a bit of a make-up job. It was so sad that we could not accommodate them, but it wasn't altogether our fault. It was the pressures that were just unacceptable from the rest of the community.

Here you're talking the early period and I suppose then you've got women who are getting married, they have to leave the workforce.

That's right, they did.

They were getting lower rates of pay in the early days.

One night I went to the Jamestown Hotel. Absolutely by chance I met quite a close friend (a woman) who I knew very well. They were a couple that my wife and I knew very well. She was a senior person, a superintendent in the Education Department. She landed up in this hotel at the same time as I did. One of my colleagues, who was not directly on my staff but who was in the Department, came into the hotel and he was very suspicious that I was there and I had sat at that table and I chatted away with Elizabeth. I got the impression that he didn't approve of that at all. That was quite absolutely innocent. Thank heavens all of that has changed.

When did you notice the change coming in? When did the Department start to take on more women?

In the '70s. I guess by now in those sort of agencies it's almost 50/50.

In some instances it's more one way than the other!

Yes.

We look back now from your comments and you're commenting approvingly, but how did you feel when this was happening in the '70s, particularly when you're at the chief level, you've got to start accommodating professional staff, liaison with staff and so on. Do you recall your reactions at the time?

I don't think I was ever very sure of myself because I had been in that 'old school'. We eventually learnt, gradually. I can't recall any particular bad harassment issues or anything.

What about in sending the women out into the field?

That came literally. Once society had accepted it, it came in.

You were indicating earlier there that in the '50s there was social disapproval and you were worried about that. I'm thinking perhaps in the '70s when you're sending people out in the field were you getting any stories coming back or concerned partners ringing up or something?

No. That's the interesting part because by then there were professional women in all sorts of fields, not only just in the Department of Agriculture. Also, men in the Department had wives who were working professionally so it all became normal.

What about in terms of the non-professional women? Talk about typists and so on, the typing pool. How many women would have been working in the Department, perhaps as a percentage?

I'm not sure but at one stage in the typing pool alone there were 20 girls as we called them, women. But the percentage of males to female in the 1950s, '60s didn't exceed 20% women.

We'll look at the staff list and so on in due course but it's just interesting that there are probably a lot of office jobs, clerical jobs and so on that women could have been doing but the men were appointed.

Yes. At first we didn't have in our country offices, we didn't have receptionists. There was just the country office. If somebody came to the country office, the first officers they saw they



sorted them out. Certainly by the middle '60s there were receptionists and they were usually women, 9 times out of 10 they were women.

With the professional officers, of course another element there is ...

**[32:39] End of Side A, Tape 6**  
**Tape 6, Side B**

[0:05] ... barrier in that sense.

Even more than a social barrier because in Agricultural Science, a part of the course had to be done at Roseworthy College and there were no facilities for women at Roseworthy Agricultural College, so there could be no professional agricultural science women. When that changed: it was probably about the beginning of the 1960s and on from there. So, there was no competition from trained professional agricultural scientists. There were women who were professionally trained as microbiologists and laboratory specialists but not in Agricultural Science.

Perhaps vets or something like that?

Yes. There would have been a few vets, yes.

It's an interesting theme to look at in a little bit more detail, that transition of the workforce.

[1:15] Our dress in the Department of Agriculture was a little more relaxed than in other government agencies because we did a lot of fieldwork and nobody expected us to wear ties out in the field. As Chief Agronomist I wore a tie and a jacket every day: I did not have an open neck. All the staff were quite formally dressed. It's very different today, Bernie. As you know, I'm working in an office a couple of days a week and there's even bare midriffs around me!

All very revealing! In the '70s, for example, you get (late '60s into the '70s) mini skirts and so on for female attire. Were there any regulations about dress or behaviours?

It would have been frowned upon. I can never remember any women coming in in mini skirts in those times. I don't think it ever had to be an issue because nobody would turn up like that.

It's interesting to see, and your comment you'd wear a jacket and a tie, just to see what might be seen to be formal work dress in the '50s and '60s gradually changing. You get to the '70s and you might have the safari suits or something like that.

Yes we did. I bought one in South Africa, for they're very smart! But I notice that now in the office around me, the men and women are very casually dressed. In fact, a bit too casually at times. But there are still ... Roger Wickes, who's in charge of the area I'm in, wears a tie. The senior most person still wears a tie and Barry Windle does.

Most people at the management level ...

The management level now is the tie and jacket, everything else is ...

It's interesting in the sense of a lot of those expectations are informal, sort of understood without being spelt out.

That's right. They have been in the Department of Agriculture always. There's never been a set of rules like 'You will come dressed like this'. People just followed what was normal I suppose.

Thinking back to 100 years ago, you wouldn't go to work without a hat. Now you have to have not so much a regulation but an occupational health and safety requirement that 'In the field you will wear a hat'. 100 years ago that was standard.

That's the changes that happen.

In some senses, as I said earlier, they're nuts and bolts, they're little issues for this department or any department. It's just interesting underlying theme: for some people going to work, it's a bit of a social thing and gets them out of the house and so on and they probably dress appropriately. (Both laugh) For other people with the suit and tie, they're there to do a job. It's interesting the mental processes that people have about work.

That's right.

We've probably covered pretty well everything we need to for the moment on working conditions. We've got a few things for another time.

All right.

So we'll perhaps put a stop on today and see how we go next time.

Thank you very much.

Thank you Arthur.

[5:10] **End of interview**