AN INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY BERNARD O'NEIL WITH MR ERROL POLDEN OF TOORAK GARDENS, SOUTH AUSTRALIA, COMMENCING ON THE 13TH FEBRUARY 2006.

Tape 1, Side A

An interview conducted by Bernard O'Neil with Mr Errol Polden of Toorak Gardens, South Australia, on the 13th February 2006. The interview is conducted for the purposes of recording Mr Polden's personal story and the family history and his working life, particularly in regards to agriculture in South Australia.

Errol, thanks for agreeing to be involved in having a chat, and perhaps we'll just start with a little bit of the personal detail for yourself: date of birth, full name and place of birth?

Oh yes, well, it's Errol James Polden, Errol James Polden, and born on the 20th October 1918 at Orroroo.

In South Australia.

In South Australia, in the dusty North.

And your parents?

Yes, Dad and Mum. Let me see, Dad was Reuben Gordon Polden and Mother was Helen Lucy Polden, *née* Ward. They were born, let me see, in 1888 I think, Dad, and 1891 for Mum. And so their parents lived in that area at the time, in the hundred of Coomooroo.

In the North of South Australia?

In the North of South Australia, where Dad had a small farm in that hundred, and his father had a farm nearby. And the farm that Dad owned was called Pine View and the farm that my grandfather owned was Hillside. They're now incorporated in the one unit, all under the control of a cousin, who was my Dad's brother's son.

I'd like to come back to a little bit more about the family and the reasons for being there and so on, but it might be useful just to outline a little bit here about the family genealogy aspect, your interest in the family history and how that's come about, because that's part of the reason for recording things today.

Yes. Well, when my dad died I realised that I didn't know anything about the family – and I was thinking of the Polden family in particular, of course, that being the name – and so then I was looking through his stuff which he'd left quite a roomful of and bits and pieces, and I realised that he didn't know any more than I did, really, about his family, or much more; and I found a letter which he had received from one of his old aunts when she was in her nineties telling him that she didn't 'really remember much about the family, Reuben, but these points are the ones that I do remember'. And she said, 'The family came out from England in about 1841 and they came from Wiltshire in a district named Chitterne', I think – but I don't know how to spell that one – (laughs) and she said, 'These were the names of the various children.' And there was Thomas and William and George and Maria and Sarah. So she said, 'That's

about all I know about them, except that I believe they came out on a boat called the *Eliza*.' So that was the story that I had, and that was where I started to look up (laughs) the family history.

Just a few clues to go on with.

Yes. It's been a most interesting voyage, really. We caught up with the members and I've put together a list of them, and on the computer I've got quite a list of Poldens and, of course, many, many names generating[?].

When did that interest start?

That was in 1974 I reckon that it started.

It's been going on for a little while.

Yes, it's been going on for a while.

I guess for much of that time, since '74, it's been a part-time interest?

Oh, very much part-time. But of course for some periods no time at all. (laughs) But certainly it's been part-time, and of course a lot of it was just notes: it mainly is notes these days, except that I have put the generations and the names and the birth dates and things like that on the computer so that I can print out a list of those. And I got very much more interest in the process when finally – oh, about ten years ago – I did print a list and mailed it out to relevant families. And it was interesting, I got quite a lot of letters back thanking me, and others didn't write back but they obviously appreciated it because they've been in touch since. But no, it's been of interest. And we've got the family pretty well put together now and got a lot of connections, of course it's growing, it's a big volume now. When I first printed it I think I had about a hundred and twenty or so names and now I've got about fifteen hundred or so names or more than that that could go on, so it's really grown.

Is it basically recording the genealogical information, or are you looking beyond that to – have you been able to gather any family documentation more than just certificates?

I've got some documentation but mainly it's genealogy, I must admit. But I've got other interesting episodes about the old family back in England and of the families out here. It's interesting, because when my great-great-grandfather came out – he was Cornelius – and his first piece of land that he bought was out at North Adelaide and not very far from the city proper, only half a mile away. And he had three, I think, acres of land there at North Adelaide. And of course if he had that today it would be quite a nice boost. But anyhow, (laughs) he sold that fairly soon after that and bought three and a half acres out at Campbelltown, and his property ran from the river, from the Torrens, all in a southerly direction, he had a long strip; and in 1843 I think the Government Gazette recorded that Cornelius Polden had grown three acres of wheat and half an acre of market garden on his rural property out there at

Campbelltown, near Darley Ford, and the place was described as 'Darlington Vale'. So there you are. (laughs)

That would be the Census record, I guess, the Census around about 1843.

The Census, there was an 1841 Census and they appear on the 1841 Census as being here. And the address was given at that time as North Adelaide, and so it was just after 1841 that he went out there and took up this three and a half acres. And that piece of land, probably in about 1980 or thereabouts, give or take a year or two, I had a call from a lawyer asking if I would do a valuation job on a property out at Campbelltown. So I said, 'Yes, that's fine.' And I went out there and the piece of land which I had to do this valuation work on was the valuation was required because the government was at the time acquiring the land against the Torrens River for the linear park. And this piece of land was the exact piece of land which my great-great-grandfather bought in about 1841 and on which he grew his three acres of wheat and his half an acre of market garden. And at that time it was being used for the production of flowers. So it was really quite interesting the way that came about.

Just to round it out, the strip of land was going parallel to the river or away ...?

No, away from the river. It was a narrow piece, into the river, into halfway through the stream, and then heading out south almost.

And it was on the south side.

Yes.

How close to Darley Road ford?

Well, you drive past a portion of the property. A portion of the property buts onto the Darley Road, and the back portion of the river is one block away from the Darley Road. So that was interesting. (laughs) The fellow who owned it, he said, 'Ooh,' he said, 'you must go down the well.' He said, 'That's the oldest well in the district,' he said, 'I bet your great-grandfather built that or made that,' dug it or whatever you do with a well. And so I did: I went down the well and had a good look at it. (laughs) But of course I don't know whether it's the one he dug or not.

An interesting illustration of the ongoing connection with history.

Yes, yes, amazing, isn't it, that I'm going out there to value this piece of land. Of course, I had to put a good valuation on it, didn't I? (laughs)

One of the things, when I asked about documentation, is of course you pick up stories about things that aren't documented, and I suppose it's a good opportunity either now or during the course of these recordings if you want to put down some of the hearsay evidence.

Oh, yes.

I think this is the opportunity. And of course sorting out the fact from the fiction in those ...

Yes, that's a problem.

But that's the role of a family historian and I take it you are the family historian, given your ...

I seem to be, yes. And I took the job on and I seem to have been left with the job, (laughs) really. And I do, yes, it's interesting; but I'm quite happy that I did take it on because really we've found out a bit about the ... ...

Well, the other thing is if you hadn't started when you did then other things would have been lost or ...

Oh, yes! It's hard enough now – or, at least, it's *been* hard enough. But things are coming together. We had a bit of a problem because there were ... in the records, the shipping records showed that Cornelius applied for free passage for his wife and his children, William, Thomas, George – or, sorry, William, Thomas, *Robert*, George and Maria. Now, it was easy to find Sarah because she was born out here after they migrated, but the William, the oldest member of the family really had me really baffled. For many, many years I couldn't find any reference. I could find in the old almanacs which they used to publish, I could find references to Cornelius and Thomas and Robert and George, but I could never find a reference to William Polden. And this puzzled me, and so I thought, 'Where did he finish up?' I had a look at Victoria, the goldfields and things like that, but I couldn't find this William Polden. And I asked so many people and in so many places. But finally I got word from England about the family and realised that William was born before Cornelius and Mary were married. So I thought, 'Well, now, that's interesting. Just what was he and where did he come from?' And it turned out that he was born to Mary, the wife, about three or four years before she was married to Cornelius. And so I thought, 'Well, now, he might have had some other name,' because it was essential when they migrated that all members of the family came. So he came out here, registered as William Polden, and in the 1841 Census he was mentioned as William Polden, but from then on you can't find William Polden anywhere until later generations where there were Williams, in later generations. And finally I found that he reverted to his mother's name and was known here as 'William Windsor'. Yes, so we've got William Windsor (laughs) as a sort of half-brother situation.

And I was telling a chap who wrote the history of the Mount Pleasant area, he had a note which somebody gave me asking if they could him in with any information about the Poldens of Mount Pleasant, and amongst other names he had 'Windsor'. And so I rang him and told him, 'Well, yes, I can fill you in with the Polden side of it, and,' I said, 'I *may* be able to help you with the Windsor side, but I'm not completely sure of my thoughts at this stage so I won't say a word about William Windsor. But I think if you like to ring back before you go to print I might have confirmation of what I think.' So he didn't ring back, but evidently in his book he wrote that William Windsor and Thomas Polden were probably cousins. And then I had a call one day

from a woman and she said, ‘Oh,’ she said, ‘are you Errol Polden?’ I said, ‘Yeah.’ She said, ‘Oh, I think I’m related to you.’ And I said, ‘Oh, yes? What’s your name?’ And she said, ‘I’m Stephie Hocking.’ And I said, ‘Well, Stephie, the name doesn’t ring a bell.’ I said, ‘How do you think you’re related?’ And she said, ‘Well,’ she said, ‘you told the chap who wrote the book about Mount Pleasant’ – can’t think of his name – ‘that William Windsor and Thomas Polden were cousins.’ I said, ‘Well, I didn’t exactly tell him that, but I said I thought they might be related but to ring me back and he didn’t ever ring me back.’ She said, ‘Well,’ she said, ‘*are* they?’ And I said, ‘They’re not really cousins.’ And she said, ‘Well, are they related?’ And I said, ‘Yeah.’ And she said, ‘Ooh,’ she said, ‘can you tell me all about it?’ And I said, ‘Well, are you sitting down?’ And she said, ‘I don’t need to sit down!’ And I said, ‘Well, are you broad-minded?’ And she said, ‘I don’t need to be broad-minded,’ she said, (laughs) ‘I want to know about it.’ So I said, ‘Well,’ I said, ‘this is the story. And he came out with the Poldens and he was actually Mary Polden, *née* Windsor, [her] son, but born prior to marriage.’ ‘Oh!’, she said, ‘You’ve made my day!’ ‘No,’ I said, ‘you’ve made *my* day, Stephie, because I couldn’t catch up with any of his relatives.’ And she said, ‘You’ve made my *life*.’ She said, ‘I’ve been looking for William Windsor, who was my great-great-grandfather, for donkeys’ years and,’ she said, ‘I haven’t been able to find any trace of him. ‘And,’ she said, ‘there he is!’ (laughter) So there you are. So that was interesting.

Have you then gone back to establish the change of name, for example, or ...

No, I can’t find really where nor just on what day he changed his name, but he’d shifted ...

In those days you’d just decide you were going to be someone else.

He decided he was going to be ‘William Windsor’ and so his name just didn’t appear ever again, as far as I can see, in our works as William Polden; it turned out to be he was now William Windsor.

He was born outside the marriage, or born to another ...?

Yes, born outside the marriage.

But do you know who his father was?

Yes, I know who his father was. Yes. And so – yes, it’s interesting.

It wasn’t uncommon, by the way, at that time.

No, no, no. (laughs) It was a bit sort of revealing, in a way, that the English papers describe that sort of birth, you know, and they make no hesitation in saying, ‘the base-born son of ...’. A bit ...

I think many of the families have got them, so ... If you recall other stories as we go along, feel free to put them down. Things that the aunts might have told you or other people and so on could help us to

explain things. Well, coming back now to your own family, the parents, a little bit about them: where were they born and what do you recall there?

Mum was born at Wilson, which if you don't know Wilson is just south of Hawker and now just a spot on the map. So she was born at Wilson, and her – particularly her mother had a very interesting background, but you might not wish to go into all that. But her family then shifted from Wilson, where her mother and father built and owned and ran the Wilson Hotel. And they, when Grandmother married my grandfather, then they shifted from Wilson, where my grandfather was the blacksmith. But he finally ran out of work, I think, perhaps, in Wilson and shifted down to the hundred of Coomooroo, just north of Orroroo, and he went farming in that area. So of course Dad had lived in that area all *his* life and that's where Mum and Dad met and got married, and we children were all born at Orroroo or in that area.

So Mum was a Ward and her parents came from England, and her grandmother came from Ireland and she had a very interesting history. She came out here and I don't know, the records show that she was about nineteen. But when one puts all the dates of death and marriage – which she did three times – together, she must have come out here as about, I would think, no older than sixteen years of age, married to Peter Horan[?], and Peter was a stonemason and he had a works in Wakefield Street, and my grandmother, she established a shop in Hindley Street and she used to sell draperies and that sort of thing, so I can find out in the records.

And Peter Horan, her husband, died – three children were born in that marriage – and he died; she then married another chap by the name of Weatherill[?] and two children were born to that marriage. These children didn't *all* live, but two children were born. He died and she then married Fitzgerald, and Fitzgerald was my great-grandfather, I suppose, on that side. Yes. And as Fitzgerald they shifted to Port Augusta where he worked in a hotel. Then he built the Wilson Hotel and he and the great-grandmother shifted to Wilson and ran the hotel in Wilson. And they were building a hotel in Cradock when Grandmother died – my great-grandmother died – and then, a few years later, my great-grandfather died. So my grandmother and her then young husband ran the hotel in Wilson, (laughs) until that was sold up, for family reasons I guess, and then Grandfather shifted down to Coomooroo. So they've been about a bit.

Now, these are stories and information that has been passed on to you?

Yes, or I've discovered and passed on.

Just for the record here, almost like a footnote. But they would have been going up there in the 1800s, 1860s, 1870s probably?

Yes, well, let me see: I would say that they went up there in the 1870s – I would have to look that up and make sure of that, but it's the 1870s I would think that they shifted up there, yes.

It would be the expansion times as they're going into the northern areas ...

Yes, yes. Yes, they would have gone up there to Port Augusta and Wilson in the 1870s, and my great-grandfather on Dad's side, he shifted up there from Sedan where he had a small, stony paddock – a 'farm', I suppose it was called (laughs) – and he shifted from there to the Hundred of Yapala[?], near Johnburgh, in 1878, and he had at the time a wife and ten children. Now, I often think of that trip when I go up there by car and wonder about how he did it in 1878, with probably a bullock or horse-drawn wagon, a wife and ten children, and he went onto newly-surveyed Crown land – no house, no pasture. Well! What did you ...? And the only think I can think they could have lived on was there was quite a heavy stand of sandalwood, and whether he cut sandalwood or whether he lived on something like that: I don't know how he would have done it.

He would have been aware of sandalwood, I suppose, over at Sedan. It grows in different parts.

It's a different part and I don't know whether sandalwood grows near Sedan or what he would have known about sandalwood, but I can't see anything else that he could have made money out of, when one looks at that country and the rainfall. And he would have tried to grow wheat, or he would have grown some wheat; he would have had some sheep, I guess. But to go up there with a wife and ten children with no house or anything – oh dear, there you go. Here's the house they built.

That's the one in the painting ...

That's the painting, yes. (laughs)

That's the painting here in the dining room area.

Yes, and that still exists and we've spent weekends in there, so ...

But it illustrates the point, and the great-grandparents and so on also illustrate the point, of there's an optimistic strain running through the Polden genes!

Yes, I think they've got to be a bit optimistic, yes, to put up with what they put up with, there's no doubt about that. No. My dad does – he farmed, and that's where I was, they were on the farm when I was born, and so soon after that he left the farm for family reasons – mainly his Polden brother and father, with whom he was working, and he decided there wasn't enough for the three of them so he sold his farm to Grandfather and Dad went into the motor industry and went down to Kadina and worked there evidently, then he came back to Orroroo and opened a garage in Orroroo and sold motor cars and repaired motor cars.

Well, just to put some time on it, had you been born when he sold the farm?

Yes, I was born whilst they were on the farm, and I would think that they sold the farm perhaps a year or so after I was born, which was about 1919, and I would say that it was about 1920 that they were in Kadina, and they came back to Orroroo, and I don't remember Kadina so I must have been too small, too young, to remember that part of it. But I do remember the house in

which we lived in Orroroo quite well and where we grew up for the next about seven years, and I started school in Orroroo. But I went to school in many places, but Orroroo was the first one.

We'll come onto the schooling, but just to round out a little bit more about the family: brothers and sisters?

Ah yes, I had an older sister and an older brother. Now, the eldest member of the family, Elsie, she has now died. She was born in 1915, I think it was. And I had a brother, Herbert, who died in about 1922: he was born probably 1917, in that period. I was born in '18. Then I have a sister Lorraine and a sister Patricia and a sister Dorothy. So I was one of two boys and four girls. But unfortunately, Herbert – 'Herbie', as we always knew him – he had meningitis, pneumonia and meningitis, then I went down with the same sort of wog; he unfortunately died and I survived, so I was mighty lucky.

That would have been about four years old for you?

Yes, he was about four years old when he died.

But you would have been about four – he died in '22?

Yes, oh yes, that's right; well, he must have been only about three or thereabouts when he died and I was probably four years old when I had that problem, yes, that would be pretty right, I guess.

So you would have grown up with the sisters.

Yes, I did, I grew up with four sisters. It got to the stage where I thought girls were no good at all! (laughs) I didn't want to see any more! But anyhow – oh no, we get on well now. But yes, I thought that I should have had a brother, but unfortunately he died.

But I started school in Orroroo and Dad, he ran the garage and sold cars and obviously did well, because he had one of the very early wirelesses – I remember him tinkering with this so-many-valved radio – and he had a camera, he was about the only one in the district who had a camera, which had a big hood over it and with which he took photos of the district, and they still exist around the place and you can see this: 'This photo was taken by Reuben Polden', you know, (laughs) 'in 1917' or something.

He was into the new-fangled technology.

Yes, he was really quite a progressive sort of a person, I understand, but always kept up with the trends and I suppose he was lucky. Then, of course, he came to the city, they came down to Adelaide about 1927, I would say. And so from then on things didn't prosper so well. He had a garage in a rented property in Gawler Place, and it's now, the area is occupied now by the Department of Education building. But yes, he had a garage there and he used to repair cars, paint cars – you know, spray cars; and he had a contract to supply the City Council with all the registration disks for horse-drawn vehicles, and also he had a contract to supply the

numberplates for motor cars around the place. So he was really quite progressive in that field. And he started making all these numberplates for South Australia, virtually, and the horse-drawn vehicle plates for South Australia, certainly. And so he was quite progressive. But then the Depression hit and he had invested in a lot of land and he lost (laughs) all his money plus a lot of somebody else's, and so ...

Tape 1, Side B

Polden interview, Tape 1 Side B. Errol, you were just about to outline a little bit more about the impact of the Depression on your father –

Yes.

– but just before we do, to backtrack slightly: it was interesting: he'd left the farm, sold there and gone to a garage at Kadina and then to Orroroo and then to Adelaide. Do you know much about your father's background? Was he a businessman, what sort of education he had, those sorts of [things].

Look, he didn't have a lot of education. They went to school at a little spot called Coomooroo and which doesn't exist these days, but the rubble is still there where they pushed the old school and hall over. But he went to school at Coomooroo, which was probably about three miles from their residence, and he and his brother and two sisters – there were four in his family, two boys, two girls – and they all went to the Coomooroo School. And of course they only had to Grade 5, and I've got some of his school books, in which the writing is really very, very neat. But they do suggest that he must have been a bit dyslectic and therefore had trouble reading, and I don't know that he was because he didn't show any sign of that in later life as far as I know. He really was quite a good businessman, he did quite well except for the Depression, which really ruined him. And he was one who wouldn't forego his debts: he decided he had to pay back everything. And so the first ten or so years that *I* worked, everything went towards paying back those old debts from my father.

He took a principled stand.

Yes. So when he got demands for money, if I had some it went to pay those debts. And I usually was able to meet the demand, (laughs) but it got a bit tough at times, I must admit.

People can inherit the sins of the father; you inherited the debts!

Yes, I inherited the debts of my father, and they were quite substantial. But after we shifted down here we lived at Malvern in a very nice home at number two Eton Street, and I sometimes look at it and wish that we still had it, and I went to the school at Unley, primary school. And then of course the Depression hit, or started to hit, and we moved from Unley down to Welland, so I went to the school at Welland for so many years, maybe, or months; then we shifted from Welland because of some problems which happened and we shifted from there to Westbourne Park, so I went to the Westbourne Park School for about a year or so; and we shifted from there up to Mylor, so I went to Mylor to finish primary school. (laughs) And, because after Mylor we

shifted to Port Lincoln, so I went to the Port Lincoln High School for two years; and then we came back to Mylor again and the headmaster at Port Lincoln wrote and said, 'You must go on to school,' so he wrote a letter to my dad and said, 'You must send him on to school,' and so I was sent off, I was allowed to go to school to do ... I did two years at high school in Port Lincoln, got the Intermediate, and the Headmaster, Mr Tregenza, said, 'You must go and do the Leaving,' so I was able to go to school and I used to push the bike from Mylor to Aldgate and then train from Aldgate to Adelaide and go to the Adelaide Tech[nical] School on North Terrace and the same thing at night. So I left home at half-past six in the morning and got home at a quarter to seven at night. (laughs) So that was my school day.

That's the secondary school, and there wasn't one at Mylor or the Hills area?

No, no, primary school at Mylor but otherwise it was hard to get to a high school. Yes, so it was quite an effort really getting to school, but they were good days. They used to have the old dogboxes[1] on the train, and so we'd get a dogbox – of course, the train would leave from Bridgewater so your favourite friends would be in a certain dogbox in the train so you'd have it and nobody else could get in, of course.

So when you say a 'dogbox' do you mean like a compartment?

Yes, just a little – you know, each one had a door to the platform. We called them 'dogboxes'.

What did you do with the bike?

Left it at the station. And that was quite safe. You know, it was amazing how you could just pull up at the front of the station and leave your bike and go to school and come back and your bike would still be there in the afternoon when you got home. But these days you couldn't do it, could you?

No.

No, it's dreadful.

Were other children from the area doing the same?

No, nobody from Mylor did it, but – I was the only one from Mylor – but there were kids came from Bridgewater and then we'd pick up more of course in Aldgate, and so as we went down and down the hill we'd pick up kids from all the little stops along the road.

They became friends of yours, some of them?

Ah yes, they did, there's no doubt. We used to meet up with them and ride with them and then got to know them. And then I was best man for one and various things like that.

I'd like to pursue you a bit more about your schooling, so we're going to get to that, I guess, on our list of things. To come back to your parents: they're moving around a fair bit, this is in Depression time, your father out of work?

[1] Passenger compartment without corridor access from other compartments.

Well, yes. Because of the Depression he, I think, probably couldn't afford the rent at Gawler Place and so he shifted out and he went to Mylor, and I guess he went to Mylor because his bit of knowledge of farming, and we had a twenty-acre block, and I suppose he reckoned we could grow some vegetables and we had apples and we could live – and had a cow – so we did that: we milked a few cows and we grew vegetables and we had fruit trees, apples and things, and so I guess living was cheaper than it would have been, and possible, you know. And he was a very proud person, he wouldn't be given handouts, he wouldn't *take* handouts. In fact, he lived to be eighty-four years of age, but he would not have a pension and he worked until he died. In fact, he still had contracts. He finished up doing valuation work and he still had contracts existing for valuation work when he died, which fortunately I was able to finish for him.

We'll get a little bit more of that story too as we go along, perhaps. That's well down the track. But just interesting that you're moving around a fair bit, and obviously there were other people in the same situation in Adelaide, South Australia, and all over, the impact of the Depression. What about your mother? You've been talking a bit of your father.

Poor old mother. I mean, she was a very loyal person, obviously, and she was a lovely mother. And she just regarded her place as being in the house and looking after the kids, and so that's about what Mum did when we were just ... During the Depression she took in a couple of boarders and that helped, obviously. And one of those boarders whom she took in at that time died only recently at the age of one month short of a hundred and three, and so because of Mum being very, very friendly with her I took on the task of looking after her or doing for her in her older age. So yes, she died at a hundred and – well, virtually a hundred and three – and I'd been helping her since 1927. (laughs)

A longstanding connection!

That's right.

Was she a long-term boarder, then?

Yes, she stayed with us, she lived with us in Adelaide and when we shifted – in Malvern, and when we shifted to Welland she came and she shifted with us: each time we shifted, she came with us. And she came with us up to Mylor. And so she and Mum were very, very friendly and they used to go for walks on a Sunday and leave a message for us to milk the cows in case they weren't home in time, and so that's the story.

Did she have a job?

Oh yes, she worked. And she was actually a very bright person. She was a comptometrist, which we don't seem to have these days of course, but she was a comptometrist and she worked with the Adelaide City Council for quite a few years and then, when she retired from the Adelaide City Council, she worked with Robert Bryce and Co, and after that – and she married, and so for a period we didn't see a lot of her, but then her husband died and from then on we

saw more of her again. And when her husband died we more or less became her support, and so she was back with us again but not *living* with us, but for help and advice, you know.

Like as a friend type of thing.

Yes, as a friend.

Do you recall how long she would have been a boarder for, then?

Well, from 1926 until about – I would say about '38, '26 to '38, probably twelve years she boarded, and she was married about some time in '40, I think, about that time.

To me that seems unusual; that's something you grew up with.

Yes, well, that's right. She just stayed with us. And in fact, the first year my mum took in two boarders and I assume that it was because of the harder times, and they were two sisters. And the story we have is that they'd left an unhappy home, and so whether that was so or not we don't know, but that was the story we had, and we grew up with that story. And the sister married, probably about four years later, but the one, Win[?], she just stayed with us all the time and more or less lived with us for years.

Very fascinating aspect. It's not something you hear much about.

No, I suppose we don't, really.

That leads me to ask you: what about their extended family, other relatives and so on? How do they fit in the picture?

Do you mean *my* extended – I suppose *my* relatives?

Uncles and aunts?

Uncles and aunts. Ah yes, well, of course they always lived up North. But Mum's parents shifted from Coomooroo to New South Wales and they took up newly-released land in around Wagga in New South Wales, and so Mum was more or less left here just by herself. All brothers and sisters – her sisters, I should say; her brother died as a very young person – but her sisters and parents shifted off to New South Wales, so Mum was more or less left here all by herself with Dad and her young family. You know, those days, in the early 1920s, we used to, each Christmas, go over to a property just south of Wagga to see them and spend Christmas with them, and we used to get in that old car – or those old cars, as the years went by there were different cars – but if you remember the old running-boards along the sides of the cars? Well, they were laden up with tins of petrol and water, and food I suppose, and we'd set out and drive from Orroroo to Wagga in the very early 1920s. And of course there were no bitumen roads and there were gates about every two miles, you'd be out opening gates to get along the river and up through that country, so I got the job as I grew up of opening the gates. And so (laughs) you'd get out of the car to open a gate and on one occasion, as I got to the gate, a big goanna ran up the gatepost and he's looking at me as I'm trying to get this gate [open] – I don't think

there was any way I could possibly get to that gate to undo it with a big goanna looking at me. But I was assured by my brother that he wouldn't hurt me, so we got the gate open.

It was only a goanna, not a snake.

That's right. (laughs) Well, at least it was a goanna. He opened his mouth very wide. I thought he could have swallowed me. But anyhow, no, they were interesting days. And really Dad was quite an adventurer, really, to drive that distance each year in the old cars as they were those days, with a wife and five kids.

Yes. That's a little bit different to the previous ancestors going up with –

Yes, the others were ...

– a horse and dray. It's still quite a journey, Orroroo to Wagga.

It is, that's right. I think of it these days, whilst those days I took no notice of it, but I think of it these days and he had to be quite adventurous and confident to do that sort of thing.

And he must have had a little bit of money behind him – you mentioned selling the farm and running the business –

Yes, those days ...

– but to afford a car and be able to run it ...

That's right. Well, those days he obviously did very well because he had everything and the best of everything, you know: very good wireless sets and big cameras and things. He obviously did very well selling cars and doing repair work in those early years. And until the Depression hit he obviously did very well. But once the Depression hit, then things were quite bad because he had invested in a lot of blocks of land all around the countryside and/or suburbs, and none of them were paid for obviously and he had to maintain them and he'd get notices each year about cleaning off the boxthorns off these blessed blocks of land, so we'd have to go down. And of course I was only a kid, but we'd have to go down and grub out these boxthorns and make the land look respectable. And it wasn't until after the War, the Second World War, that he was able to sell those blocks of land. But it was amazing how they sold after that, and so he got a little bit of his money back probably, but I wouldn't think he got *much* of his money back.

So he held onto some land through the Depression.

Yes; only because he couldn't sell it. But no, he took up this land at Mylor, twenty acres, and that wasn't paid for at the time but he evidently had title to it and a bit mortgage. And finally that was paid off, and one of those things that I helped him pay off too, but still it was paid off, that's the main thing.

You mentioned World War II, Errol.

Yes. And unfortunately I didn't help in World War II. I had a bit of problems, really – well, major problems, I suppose: I had a problem with arthritis and I was reduced to almost a vegetable for two or three years, I just couldn't walk. And fortunately I got onto a good doctor who had experienced the same problem, Dr Hamilton, and he said, 'Oh,' he said – after some time, sort of not being able to walk around or do anything – and he said, 'I can help you there,' he said. He said, 'I've got two cures: one will help you to walk again and the other one will be a long-term cure which,' he said, 'you'll have to take for quite a long time.' So he gave me these two recipes and I went home and took this good one (laughs) that was going to help me walk again and – oh, golly! – I nearly died, I think. But I did walk again, that was the wonderful thing about it, I was able to walk again after a couple of months. And then I went on taking this other prescription for probably eight years, ten years, and finally I got to the strongest dose – it was only started off with a very small dose of whatever it was and then built up each time after so many months on each treatment – and when I took the last preparation or script into the local chemist at Gawler to have made up, he looked at it and he said, 'Do you have to take this bloody stuff?' He said, 'This'll *kill* you,' he said, 'this'd kill you, this stuff.' And I said, 'Well,' I said, 'it hasn't killed me and I've been taking it for several years.' He said, 'Look,' he said, 'I wouldn't take this,' he said. 'If you can walk, the way you're looking now,' he said, 'I wouldn't take it.' So I didn't take any more. (laughs) But that lasted for a few years and that was mainly during the War years.

That was a prescription item or was it something ...?

No, it was something which the doctor, you know, he prescribed it and he cooked it up himself. And he reckoned ...

So it was a drug of his own ...?

No, well, it was something – I think that it was his own medicine, a medicine of his own mixing. He told me that he had experienced a very similar trouble and that he couldn't get to university, and the only way he was able to get there was by somebody taking him to university and he used a typewriter to get his notes and to get through university. And he said, 'And this is what I found helped me.' And so that was the story. And that was – oh, well, I'm very thankful, too, because it's not much fun not being able to walk, I can tell you that. But I was on crutches for quite a long time and finally got going again and so here I am.

And it was a form of arthritis?

Yes, it was an arthritis.

You haven't had any relapses?

No. Well, I take an anti-inflammatory now and then, (laughs) but not too bad. No, it was a bit sad about that. So I didn't ... But when I was able to work I did, I went down and helped

machine aeroplane parts and Bren gun carrier parts at Islington, so I did a little bit but I didn't do much for the war effort.

And so working down there at Islington at the railway yards?
Yes, at the railway yards, yes.

Manufacturing ...?
Yes, that's right. They used to make parts for the Bren gun carriers and that's mainly what I did, Bren gun carriers, and a bit of machining for aircraft parts. So that was the story. Sorry about that.

Any other ...? Well, we've got to ask about your father with World War I.
Yes. He didn't serve in the Army, neither did his brother. I suppose they thought they were farmers so they stayed on the farm. But no, he didn't serve in the World War I and I didn't serve in World War II. That wasn't a good effort; but, still, there was a problem. But I would like to have joined the Air Force but it didn't happen.

And because you're talking there about the Depression and the between-war years, and your father had sold off the garage –
Yes.

– and you indicated then that he was basically running the farm at Mylor.
Well, we lived there. He didn't do much although he used to come home – he got a job as a salesman in the motor industry, and he used to travel and go over the West Coast and up the North and do those areas as a salesman in various firms: Motor Traders, James Hill and Sons who used to exist those days. And so he got going in that respect and kept us alive and kept us in footwear, I suppose, so that's how the Port Lincoln episode came in. We shifted from Mylor over to Port Lincoln in 1932, I would say, and so that's when I went to school in Port Lincoln, to high school. I went to high school in Port Lincoln for two years, '42 and '43, and during that time Dad opened and managed the Motor Traders branch in Port Lincoln and that still runs, so that was quite an effort, really. And he was able to help with the engine reconditioning as well as the management of the property for the business where they sold spare parts, motor spare parts. And he used to travel up the Peninsula, up the Eyre Peninsula, so as to get to know and to get the business from the garages up through on Eyre Peninsula. So really he did quite well in that respect. And then he got a bit maybe greedy, I don't know, but anyhow for some reason or another he decided to give that game away and came back to Mylor, and that's when I went to school at the Adelaide Tech for the twelve months. And then we took over, as R & E Polden, the Mylor Garage. And so I worked there, more or less as a mechanic I suppose, and (laughs) selling bits and pieces and doing mechanical work, motor car work, and selling petrol and all that sort of thing. So we had that Mylor Garage for a few years, and I just offhand don't

remember how long, but I worked there. And then we sold that, or Dad sold it, and I – as I said, I was laid up then for a few years and so I didn't do much for a few years except home and sort of trying to walk and get going again.

But then I put up a poultry unit at about that time, so on this twenty-acre farm I built a few poultry sheds and started selling eggs and poultry meat. So that's where my interest in poultry started, really, and I used to – actually, because of just reading stories and getting to grow a few chickens – I started to make some what we called 'weaners' for the chickens, and the idea was to get them up off the ground and out of the wet conditions, which Mylor is very wet, as you know. And so we reared these chickens in weaners which were very much like the cages we have today for layers, except we'd put them in two or three tiers, and we'd run the chickens on wire. And they were about six feet – oh, well, how many? – two metres by a metre in size, and perhaps three on top one of each other, and so we would have maybe three hundred chickens in a small cage which could go in a nice, warm shed. Rather than have them outside on the ground. And when they got to six weeks of age, then we'd put them outside on the ground. And the first sort of part we played in cage production, or that type of production, was these early weaner things which I used to weld together and brought some floors and sides and that sort of thing, had them made in the city, and so I put those together on the farm, you see. And one day – what was his name? – Stewart Henderson[?], who was at that time Chief Poultry Adviser, he called in to have a look at these things I was making because that wasn't really good to 'have these chickens up in the air, they ought to be on the ground', and so I showed him my chicken (laughs) coops and he was quite impressed. In fact, they later bought a couple to try out at the Parafield Research Centre. And at that time he said, 'Oh,' he said, 'I could probably do with you in my department.' He said, 'I could give you a job in my department.' And I thought, 'Well, with my history of arthritis and problems that might be a darn good idea,' because then I would have some security, you see. So that's how it all started. (laughs)

That gets up to another starting point and we're going to have to backtrack yet again. ... ... I don't want to labour the point, but the arthritis: did you ever determine a cause for that?

No, but they seemed to think that it was caused mainly by cold, wet conditions. I used to, well, as I said, ride the bike to Aldgate and of course you were wet, and in the wintertime you were wet all day and you'd get onto the train, you'd get to the station you were wet, and you didn't really dry out until you got home at night and took your clothes off. And then early, after that, I started riding a motorbike and that was perhaps part of the trouble. But I don't know why, the cause of it was never sort of determined.

And you mentioned working in the garage in Mylor: did that follow on from your study down at the Technical College?

Yes, well, I did a few courses. After Adelaide Tech I went and did a welding course and a few things like that, just at the Institute or whatever they called it, the Institute of Technology? No, that's not right. School of Mines, that's right School of Mines and Industry, that's the story. And so I did welding and I think a couple of things – oh, I did wool classing and I did welding, because that's how – then I started on wool classing as well, so that was a part of it. And the wool classing, I was quite interested in that side of it, mainly because I enjoyed the bush, and so I did quite a lot of wool classing up in the North and also down in the South-East. So that was more or less a wintertime job.

Well, I think it would be a good opportunity just – we're nearly out on this side of the tape – to put a pause on, but a good opportunity perhaps to pick up on your schooling side of things, if you don't mind, and we'll take it from there and continue the story.

Well, the schooling, as I said, was at various primary schools, several of them, and then finished at Mylor Primary School, then two years at Port Lincoln High School and I did the Intermediate, and I did the Agricultural course at school – topped the state in Agriculture, that's all I know! (laughs) But other than that, I did pass the Intermediate, yes, and got a credit. And then, as I said, Mr Tregenza, who was the headmaster, he decided I really should go and do another year over here so I went to the Adelaide Tech and did the Leaving. And finally passed Leaving –

You did Leaving –

– Leaving at Adelaide.

– Certificate?

Certificate, yes. Finally passed the Leaving Certificate at Adelaide High, but that was a big effort because it was just a real slog getting to school and getting home again and not much time for ... And of course going to different schools, from Port Lincoln to Adelaide Tech, was a real culture shock. And I remember when I first got there – what was his name? – Sid Moyle, that's right, Sidney Moyle, he was the headmaster, and I walked in very self-consciously and reluctantly and said, 'I've come to enrol,' and he burst out at me and said, (shouts) 'Don't you know our enrolments stopped two months ago!' (laughs) I thought, 'Oh, good Lord!' So gingerly I said, 'I've got a letter here,' so I gave him my letter and when he read that he ...

End of Tape 1

Tape 2, Side A

Polden interview, 13th February 2006, Tape 2, Side A. Errol, we just finished the other tape talking about – starting to talk about some of your schooling, and perhaps we should actually go back to the start, go back to I guess Orroroo days, it would have been. Pre-school –

No.

– or primary school? What did they do in the country?

I don't think I ever had any pre-school, but primary school at Orroroo and I started school there in the primary school and I would think that I went there, to the primary school at Orroroo, for two or maybe at the most three years, but I really don't know that for sure. But we shifted down to Adelaide, and I think we shifted down to Adelaide in 1926. So I reckon that by that time I should have had at least two years of schooling, and certainly I did ... I know I was ... but I'm not real sure about the third year; and then I went to the Unley Primary School for probably a year or a year and a half; and then to Welland Primary School for maybe a year; and then to Westbourne Park Primary School for about a year; and then to the Mylor Primary School for two years. So that's the schooling, early schooling.

That's the primary schooling.

Yes.

In those cases – about four or five different schools there – how do you get on for going to and from school?

Oh, Orroroo was easy, we used to walk, of course, walk to Orroroo School, and that was just down the road and around the corner a bit, so that was fine. And then to Mitcham, or at least Unley: we walked there, that was okay. Welland, or ... we lived at ... I don't know whether it was called ... yes, it's the Welland School and we lived in Allenby Gardens, but they were only just down the road. And that was fine. So I walked everywhere to school except when I got to high school at the Adelaide Technical High School, and that's where I had quite a bit of trouble getting to that school, but I think we might have spoken about that before. But I used to have to leave home at about half-past six in the morning and I got back home about a quarter to seven at night, I pushed the bike from Mylor to Aldgate and then caught the train from Aldgate down to the city and walked along North Terrace to school, and then repeated that to go home. So it was quite a long day, really. And of course in the wintertime one was wet most of the time, (laughs) because it rained pretty well every morning up there, and so by the time you got to the train in the morning you were wet and [would] stay wet most of the day.

Yes, yes, as you were saying before, yes. Well, just looking at the primary school days, you were walking to and from school?

Yes.

Mum's at home?

Yes, Mum's at home and we walked to and from school. Dad was really not home that much, he was travelling quite a bit, yes, and in Orroroo in business, and so he was away during the day but home every night. And then in the city he was still home in the night right throughout our city years. But then when we shifted to Mylor he did a job as a traveller and, prior to going to Port Lincoln, he did a job as a traveller for motor firms and he travelled through the North and West Coast, was home more or less weekends and that's about all we saw of Dad. We used

to run ... Mum and I used to run the place and milk the cows and feed the pigs and chooks, and grow the vegetables, go to school.

What were the girls doing, the sisters?

The sisters? Well, they were not outside girls, they were always helping inside, and they didn't really do anything outside. So the sisters grew up not really doing a lot outside. But Mum used to milk the cow in the morning or in the afternoon and I used to help, and my job was always to feed the pigs and mend the girls' footwear (laughs) and chop the wood, so I used to supply the house with firewood and feed the pigs and Mum would milk the cow.

And what about the girls' schooling? Did they go to primary school with you?

Yes, they went to – well, my eldest sister, she started in Orroroo and then she completed her schooling down here while we were in the city, and the other girls, they went to school much the same as I did, really: from home and down to the Mylor School. They didn't – yes, they used to travel to Adelaide to school, but by the time *they* started school we either were able to afford or maybe things were different and they were able to go by bus. So the bus used to pick them up at the front gate. So they didn't have to ... Although in the first – yes, the first period of my sister just below me, Lorraine ... ..., I used to donkey her to Aldgate; or, at least, where I couldn't donkey her we would walk. So for a few months of early in her first high school year, we both went to Aldgate and caught the train. And I was supposed to donkey her because (laughs) – I know I tipped her off on one occasion and that was the end of both going to school and catching the train to Aldgate, probably when I tipped her off and she wasn't too happy at all and neither was Mother. But somehow or other we fell off the bike. (laughs)

Just to sidetrack with a *non*-school topic: when did you learn to ride?

Oh, well, I don't know *when* I learnt to ride. Probably when we were at Unley, because I do remember my father evidently got hold of a second-hand bike and he promised me for several months that he had a bike that he'd be bringing home for me to ride. And so I guess I learnt to ride when we were at Unley, but I'm not sure, but I do remember this because I got ridiculed and I don't forget that one, because somebody who stayed overnight, I wrote a note to my dad and put it up on the mantelpiece: 'Please don't forget my bike.' And I spelt 'bike' B-I-C-K, if I remember rightly, and this fellow who was staying the night, he saw this: ' "Don't forget my 'bick'" – what's a "bick", what do you call a "bick"?' (laughs) So I was really put in my place because I didn't know how to spell 'bike'.

As children are prone to do. Do you remember having a series of bikes then, starting smaller, working up?

Well, that was one that I had to ride through the bar, so it was a big bike and I used to ride it through the bar and not worry [with] the seat at all. So I guess that's about the only one that I had until I was able to buy one for myself, which I did when I was going to school and catching

the train at Aldgate, yes. So I had a good bike – or, for those days, it was a good bike. (laughs) Yes.

He'd[?] been able to earn some money by then.

I must have earnt a bit, yes, something or other. I think we used to grow a few vegetables, and so we'd give our vegetables to one of the greengrocers who was going down to the market each morning, and he'd sell them for us, yes. So we made little bits with growing vegetables.

Well, going back to the schooling – and here I'm thinking mainly the primary school – did you have subjects or interests that appealed to you?

I suppose really no, I don't know that I really was a great scholar those days. I think that the fact that you were at so many schools – no, I really didn't learn to add up and to recognise numbers well until I was much older, and that was a real handicap. I used to add up, you know, do the long tots on the fingers – one, two, three, four, five – which was pretty bad, but I didn't recognise numbers. So I probably wasn't a good scholar for a while, I don't know. But as I got older, then I used to try very hard because I hated to be anything but top of the class, (laughs) and so I used to try very hard as I got older and managed to hold my place, my class position, fairly well.

I asked you about the subjects of interest because of that reason, you're going to so many different schools that it must have been hard, even as a young fellow then, to settle down.

Yes. I think I must ... really I did find it hard, I know, although I didn't take a lot of notice of it those days. But I used to ... some of the things which you remember ... One thing in particular: whenever I hear this ... ... sung, I can't help but think of the Welland Primary School because we had a teacher, we were in an upstairs room at school – it was a double-storey building – and we were in this upstairs room – and I don't know this teacher's name, I'm sure I don't – but in the singing lesson he had us singing 'Om–bra–my–foo'. And of course nobody knew what it meant or much about it, but we used to have to sing this (sings) 'Om–bra–my–foo, dee–ve–ge–ta–bi–le' – (laughs) and ... ... I can remember learning at school. And this teacher, every time we'd have the singing class, he'd come around, he'd listen in to students as they were singing. And he always used to come up and he'd listen to me singing and I used to get very flustered about him with his ear in front of my mouth, listening to me singing 'Om–bra–my–foo'. So whenever I hear – and I've got a few disks with 'Om–bra–my–foo' on, which I get pleasure from these days. But I don't know too much about that. But then, I do remember Mylor School fairly well because that was Grade 7 period, and we had a good teacher after the first year – first year teacher wasn't too good but he didn't last long – but second year we had a very good teacher, and that was the school that I enjoyed quite a bit. The others I really don't remember much about. I do remember at Orroroo being stood in the waste paper basket because I called the teacher by the wrong name and her name was Maloney, if I remember rightly, and I

called her 'Paloney', and that was really a no-no so I got stood in the waste paper basket for that purpose, for that job. But anyhow, no, we had a lot of teachers and some were lovely people and of course others I didn't really like much.

But high school, that was a very ... I really enjoyed high school at Port Lincoln. And Sidney Lloyd Tregenza, the headmaster, he was a lovely person. And Harold Reske, the agricultural teacher, and Miss Fisher, the English teacher, they were really lovely people. And that's where I took most interest in schooling, really.

That's often the case, that primary school becomes a bit of a distant memory and the secondary school makes the greater impact.

Yes.

But before we get onto the Port Lincoln secondary schooling, do you remember things like playground activities or sports at primary school at all?

(laughs) Oh! Yes, well, not so much – I know I used to take my football, and I was evidently a fairly privileged lad at Orroroo and I had a football, so of course I'd take my football to school. And of course, being a pretty small bloke I didn't really get a lot of use of it myself! But I had a very good second cousin who was at the school at the same time, and he would always make sure that I got a few kicks. So I got a few kicks, mainly because of Tom Fogden, (laughs) who was a second cousin. But no, not a lot of activities and sport.

And of course at Adelaide Tech I didn't really have a chance to play sport because it was so much time travelling, and I couldn't go down at weekends to play, so I didn't play sport at the Adelaide Tech. But that was always a bit of a concern. But Mylor, the main activity at Mylor, we used to run a paper chase every lunchtime. ... ... we'd head off into the scrub with a bag of paper, and the mob being chased would carry the bag of paper and we'd drop a bit of paper every now and then, and the crowd behind would chase us and following the paper trail. And of course when the original, the first teacher who was there, he was quite a lot ... we could walk in quarter of an hour, ten minutes late: that was no problem at all, you'd just go to your seat and sit down and he wouldn't notice it. But when we got a new teacher, Mr Lesner – boy! – we walked in late after a paper chase one day, and of course we all ... well, all hell broke loose. (laughs) We had to 'please explain' where we'd been. And somebody made up a story about watering some trees which we had planted at Arbour Day, so the others had to (laughs) agree, and it got to be a very sticky situation. But the paper chases stopped after that.

And how many children would have been involved in the paper chase?

In the paper chase? I'd say about twenty altogether, that would be about the sum total. But ten would head off and then another ten would chase them. So about half the school, almost!

That wasn't confined just to your class?

No. Well, there were only about six in our class, I think.

And you mentioned (telephone rings) Arbour Day.

Yes, we used to have Arbour Days those days as well, and we planted trees up along the Lesley[?] Creek and in the Lesley Creek and the Lesley Creek Road, and it's interesting to go back and see that those trees have flourished, they're still growing.

The trees are still there?

Yes, so it's nice to see them.

What about other celebrations? I'm thinking of on Anzac Day or ...

No. Well, we used to have to, of course, salute the flag every day, that was part of the thing. And as for the major celebrations like that, I don't really remember that we joined in those things a lot at Mylor. But we used to play sport against other townships, we used to play cricket against Echunga and the girls played basketball and that sort of thing, or netball. And so we did see a bit of our neighbouring kids, just once or twice a year. But really it was a pretty smallish school. There were two teachers, one for Grades 4 to 7 and the other one for Grades 1 to 3. And it was all in one big classroom with a curtain dividing the juniors from the seniors. And of course the seats were long platforms, so that wasn't good. I suppose. But the big problem was the one teacher who was there when we went there, and he was not a good person, really. Anyhow, he was finally dismissed and we did get a nice teacher after that. But he was a person who shouldn't have been a teacher at all.

And these primary schools, the four or five of them: they were state schools?

Yes, yes, all state schools. And the Adelaide Tech, of course, that wasn't a state school, but – in fact, yes: evidently to get into the Adelaide Tech you had to have a certain qualification at the Qualifying Certificate examination, and of course that's what Mr Moyle I suppose was going to hold against me, the fact that I was almost two months late (laughs) getting there. But anyhow, it all turned out all right.

You had the piece of paper, you were okay.

Had me bit of paper.

And finally, in primary school, I suppose there's a veggie patch and so on at home: you were able to take your own lunch?

Oh yes, we used to take our own lunch, yes, always. And of course after school we'd go down to the shop and we'd buy whatever Mum wanted – a loaf of bread, always – and get the paper, I suppose, and the mail. So we collected the mail and paper, then a loaf of bread and walked off home. And of course by the time we got home the old loaf of bread was looking pretty hollow.

(laughs) So we had to amend our ways after a while because Mum got rather tired of just having crust. And so we had to leave the bread whole. Interesting days.

That's interesting: she didn't make bread?

Yes, Mum used to make bread too, but she didn't make it all, and quite often – as a treat, I suppose – we would buy a loaf of bread and take it home, yes. But Mum used to make bread as well.

Let's have a look at the secondary schooling. And you're at Port Lincoln a couple of years.

Yes, Port Lincoln for two years, and did the Agricultural Science and Harold Reske was the Ag teacher. He was a good bloke. And the other teachers were really a lovely lot of teachers, I always enjoyed Port Lincoln High School.

What attracted you to the Ag Science course?

I don't know. Probably just because we lived at Mylor on the land and Dad probably was the farmer and probably that's why I did Ag Science.

Were you thinking of a career or anything at this stage?

Yes, I suppose I did, because towards the end of the second year they asked me if I'd like to sit for a scholarship, and of course I would like to, and I said, 'I'd like to do Agricultural Science.' And they said, 'Ooh, well, if I were you I would sit for a different one because Bob Mitten is sitting for the Ag Science scholarship and he's in Leaving so he's more likely to get it than you are. So why don't you sit for a different scholarship?' So I didn't know what else to do so I think I probably nominated Engineering. But anyhow I didn't get it; but maybe if I'd nominated Agriculture I *might* have got as good a chance. But, on the other hand, Bob Mitten did get it. So Bob Mitten got the scholarship to do Ag Science at Roseworthy and he went on to be a vet, and I didn't get anything but I did go on to the Adelaide Tech.

Was there only the one scholarship being offered?

Yes, as far as I know it was just the one.

One for that school, or ...?

No, I think it was a general ... for country schools, I think: all country schools could nominate somebody for a scholarship, and evidently there was one for Agriculture and one for I think it was Engineering offered for people in the West Coast, and Bob Mitten got the one for Agriculture. I didn't get one but then I didn't ... probably didn't expect one at all. But the headmaster suggested I sit for one, so that was something, I suppose. But I didn't do too badly at Port Lincoln High, I used to be either first or second in the class right through. But I had a lot of trouble trying to beat the top class student. He was very bright. (laughs)

And what were your favourite subjects or interests? Obviously Agricultural Science was one.

Agricultural Science was I think the main, the favourite one. But I was quite good at Maths and English, so English and Maths. I won a couple of competitions writing essays, but probably had a bit of help as well, but still ... and they weren't too bad. So yes, Ag Science was really the one that I preferred and we had a good time doing Ag Science. We used to visit the farms around the district and write stories – we had to write an essay after doing a trip which we ... one weekend, we did a trip up through the country and saw people making silage and various things on farms, and then we had to write an essay about it. And my essay got a prize and appeared in the local 'rag', as they say. (laughs) At least Mum had something to cut out!

An early claim to fame.

Yes, the *only* claim.

Mention of your mother: were your parents involved much in your education? At home, or involved with school?

Not really. Dad was always busy and Mum really didn't play much part in education, really she didn't. So no, they weren't a lot. We didn't really have much – well, much pressure from home, really. We were always encouraged to do our job, but neither Mum nor Dad were ... I don't think they were scholars. Certainly Mother wasn't a scholar, but she always fed us well and looked after us well. But no.

Did you have homework to do?

Oh yes, there was always homework. That was a big problem, especially from Mylor to Adelaide, that was always a problem because it was so late at night. But yes, we always had plenty of homework to do, and got it done. But I used to mainly do mine early in the mornings. I was always an early riser so I did all my work early in the morning.

And work on the train coming down ...?

Yes, a bit but not much because there were too many (laughs) kids on the train, of course, so it was almost a social gathering.

I thought you were going to tell me they were such dedicated students, you were all working hard.

(laughter) No, I'm afraid not.

So you got up to a few things?

Oh yes, well, you always get up to a bit of mischief, I suppose, but particularly going down to the city we were always in these little dogboxes which held – well, I don't know how many they were supposed to hold, perhaps a dozen people; but we'd try to get one or two or three or maybe half a dozen and keep the others out as we got down closer to the city. But it was really good fun. You had the boys – and the girls, of course – coming from Bridgewater and then a few at Aldgate, a few at each little stop along the road, and so you'd pick up mainly kids on that early morning train.

Were the schools – I'm thinking of both primary and secondary and the Tech High – were they mixed?

Yes, yes, they were all mixed schools and so, yes, you lived with both sexes and grew up with them, just naturally.

And the secondary school more so than primary school, but corporal punishment ...

Oh, yes.

I won't ask you what pranks you got up to –

No.

– but did you get punished?

No. Look, in secondary, no, I haven't any problems with secondary; I was evidently reformed by that time. But I did get into a little bit of trouble at primary school, mainly at the Orroroo School, the first school I went to, when I probably was not a good student and not a good person and so I got stood in the rubbish bin a few times.

You mentioned that other instance: I thought it might have been a one-off.

No, it meant that I didn't learn anything for that morning. Which I thought was a waste of time. But it wasn't very nice having to stand in the rubbish bin, just the same.

When you say you're standing in the bin, presumably there's rubbish in the bin?

Yes, a bit of rubbish in the bin plus me, and I'm the biggest part of the rubbish, I'm afraid, I was not a very popular boy. And I don't know really that I did anything to warrant that, except I might have pronounced the teacher's name wrongly, that probably is what happened.

What size would the bin have been, do you recall that? You're you talking more than a waste paper bin.

Well, it only just got my feet in it. I think it was a half a kerosene bucket was what I remember of it, and it was in the corner. But the problem is they could all see me and that wasn't very pleasant. So I do remember being stood in the bin and that's about the only punishment I really do remember having.

Did other children suffer the same punishment?

I don't know, I suppose ... Look, I don't remember seeing anybody else. I must have been a very, very bad person because I don't remember seeing others in that rubbish bin. (laughter)

Do you remember your parents heard about it?

I don't know that they did. I'm certain I didn't tell them but they might have got to know about it, and that might explain one little bit of a hiding I got at one time. But I don't know for sure.

I thought there might have been something a bit more substantial, for disobedience or smoking cigarettes or something.

No, I didn't do that sort of thing. But no, I think it was because I ... I'm pretty sure it must have been because I called the teacher 'Miss Paloney' instead of 'Miss Moroney', and I think that's the only thing I could have done.

And nothing at Port Lincoln and ...?

No, no, Port Lincoln and Adelaide Tech High had no problems, really. Yes, I tried to behave myself and I had no troubles. Port Lincoln was my favourite school, left the best impressions, really.

Well, you mentioned this letter from Mr Tregenza saying you should go on: did you discuss with your parents, your Mum and Dad, about what you should do for a future?

Well, look, I didn't have much encouragement, really, because Dad always said that he had his plans for me. And so when I left the Adelaide Tech the headmaster, Mr Moyle, he said, 'I can get you a job anywhere you would like,' he said, 'I've got several jobs going in banks and other places,' and he said, 'whatever you would like to do,' he said, 'I can get you a job if you're interested.' So I went home and told Dad and he said, 'Oh no, you tell Mr Moyle that I've got plans for you,' and so that's what happened. And I did that, as I was told, but I don't know why I didn't have enough gumption to move out and go and do that, but I didn't. And so from then on I was set to work digging out the scrub and clearing the block of land so that perhaps it would be worth more money when it was sold or maybe we could grow a bit more vegetable, a few apple trees and that sort of thing. So I spent a year or so just digging out scrub and clearing land and cutting wood.

On the Mylor property?

On the Mylor property, yes, before I decided that I had to do something and earn some money. And then jointly my Dad and I took over the Mylor Garage as a proposition, and while he travelled and still earnt a bit of money I ran the Mylor Garage.

So you got to Leaving with Technical High School.

Yes.

Did you consider going on?

Yes, I would like to have gone on. I wanted to do Veterinary Science or one of those things, but it didn't happen, I wasn't allowed to do that; I had to help at home because there was no money.

Tape 2, Side B

Polden Tape 2, Side B, on the 13th February 2006. Just to round out the story so far, for today, let's just look at the Tech High situation: what did you study there and what was your interest there?

Well, I did the general course, if I remember rightly, and there were just the two, the general or the commercial, and I did the general. And in that we did, of course, Maths and English and

sciences – Physics and Chem[istry] – and also we did a session at the School of Mines and I did Fitting and Turning. And I was interested in doing things with my hands and fitting and turning was one of those things which just fitted in quite nicely with what I liked doing. And so we made several things on the lathe and in other ways. And that was quite a pleasant time, I did very well in that section, Fitting and Turning, I was quite a bright student. But in the other subjects, English, which Mr Moyle taught, he was rather severe for me and I didn't ever sort of settle down very well (laughs) under Mr Moyle. But the Maths, that came, that was all right. Physics and Chem were all right. But I did have trouble adapting because the teaching methods were so different from Port Lincoln to the Adelaide Tech. Oh, dear! My system of doing Maths, some of the ways that I did Maths was not acceptable at all to the Adelaide Tech ideas so I had to change various things and the first couple of terms were very iffy, I didn't really do very well in some of the subjects in the first two terms, and it was a bit of a shock really because I really had no trouble at Port Lincoln. But in the third term things started to crystallise and so I passed the Leaving exam, but only scraped through I guess, but at least I passed so got the subjects required and got through that.

Was that the QC[2] year?

No, the QC was the primary school, and then we did the Intermediate which was two years, or which I did in two years.

Sorry, I meant the Intermediate year.

A lot of them evidently did the Intermediate in three years but I did it in two years, and then came and did Leaving at the Adelaide Tech in the next year. So yes, I got my Leaving and passed, so that was it. But yes, I would like to have gone on, and in fact I wanted to do ... I asked my Dad if I could go and do Engineering at school but he said, 'Oh no, no,' and so I said, 'Can I go to Roseworthy?' And, 'No, no, you can't go to Roseworthy. No,' he said, 'I want you to do a few jobs here and then,' he said, 'I've got plans for you.' So his plans really were not ... I think they were only to get me to earn a bit of money to pay off some of those big debts. (laughs) So not good.

Perhaps more the School of Hard Knocks than the formal school of education.

That's for sure!

Just to clarify it for me: how many years at the Tech High?

Just one year.

Just the one year. You did two at –

Two at Port Lincoln.

[2] QC – Qualifying Certificate.

– Port Lincoln, so you did your Leaving ...
In three years.

In three. That's right. So what year did you leave school?
Nineteen thirty-four, I would say.

And then into the working life on Mylor ...
On the Mylor twenty acres, yes.

Yes, went on the property and then in the garage.
That's right.

That's probably a good point to pause for now, and then we can pick up a bit on the next instalment if you're happy to go on.
All right, that's fine by me. (laughs) Yes, I'm not suffering unduly. It's interesting, really.

We're getting there. (break in recording)

END OF SESSION.

An interview conducted by Bernard O'Neil with Mr Errol Polden of Toorak Gardens, South Australia, on the 17th February 2006, continuing the interview of 13th February 2006 in regards to Mr Polden's life and times. And, Errol, we're going to have another session today to follow more of your story through, and we finished last time about the end of the Adelaide Tech High education experience and you were about to start work at Mylor, so perhaps we can ...

Yes. Well, that's right, too. And I started work at Mylor, we took over the lease of the Mylor Garage, my father and I – R and E Polden, Mylor Garage – and so I worked there for a few years. But in the wintertime I always thought it was a bit too cold and wet and chilly so I actually did a course at the School of Mines and Industries on wool classing. And then, in relation to that, I used to go out during the winter months doing wool classing on sheep stations, mainly up the North but a few times down the South-East as well, and that continued over the few years.

If we could just backtrack a little bit, we should really get a couple of dates down. How good's your memory on when you started work in Mylor, at the garage?

I guess it was in about 1935, in that period, when we took over the garage. I only had just left school and my father always reckoned that I was going to help him actually on the farm, but the farm wasn't producing much at that time and it was a very small place and so we took the lease of the garage and so I went there and more or less stayed out of school. And he was away, travelling, through the week and I, in conjunction with a chap whom we hired, ran the garage and service station. And so that, as I said, it continued; but in the wintertime – a day a week or whatever it was – I went down to the School and did Wool Classing. And so that was just ... I think perhaps it might have been just one day a week for most of that year that I did it, and I can't remember what year that was, but that would have been probably about '36. And then I went out in the sheds, just for a month or two through the wintertime, and back in the garage

after that. But we had this employee who did the bit of mechanical work and took over whilst I was away.

That's what I was wondering, the assistant there, the chap helping, what was his role?

Well, he ... actually, he was a motorcycle fiend and he used to actually compete in speedway races and that sort of thing in the city. And he worked for us as a mechanic and a general hand, he served the petrol, he more or less ran the place in conjunction with a sister of mine just whilst I was away; and when I was at home of course I ran the place in conjunction with the mechanic chap.

Were you doing any of the mechanical work?

Oh yes, I used to be down the pit and work sometimes all night on (laughs) the local bus. The local bus man had an old bus and he used to travel from Mylor, Bradbury, down to the city. And this bus broke down one day and so had it towed into the garage and we put it over the pit and we worked all night on that bus, pulling out the pistons and putting in a new big end bearing and things like that, and got him going in time to get his bus running next morning (laughs) at eight o'clock. So they were the days when one did these funny things, really, working in the damp pit all night – I'll never forget it, and probably contributed to my arthritic problems which I developed a bit later on and which put me in bed for twelve months. So it was quite a busy time, really, studying and running the garage and on occasions, as I said, working all night.

Were you learning on the job?

Oh yes, I did. I had a – let me see, who was it? – International Correspondence School or some such place, and so I signed up with them to do their motor mechanic's course. Oh yes, and I used to do a few exams (laughs) after each week or month or whatever it was, I had to keep my assignments going with this business. And the books actually which they sent me, quite an array of books which they sent me out each year, and I still have them upstairs. I don't know whether they'd be much good these days, probably the motor cars have changed too much. But it was interesting, and so I put myself through a course of Engineering Studied with the International Correspondence School.

And then learning off the assistant?

Yes, yes. Bill was quite good and we got on very well together and I was able to learn from him too, that's right. But we worked together pretty well, really. But it was quite handy.

Do you remember his name?

Bill Pfeiffer.

... ... have on the record.

He was actually quite prominent in motor cycle riding. And he died only a few years ago.

Did you maintain connection with him?

Yes, he lived in the same house up there, halfway between Mylor and Aldgate, and I used to keep in touch with him quite a bit.

I want to ask you a little bit, Errol, about the business side of things, but before I do you made a comment leading into this discussion that your father had sort of expected you to help on the farm and so on.

Yes.

It was about twenty acres or so, wasn't it?

Well, that particular farm, yes, in Mylor. But of course I think the whole reason that I came into this world was to help on the farm which he was running when I was born up around Orroroo, you see, in the dusty North. But then he left that farm because of the family relations and always reckoned that I was there to help him. And so when I left school he wanted me to clear certain areas of land. And we had apple trees and we had market garden and that sort of thing and so we did get a bit of income from the land. And then of course he thought that if we cleared a major portion of the land we could run cattle. But I always thought that the place was too small for that, so that is why when I had trouble medically I couldn't do much but I did build some poultry sheds, and so I put up a poultry unit and that all stemmed from the problems which I had at the time.

I was wondering, in terms of the Mylor property, whether it was possible that you could have made a go of it.

No, not really, not as the way Dad ... We ran pigs, we ran quite a lot of pigs, and milked just a few cows, and we had the garden itself, but really it was never an income for a family on that property.

And I suppose with the debt situation that you described last time with your father, it was not possible to take on land or ...

No, not really. But after I'd built and got my poultry unit running, things changed quite a bit because a chap came along who really wanted a poultry farm and he wanted to buy the property because of the poultry farm. So my father very kindly sold the property (laughs) to him and I lost my poultry.

Where does that fit in the sequence with the garage and so on?

No, we had given the garage away at that time. When I was sick, or not able to work, we relinquished the lease on the garage and so then I ... as I said, I put up this poultry unit because it's something which I perhaps could do, struggling around the place, and that's where the poultry business all started, really.

We'll probably come back to that, but we want to look a bit more at the business of the garage, and I'm just wondering how did you run your ...? Was your father about – when he *was* about – was he about the garage helping, or ...?

He was there at weekends. He really didn't do anything in the garage himself, I must admit. The least undoubtedly would have been in his name and certainly he took care of paying the bill each week; otherwise, there wasn't much paid out. (laughs) But we made it pay, I'm sure we did, but I didn't see ... I didn't do the books.

Were you involved in running the business?

Only in that I sold stuff and entered it all up and took the money and put it in the bank, and that was the end of that, I didn't do any more than that.

Dad did the bookkeeping ...?

Dad did the bookkeeping and ... well, he and his helpers. He had a ... well, one of my sisters actually did a bit of it, so it was pretty well a family concern, yes.

Was it a partnership or anything of that type?

Oh, yes. Well, it was regarded, it was a partnership, it was taken on as a partnership and it was always advertised and written up as R and E Polden, yes. So it was a partnership in terms, but never as far as the money was concerned! (laughs) I wasn't very strict on my father; I always took it, as he said, that I should help him. Then I *did* help him, and that was the story.

Well, you described last time that your father wanted you to help in order to pay off the debts and so on.

Well, that's for sure. He obviously had quite a few debts, and there were names mentioned which I mustn't mention, but there were names mentioned as persons who wanted to be paid interest or whatever it was, and so we had to send them a cheque and more or less regarded all that as my wages, you know, and we just sent it off to pay his debts because he suggested that if they weren't paid he could be in real trouble and he made it fairly clear that he didn't really want to be in trouble, (laughs) so that was that.

How viable was the garage as a business?

Oh, look, I think probably it was quite all right for one person but I don't think it was a business for a family or two people, no. One person could have lived on it, I'm sure, but I don't think that any more than that really could have, it wasn't terribly viable. Maybe if ... It was a hard time, I suppose, the start of the Depression, and no, I don't think that you could call it a flourishing business. But obviously we made something out of it and we paid a mechanic and we must have got a bit back, yes.

Were there competitors in Mylor?

Not in the town, no, no, not in the town. That was the only garage in the town.

Well, how much traffic would there have been? Particularly given that it was Depression times.

Oh, look, it's pretty hard to remember. But a lot of the traffic was still horse-drawn. But then we had ... the village, the area then was a market garden area, and so the market gardeners, they

all – well, most of them had trucks. Some of them still used the horse and cart. And I remember there was an old Mr Cooper and they had the General Store, but he used to have his horses and the cart and he'd toddle up the Mylor hills and obviously down to somewhere – Adelaide, maybe – even those days. So it was early, I guess one would say. But generally speaking the gardeners had their trucks, so the business was mainly with the market gardeners, selling petrol and oil and repairing their trucks and that sort of thing. And the local bus driver, as I said, we used to look after his bus for him. And so there were just odds and ends. And we sold paint and general things, so that it was ...

Was it a bit of a general store as well?

A bit of a general store as well, really – only in the hardware field, yes, a bit of hardware and the mechanical repairs and petrol, oil, that sort of thing.

Not like today where the garages sell paper and bread and milk and so on.

No, we didn't have any bread. And of course we had a local baker, we had a local storekeeper and the local Post Office, so we sort of did a bit of the rest of it.

It's interesting to get an insight into a garage in the '30s. It's also interesting, Errol, you said at least one of your sisters was working there.

Yes, yes, my elder sister, she always helped a bit. But ultimately she got herself a job and then of course married so we lost her services. But she did help, she used to help do the books. So yes, it was really a family concern, that's right.

So was she about the garage during the day and so on?

No, not really; just at times she'd be there. If I wasn't there she'd perhaps go down, but otherwise leave it to Bill.

What was her name?

Elsie.

Elsie. We got a little bit of a family history last time, not all of it, as in the ... So it's a little bit unusual, in one sense, to have the sister working in a garage, but as you say, it's not really in a garage environment, it's more of a bookkeeping and so on.

No, she just helped with the books and otherwise there were mainly Bill and I in the garage and that's the way it was run.

Did you think about doing any of the bookkeeping or doing any study for bookkeeping or anything?

No, I didn't really. No, I was busy learning how to repair motor cars at the time.

Do you remember how the day was structured, what sort of times you kept and number of hours you worked?

Look, I don't know too much about it. But I was always one was able to get up in the morning and that was no problem; and of course, as I said, I went to school, left home about half-past six in the morning so getting to the garage for seven in the morning was no problem, and I guess

that's about what happened. I would guess I had to get down to the garage at seven-thirty in time to get the traffic going through to the city for the day. Quite a few of the people who lived around the area drove to Adelaide to work, and so you'd hope that they'd be going through from half-past seven onwards so we sold stuff about that time and kept open until later in the evening. But I think really there might have been time limits on what you could do or when you could sell – I'm not sure about that, I've lost track of it now.

It tended to be a time when things were regulated and so on.

That's right.

And how did you get on for supplies? You mentioned petrol and oil, where did that come from?

That was no problem, that came from the city in tankers – the petrol – and a tanker would call in every so often and fill up the underground tanks with petrol. And the old pumps, of course, were not electric, they were hand-operated. And so we'd carry on from there. But supplies were mainly brought up from the city; we didn't have to go to the city to get them unless something was urgently needed when we would perhaps go to the city to get it, but not much.

And you worked there for what, a couple of years?

I suppose, let me think. I'd have to go through the old records. But probably we would have had that for something like five years, I would say. Yes, I would say about five years. And so I was there at that time. But, as I said, I was away in wintertimes, just month on end, and back home again. So it broke it up a bit.

You mentioned the wool classing and –

Yes.

– from the business point of view I wanted to know if you wanted to pursue things like bookkeeping or running the business. But you'd taken up further studies, so to speak, in wool classing.

Yes, that's right.

How did that come about?

I don't know, I just had a ... Well, I suppose I was more inclined to work on the land or that sort of field than in a garage, I guess that's the story, and so I did wool classing and thought, 'Oh well, it's more akin to what I would wish to do.' And I went out and did a bit of that work for a few years until hobbled, and then it stopped. But I quite enjoyed going out like that and having a month away in the wintertime when, as I said, Mylor was very cold and very wet. And we'd often have the pit half-full of water, we had to bail that out. (laughs) So not good.

I suppose I'm putting a fine point on it, Errol, but it's just interesting to know where that spark for wool classing came from.

I don't know really how that came about.

Did you know any wool classers or anything?

No, I didn't know any wool classers. But of course we still had the family on the farm and the Polden relatives were all up – and perhaps my mother's relatives also but they were on New South Wales on the farms – but I used to spend school holidays on the farm and so I suppose that's where that all happened. I sort of grew up spending school holidays on the farm helping uncles with their jobs, and that's probably where the wool classing came from.

So you'd be sent from Adelaide to Orroroo.

Yes, that's right.

Yourself, and what about ... any of your sisters?

No, just me. And they'd stay at home and help Mum. But no, I used to be sent up to help one of the uncles quite regularly each year, holidays, and so I grew up following the harrows and the plough and then trying to reap wheat (laughs) on the old harvesters and then winnow it, and that was quite a job. So the old, old way of farming was quite the thing those days. There were no tractors on that particular ... well, those two farms that I worked on.

How did you feel about going up there and ...? I can imagine as a youngster the first time or two were exciting.

Yes, the first years were quite exciting but after that it used to be quite a bore, I must admit, quite a, I thought, drudgery. And particularly walking along behind a team of horses and half a dozen harrows across the dusty ground, (laughs) and I'm afraid that didn't appeal to me greatly, but there you are: one of those things which I guess they thought I should do.

Did you go up by train?

Sometimes. Other times I'd be picked up and taken up. But mainly by train or whatever it was that took us up there. And of course, as I said, Dad was travelling for quite a few of those years and he used to travel in that area so that I'd get dropped off up there and probably picked up afterwards to come home.

It's interesting boyhood experience.

Ooh, yes. Well, one learnt to ride a horse and do the ordinary farm chores, that's right.

There's that and, as I say, relating it to the wool classing, it sparked off a bit of an interest there.

That's probably how it started, probably why.

Yes. And the course you did – when I say 'course', ... study at the School of Mines.

Yes, that's right.

Does anything stick in your mind about trundling off to the School for ...?

No, that seems to be relatively easy those days. After going to school on the train it was no problem to get down to the city, but by that time I was able to ride the motorbike and that sort of thing so I got to Wool Classing, that was fine.

A small group of people in the ...?

Yes, there wasn't a big group. And I think it was about ... carried on for three years, and after the first year then part of the course was out doing work on a sheep station so that you did your practical work on a sheep station. And they were really ... well, I quite enjoyed that when we were up in the bush, you know, and working, I suppose, fairly hard, really. It was quite hard work. Well, it was *constant* work, I don't know that one can call it *hard*, but it was physical work. Then of course you would gradually get into the wool classing which was not so physical, but initially you were more or less just a rouseabout – first year, anyhow – and after that you did do a bit of wool classing and so that you got into the wool classing process. But it was interesting, we had some very ... I had some interesting times, no doubt about that.

You mentioned doing the task of a rouseabout for a year, and it might be helpful for the family record: what did the rouseabout do?

Oh, he did the skirting, he prepared the fleece.

In the shearing shed?

Yes, in the shearing shed. He just prepared the fleece for the wool classer. He did the skirting and the rolling and that sort of thing. And there were other rouseabouts who used to pick up the fleece, but the School of Mines students were all working on the wool, sorting the wool, maybe sorting the pieces and the bellies and preparing the fleece and then that was handed to the actual classer of the time to put into the right bins. So I suppose physically it wasn't a very ... not really hard work, but because the people who picked up the fleeces on the boards and swept all the floors, they did most of the hard work I guess and the students, they just walked around the table preparing the fleece and rolling it up ready for ... and putting it on the desk or on the table for the wool classer to place and sort according to quality. And that happened, you did that entirely for the first year or so, and then you got into doing a bit of wool classing yourself.

So in a sense it's almost like an apprenticeship that you're learning by hands-on and ...

It was an apprenticeship, pretty well: you're learning by hands-on, and of course you're paid as one of the members of the team. And some of the ...

End of Tape 2

Tape 3, Side A

Polden interview, Tape 3, Side A, and 17th February 2006. Errol, you were just about to describe a situation with a pastoralist, I think, in the wool classing work experience situation.

Yes. I was thinking of one, his name was RJ Warnes and he was Coomooloo and Sturt Vale Stations, he owned those stations. And we did that, those two sheds, and then when Mr Warnes paid the shearers and the shed hands and the wool classer off after the clip was off, he produced a few bottles of whisky and of course everybody was given a glass of whisky with his pay

cheque. And of course I didn't know at that stage what to do with a glass of whisky, but I had no trouble because there were a few shearers there who were quite happy to drink it for me.

You had some assistance.

Had *plenty* of assistance.

So how many people would have been working then, a big crew?

At Coomooloo? Yes, I think that they had around about twenty shearers and of course there were a dozen or more shed hands, it was quite a workforce.

These would be people going round from property to property.

Yes, yes, they used to do that all their ... it was their job, for years. But I just joined in for the month off shearing and then home to work on the garage again.

And the family properties there, were they just the family running them and getting these people on contract, so to speak, as they needed them?

Yes, I think so. Yes, RJ Warnes, he was the owner of Coomooloo and Sturt Vale, and I believe Warnes family still own, well, part of it; I've heard of their names on TV, as you do, especially when there's a drought or something like that on. And other station, Jacobs and Lillicrapps and people like that, they owned the stations and they were there when we worked on them. And some of those stations, there were always problems in getting the full flock mustered and there'd be quite a lot of missed sheep which they'd ask ... well, I stayed back on several of the stations for an extra week and did the sorting and classing of the clip, so just to finish it off after the main lot of employees had gone. But they kept back a shearer or two and I, one person who could class the wool, and just to finish their clip off. So I did that a few times on different places just to fill in the time.

And again, Errol, just for the record here, you're describing working as a wool classer: what did that involve? You mentioned the rouseabout part of it, of the apprenticeship, but what did a wool classer do?

Well, a wool classer actually sorted the wool into categories for the market and they'd sort it into fine wool, medium wool and coarse wool and grades of each, so that you often would have three grades of fine wool and three grades of medium wool and perhaps one or two lines of coarse wool so that you kept the fleece type in a relatively even line, so that people could buy knowing that they were going to get a certain count of wool fineness or whether it was going to be medium-fine wool or coarse wool so that the various categories were able to be bought with confidence in the groups that best suited the end product.

What was happening therefore to the wool? Once it's been classed and sorted, was the buyer coming round to the property, was it going to an auction?

No, it all went into the market and was sold in the auctions in the city. But that all was consigned to the stock agents – you know, Dalgetys, Elder Smith's, Goldsbrough Mort's, so various places.

They'd bale it up and send it down by train or ...?

Yes, yes, some of it ... I remember Harry Ding[?], who was quite a famous man, and he used to run his trucks onto a lot of the stations carting the wool away. And Harry Ding took over from the old mail contractor – can't think of his name offhand – took over from Tom Kruz[?]. And so I met up with Tom Kruz[?] on a couple of wool-classing trips and then Harry Ding. Yes, got transported from Yunta to Coonamore[?} or some station by Harry Ding, (laughs) and so yes, I met up with quite a lot of those old identities in the area.

Have you seen the book of Tom Kruz?

Yes, I have. It was interesting, I was quite interesting in Tom Kruz and Harry Ding and those old identities.

It was a toughish sort of life –

Yes.

– not just for them but for other people in that area.

Yes. Well, Harry Ding was driving us from Yunta to Kurnamona[?], I think it was, Kurnamona Station, and there were two of us in the utility with Ding, and we were travelling quite fast really on this old back track. And suddenly he said, 'Ooh! Hang on!' And we hung on. But then we hit a spoon drain and, boy, our heads hit the roof and the utility bounced probably three feet off the ground, I reckon. And we stopped and our cases, which were in the tray of the utility, had been thrown out, they were scattered back along the track, and the other passenger who was beside me, he'd hit his head on the roof so hard that he was just about out to it. And of course the driver, he hung on, but – oh, boy! – I don't know how we survived that particular episode. (laughs) But that's Harry Ding: he just thought of this spoon drain just a little bit too late.

That leads on in a different direction but I think it's worth just pursuing for a moment, Errol: firstly, accidents or incidents in the bush. Did you get called on to use your mechanical skills?

Oh yes, I suppose I did too, really. Yes, we used to have to do a bit of repair work. And I did, quite often we were called on, I helped and got some of the shearers mobile, that's right, I did. Oh, of course you don't remember these things too well but yes, I remember from Midgeroo[?] Station, I think that was up near Coburn, and one of the shearers broke down on that station and we got him going again, and I got that car going for him, so ... Oh yes, we did, we helped a bit.

What were the ... how were the shearers getting around, what were they using?

Motor cars or else they'd travel by train and get picked up from the station, yes. But mainly old cars, yes.

Motorbikes?

Didn't see too many getting there on motorbikes because they were there for a month more or less on end, and so they usually came ... quite often they'd travel together as a team and so they'd probably ... three or so would come in one car.

Did you see not necessarily the shearers but other people, maybe, on pushbike or horse or even walking? Do you recall?

No, I don't recall anybody coming to the stations in that ... It was a bit, I think, more civilised. They'd got out of the pushbike era at the time I was there. So we used to go riding, we used to ride quite a bit on the stations, but only more or less out and you'd go out at weekends mainly to help muster sheep. But only as a complimentary job, it wasn't a job that you were paid to do. But if you were interested you could always go out and join in.

There wasn't much else to do on the station.

No, well, that's right. You might as well be out helping and looking around as ... Oh, we used to do a bit of shooting, I must admit, and often we'd go shooting, but there wasn't much else to do. So it was quite nice to be able to join in and help muster at weekends.

Where did you learn to shoot?

Oh! Well, I always had a gun, I always had rifle. When I was about knee-high to a grasshopper I was given a rifle for a birthday, and so I had a rifle pretty well all my life. And of course those days ... things were a bit tough those days, and so you'd often have to – well, no, I shouldn't say that you would 'have' to; but certainly you didn't waste. If you shot a pigeon or if you shot a parrot – which one wouldn't do today, but if you did that, which those days I think we didn't really think it was much of a crime to shoot a parrot because they were eating the apples anyhow and we needed those apples to live – and so if you shot a parrot you would always dress it and Mum would cook it for lunch. And so really a pigeon or a parrot was always quite a nice item to drop. (laughs)

That's in the Mylor ...?

Yes, in Mylor. And of course out in the bush if we could get a kangaroo, well, some of the cooks were really very, very good. One, Len Cunningham, he was a lovely cook and he'd always tell us, 'Ooh, if you get a kangaroo bring some steaks and the tail home and I'll use it up.' And he used to make very nice kangaroo tail soup and he used to cook the steaks, he was very good. So you certainly didn't waste the food, you didn't waste a kangaroo.

How would you get the kangaroo back to the ...?

Ah well, you'd toss it on a horse or bring home half of the kangaroo or a bit of the kangaroo, you didn't bring the whole thing back, but take his hindquarters off and bring those back.

Someone knew how to cut it?

Oh, yes. Well, we used to skin it. You know, it was pretty rough, but no problem.

You personally?

I helped, oh yes, oh yes.

Again, how did you learn to skin an animal?

I don't know how I learnt to do that, but we grew up skinning rabbits. You'd go out trapping rabbits or shooting rabbits, and of course you didn't throw a rabbit away unless of course it was infected with hydatid or something, so you'd bring the rabbit home all skun and cleaned and that would be lunch one day.

Again, putting a fine point on it, but the rabbit situation, would that be at Mylor or ...?

Yes, mainly at Mylor. But of course we used to go shooting out in the bush too, but not so many rabbits there. But no, I used to quite enjoy shooting a bit.

What about when you were living in Adelaide or the suburbs of Adelaide? Did you go out rabbit-shooting in the Hills and things like that?

Yes, we used to, but not early, not in those early days, I don't remember much shooting in the early days. Although Dad's always had guns and rifles in the house so we've grown up with those in the house all our lives, so they were there. But we used to, if we went of course up to the farms, well, then we'd always have the guns and we'd go shooting. Yes.

So you got given a gun as a youngster?

Yes, I got given a gun I don't know how old I would have been, but certainly only a schoolboy. Not a gun; I should say a rifle, a single-shot ...

But as a small boy, a .22?

Yes, .22 rifle.

And someone would provide you with the bullets and the pellets and so on?

Oh yes, they were always about the place, you could always find a packet of bullets.

What about your sisters, did they learn to shoot?

Oh no, they didn't shoot, no, they were sisters and Mum was a very refined lady, she didn't again encourage girls to shoot. No, that wasn't really done.

And presumably therefore Mum didn't shoot?

No.

Or not that you saw.

No, no. (laughter) Didn't ever see Mum ...

And what about Dad?

Ah, yes. Actually he won a few trophies in rifle shooting in the Orroroo Rifle Club so he must have always been keen on shooting.

That's what I was wondering. And you graduated from a .22 up to the ...?

Oh yes, we had a 3220 and a something else, bigger rifles. And of course we had the shotgun, a double-barrelled shotgun. But I didn't use that much. But we had those all those years.

Of course, these are for the times necessary skills, particularly when you're up bush.

Yes, you need to be able to use ... you know, you really need to be able to get yourself something to eat, and if you had a gun you're pretty right doing that, no problem.

How did you get on for supplies when you were in the bush? I'm thinking there you're describing a trip in the car when you hit the spoon drain, for example: you hade to carry all your provisions with you?

No, we didn't, because we were heading for the station, you see. So we had all of our clothes and sleeping pack with us, and they're the things that got tossed out of the tray of the utility. But we didn't have food, that was all supplied on the station.

And looking back, did you have any scary incidents or hazardous situations? What if, for example, you'd all been knocked out in the spoon drain and you didn't have food?

Yes. Well, that's right. Look, that could have been quite serious, that episode. But fortunately it wasn't, we were lucky. We just got back in the car and we had to put the battery back in its right spot and pick up all the luggage and the bits and pieces that came out of the luggage and get ourselves together and climbed back in and went on. We got up to Coomooloo – I think it was Coomooloo; Coonamurra or Coomooloo – no problem at all, except for one little mishap. No, we were pretty lucky, we had no major problems in that respect and that was the only episode in a motor car that was a bit dicey.

Because even if you're travelling just short distances, and depending on the time of the year and the weather and so on you can get caught out.

Oh, yes. Certainly we learnt to respect the country, there's no doubt about that, because, as you say, you can get caught and after a rain you'd find the creeks awash and you couldn't get across and you had to learn to respect them. And we just grew up, always if there was water in the creek we would walk across the creek before we started to drive across to make sure that we were right to get across. And of course you had to be very careful because the creeks came down so quickly and you could ... if you were out of the car you could hear the creek coming probably – oh, I don't know – half a mile at least before it got there, I would think. Well, look, I've never stepped this out, but quite a time before it got there you would hear the roar and you would wonder just what this might be, and then somebody would suggest, 'Oh, the creek must be coming down.' And yes, probably five or so minutes later down would come the first trickle of water and then a wall of water with logs and stumps and rocks all tumbling down in front of it. It was quite, quire scary really, and if you were in the middle of the creek and it came down you wouldn't have much hope.

It can happen. We tend to think of the desert region or bush region as being dry, but it gets a lot of rain.

Oh no, the problem is you have a thunderstorm in one spot and whilst it might be relatively dry where you are a couple of miles away, if they've had a thunderstorm, that creek could come down quite a banker and trap you.

Thanks for your comments on that little aspect of going bush, so to speak. We can pick up again now in the flow of the story, because this came out of talking about wool classing and being in the bush. You were saying earlier, Errol, you were running the garage and doing the wool classing study and then going out on the classing activities, classing work: what happened with the garage while you were ...?

Well, that just ran itself and I'm wondering – Bill, he just ran ... he just looked after it for us, and (sound of traffic) my sister would have been down there a bit, and so the garage sort of got on. And Dad was home, he wasn't away all of the time but he was away most of the time travelling. He'd be home each weekend, but I guess really he wasn't away all of every week so I guess somehow or other that all sorted itself out. Whilst I was away he was more at home than he was normally if I had been home.

Do you recall if you made any effort to co-ordinate your absence with him being in Mylor?

No; I mainly took ... if a position was offered from the School of Mines then I would try to take that and Dad would try to fit in. So it worked quite well. And he was quite happy for me to do wool classing, so that worked quite well.

How did you pick up the classing work? You suggest there it's through the School of Mines.

Yes. But I didn't ... it was only done through the School of Mines, really, I didn't advertise or seek employment really in the field, it was all done by the School and they would just ring and say, 'Could you go to a station next week or the week after or some time,' and so that's the way ...

But had the stations approached the School?

Yes, the stations had the School, had approached the School, and then of course the School would try to find a person to go up or persons to go up.

But of course there were wool classing firms and the broking firms and so on.

Yes. Well, mainly it was wool broking, I don't think there were such things as wool classing firms. There were wool classers who used to work individually, and there were shearing contractors, and some shearing contractors maybe would have contact with a classer. But often, I think mainly, the station owner was the person who got the classer. He would have a preference for a classer, and so he would usually have a classer who came back year after year.

When I said 'firms' I was thinking more the Elder Smith Goldsbrough Mort type places where, being agents and so on, they would ...

Yes. Now, Elder's and Goldsbrough's did employ their own classers who worked in their own wool stores, but I don't think those classers ... they employed classers who went out onto pastoral properties and classed the wool in the properties. They were mainly just private citizens who were wool classers and who had contact with a few stations, and they would have probably eight months of the year booked up, each year, returning to the same stations year after year.

So it wasn't, in that sense, seasonal because you're going a fair bit of the year.

No, they would have quite a fair portion of the year booked up each year, from year to year.

How much did you do, then?

Oh, I did ... as I said, I used to go out for a month at a time and sometimes I'd do two months through the, well, late autumn up to the spring period. But not more than two months, I used to just do two or three sheds and that was it.

You'd come back to Adelaide and go back out ...?

Yes, come back to Mylor and go back. Yes, and I did some in the North and some down the South-East for two or three years, or four.

Was it something that could be a full-time ...?

Oh yes, you could. Well, those classers, they were full-time, that's all they did, they were classers. Some of them owned small properties and would go back to the property afterwards, but a lot of them were just purely wool classers.

I'm intrigued by the way you were able to run the garage, do the mechanical work, and be off doing this other activity as well.

Go and do some wool as well. Yes, well, I'm a jack of all trades (laughs) and master of none, that was the problem.

We touched on that. Perhaps we could look at the end of the lease for the garage and turn into your new career. We described last time, by the way, the wartime situation of you not being in ...

Yes. Well, that was the thing that crippled[?] me most was this problem which I had, and that more or less ... I thought, 'Well, maybe I won't be able to work again.' It's quite a nasty feeling to be laid up, not be able to walk for months on end. And so that is what prompted me to put up the poultry unit. And so really the garage I think was let go and the wool classing went by the board because I couldn't walk, and I managed after twelve months or so to be able to get around enough to put up some poultry sheds and start in on poultry. So that's when the poultry unit, that's when poultry first sort of took shape.

So this would be about 1940 or so?

Yes, it was a bit ... early '40s, and I don't know what year that would be. But that's when I started doing the poultry, in about 1940, and then of course I had it running for a few years.

And I'd have to think about that a bit, but long enough to put up a few sheds and get a thousand or so birds going – and paying, paying a bit of money. And then ...

Were they for laying, or ...?

Yes, they were laying birds, purely and solely; but I used to supply, for hatchery purposes, fertile eggs. And then I used to work in with a chap who ran the Scotsburn[?] Poultry Farm at Echunga, and he and I then set up doing a bit of work on equipment. And I used to manufacture this equipment and also produce these fertile eggs, which were hatched down at Scotsburn, and ... look, I had quite a good business with chickens, with day-old chickens. And so, as a junior partner, I got in with him and, as I said, we made this poultry equipment – weaners and this sort of thing – and ...

Mechanical ...?

Well, I used to do the welding and put these things together and we sold quite a few, and that's how ...

So they weren't just for your own ...?

No, not just for our own use. We made them for our own use but we also sold them, quite a few.

So metalwork and mechanical and ...?

Yes. Well, it was all made from angle iron and steelwork, and so we made these cages in tiers, much like the current laying cages. That's the forerunner of that sort of thing. But laying cages were not thought of, those days. But I made these things mainly because of schemes and diagrams which we saw in overseas publications and so we copied that, and I certainly didn't think of that myself but we copied this, and found that it worked in that area very well, having the chickens housed and in these cages until they got to six weeks old, age, and then we would put them out for free range, running.

So you might have a thousand chickens running round free-range?

Yes, oh yes, you'd have a thousand or more, of course, running free-range. And initially you'd start them off from the incubator in a brooder, warm section, and then at six weeks of age or four weeks of age you'd put them in these what we called 'weaner' cages, and you'd rear them for up to six weeks of age in these weaner cages, and then at six weeks or eight weeks we would try to put them out on the ground. So from then on they were in free range on the ground.

On the ground, not in a shed?

Well, yes, small shed at night. They had a shed for shelter, but mainly they were outside, in the open air.

Did you have a problem with things like foxes?

No. Well – oh yes, there was always a problem, but you were able to overcome that with good fencing and, of course, a good rifle.

But of course you couldn't be there all day, every day, watching them.

(laughs) No, couldn't be there at night, that's right. No, look, the foxes did help themselves at times, there was no doubt about that. So we lost a few, but not excessive, no.

Were there other people in the area doing ...?

Yes, there was a few others in the area, and that of course is why *I* started, I guess. There were a few in that area who ... in the early days of poultry, intensive poultry-keeping, and so I guess I just followed suit. But then the work with McKay on this equipment, that was ... at least we did start that, we didn't look at somebody else doing that except in an overseas magazine, I think that's how that all started.

Was it well-paying sort of work, the manufacturing side of it?

Well, I don't suppose it was a wonderful thing, really. We kept our heads ... we paid for our labour and we kept our heads above water and we had a bit to live on, but no, we didn't make a million dollars, that's for sure! (laughs)

You had the chooks going as well.

It was interesting. We had the chooks as well so we kept ourselves alive.

And you mentioned seeing equipment and so on in publications so you're doing a bit of reading.

Oh, yes.

What sort of things? Trade journals, or ...?

Yes, mainly they were, trade journals and industry journals. Mainly published in America. And these days, of course, you do have your own ... I guess, those days ...

Tape 3, Side B

(laughter) The old memory's failing a bit these days, I'm afraid.

Polden interview, Tape 3, Side B. Errol, you were just describing the sort of literature, publications and so on you might look at for information, ideas. Some from America, some from local?

Yes, look, there had to be some local ones, although really I've lost trace of where those came from. But I think generally speaking they were American publications, and they seemed to have the more modern ideas or different ideas. At that stage we were pretty well confined to housing poultry (traffic noise) on the ground, and not putting them up in cages at all. But the overseas people, they were ahead of us in that respect, and that's where I think we saw these things, in the publications from overseas, and so, as I said, we copied them and we found that it worked very well, particularly up in the Hills where it is pretty damp and cold. And we thought that our

chickens did better in a shed in these cages, and then they could go out on the ground, out in the open, when they were more mature.

And other people pick up on the idea?

Yes, they did because we sold quite a few to various places, and I think actually we sold a couple or something to the government at Parafield Poultry Station, and so they tried it out and they did that too, there, and whether we initiated it or not I don't know, but certainly we were fairly early in the scheme of things, that's right.

So you're having contact with other poultry farmers and other people.

Oh, yes. Mainly with McKay, Scotsburn Stud Farm at Echunga. And we worked together, actually.

But were you also getting more involved in, shall we say, agricultural activities?

No, I really was just busy looking after my own little thing and I wasn't really at that stage getting around very much, because I didn't walk very well and I had to use some crutches and so I didn't really get around a lot. But gradually the arthritis problem eased and I was, within maybe three or four years I was getting around, walking, and doing things perhaps normally. But it was a bit hard work, I must admit. (laughs) Getting out of bed in the morning was a real problem.

No, I was wondering whether you were getting into things like Agricultural Bureau and so on, where ... in the area where you start to make more connections with other ...

No, not at that stage. Actually that didn't happen until I got into the Department of Agriculture, and that was a few years after that.

You kept the poultry farming interest going.

Yes, that was my interest.

Your health recovered and ...

The health got better and so gradually I got back into doing a bit more work and getting about the place. There was plenty to do. As things got better I took quite an active part in the local village and was Secretary of the Institute Committee and librarian, and projectionist at our local theatre. (laughs) And so yes, I did quite a bit of that sort of thing.

You were still living on the family property?

Yes, still living on the family farm. And then we ... Dad did sell that place after a few years and we bought another hundred acres just around the other section, around on the Hahndorf Road from Mylor. So that was more challenging, but it was mainly scrub and we had to start clearing that and getting it going.

Just to locate it, are you able to give any of the modern bearings for the property, like a road name or street name?

Look, I'd have to find out what the street name is. It undoubtedly would have a street name there. But it was on what they called the 'River Road' from Mylor, which went from the Echunga side of Mylor and wound around to Hahndorf, so it was on the Hahndorf ... perhaps they call it the 'Hahndorf Road' these days. And so we had this hundred-acre section there, with access to the Onkaparinga River for water.

And did you move the poultry ...?

No, I didn't. We actually developed a dairy on that property, and I only had a few ... you know, I took some of the poultry, but we didn't move any of the housing or anything like that, no.

So this is when you sold off the Mylor property –

Yes.

– you sold off the poultry as well and the cages and the sheds and everything?

Yes. The housing, the property at Mylor, was sold *as* a poultry farm.

I wanted to ask you if you, at that stage, had seen yourself pursuing the poultry farming as a longer-term thing once your health was on the improve and so on, but you sold out and went to ...

Yes. Well, actually, the selling out more or less coincided with my switch to the Agriculture Department. I think it all happened because, as I said, Mr Anderson, Cyril Anderson, called in and he suggested to me that he could use me in his Poultry Section in the Department of Agriculture. And of course having gone through my problems I thought, 'Well, that might be a good idea – at least one has security,' and so that's how that came about, really. I applied for a position in the Department of Agriculture and after some months I had word that, 'Yes, you have a position in the Department of Agriculture.' So that's how I started off as a poultry officer.

So what time is that, what ...?

Well, look, I'd have to look that up again. It'd be in probably about '47 or something like that – '46, '47.

We can get the precise date in due course. But yes, getting an idea of the chronology here.

I don't know that I really would ever be able to find the precise date, but it was probably around about when I started. And I went out to Parafield just initially and worked at the Parafield Poultry Station for twelve months or so before I was sort of sent off into the bush to do my own thing.

So you're commuting to Parafield from the new property?

Yes, I did that, commuted to Parafield from Mylor. And then some time after that we were married and so we then came and lived down in the city, just in a rented flat, and I went to Parafield for a few months from there. And then, as I said, I was sent out into the bush to do my work as a poultry officer and so we shifted to Gawler initially, and after about six months at

Gawler we got a house near Riverton – it wasn't *in* the township; properties or houses were quite hard to find to rent, those days – and we finally found this property which was a lovely old building, house, on a farm at Giles Corner. So we went there to live and I worked from Giles Corner covering the Northern Districts for the Department of Agriculture, and we lived there, as I said, at Giles Corner for, I don't know, probably twelve months; and then we found a house in Riverton and shifted into Riverton. So yes, that's ...

Were you being moved around by the Department?

Well, look, they didn't move me about, no, but they just said, 'We want you to work in the North and find a house and see how you go.' So we did. I sort of came up and ... of course, I went mainly thinking that we would shift up to Jamestown, where there was another Ag Department office. But we couldn't find a house near Jamestown and we found this one at Riverton, so they said, 'Oh, that'll do,' so I set up office near Riverton. And that's where we stayed, really. We shifted from the farm into the township and then we bought a block of land and built a house, and I worked from Riverton for the next twenty-odd years.

We're going to cover, hopefully, some more of that. But going back to joining the Department, and going up to Parafield, you're on a learning curve there?

Look, it *was* a learning curve, and I guess ...

It's unusual that you already had some experience as a poultry farmer.

Yes, I think it was a learning curve as far as the Department was concerned, and I have never been too sure just how all this came together. But, as I said, it was Anderson himself who first mentioned it to me and then I applied for a job with him in mind, and it was a while before I heard anything about it and then I was asked to go to Parafield, take up a job there for the time, which I did and just worked there, more or less as one of their assistants I suppose, and then from there I was told, 'Well, off you go, do your thing out in the bush.' (laughs)

Well, we need to find out a little bit more about what this 'thing' is.

Yes.

But firstly at Parafield ...

Oh yes. Well, that was just an ordinary job helping with the running of the farm – with the running of the hatchery and the poultry and just working on the poultry farm. I guess it was a learning curve, one would say, finding out just how the Department did its business.

What sort of thing did Errol Polden do? You weren't just walking round collecting eggs, for example.

No, he didn't *just* collect eggs, but he helped to feed the fowls and he helped to collect the eggs and he helped to incubate the chickens and he helped in the breeding programs. And those days we used to run an egg-laying competition for the farmers of the area – well, for the poultry breeders of the area – and so he helped with the egg-laying competitions and recording.

And the competition was to ...?

To test hens for their laying ability. And so it was quite a popular process, really. We had entries from all the maybe just little breeders of the state who would want to get their hens tested for egg production. So we'd put each hen in a single coop and test it for twelve months and record each egg that was laid over a twelve-month period. And it was quite a thing, the Parafield egg-laying competitions, it was quite a part of the early poultry establishment, really. And a lot of the early work – of course, the breeders would depend on the results of the competition for their sales, commercial sales of chickens.

So they could say, 'This is the fastest or the best chook and I've bred it,' they could sell more.

That's right. Bruce Block was one of the breeders and he would ... he won the show at least one year and so he really made a bit of a name for himself – and others, of course, too, whose names escape me. But to win the Parafield egg-laying competition was regarded as quite a worthwhile event, you know.

How big an enterprise was it at Parafield, the Department's facility?

They had quite an experimental farm there, and they used to do experimental work, of course: feeding trials and breeding trials and, as I said, the egg-laying competition was run for the general community of the general breeders. But we used to do feeding trials, and of course egg-laying – well, egg-laying was the ultimate thing – whether the fowls lived or died, I suppose, whether the feed was any good. But it was all experimental work, really.

Testing and experimental and –

Yep.

– research. Was it ...?

Well, yes, research. There were research officers and Parafield was their headquarters as far as work was concerned. And so it was always ... it was actually very well-run, Parafield, and they had a Manager, an Assistant Manager, and it was quite well-run. And I worked there I think for probably about twelve months before going out and carrying on the work in the field.

How many would there have been at Parafield?

Oh, how many employees? Look, I don't know, but probably I would say at least half a dozen, you know, six maybe up to a dozen including a manager and the office workers and that sort of thing. We would have had a dozen workers there, yes, I would say so.

And where was the station located?

Near the Parafield Aerodrome, just on the west of the Parafield Aerodrome.

On the Aerodrome side of ...?

It's a big housing estate now, but it was just on the western side of the Parafield Aerodrome, yes.

Thank you, that gives an idea. And you're there for about twelve months.

Yes, twelve months or thereabouts, or eighteen months.

Did you have an expectation when you joined the Department?

Well, that's what Mr Henderson suggested that he would like me to do and so that's how it finished up, yes.

But did you have an expectation that you'd like to work with the Department for ...?

Well, (laughs) yes, my expectation was that it would be something which I quite liked doing, that's the agricultural side of it; and the other was that I really was concerned about problems, health problems, and I thought, 'Well, that's something which I can handle, and if things develop again at least I've got some security.' So it was a bit of a ... I was hoping that that would work, really, because I was feeling very insecure at that time.

But did you expect that you'd stay at Parafield?

No, no, I didn't expect that. I don't think I would have gone there with that expectation. I expected that I was going to get out into the ... abroad and do my own thing, yes.

But once you'd established what your 'thing' would be.

Yes, that's right. Oh, I guess it was mainly to establish how one should do it. To fit in with departmental policy and ideas.

Of course, they were different times then, but you make it sound pretty straightforward: a bloke offers you a job, 'Yeah, I'll take it,' a few months later you're in. Was it that simple?

Well, he didn't actually *offer* me the job but he said, 'I could *do* with somebody like you in my department.'

But he floated the idea and then ...

Yes, and so that's how it started. And I thought, 'Oh well, that's not a bad idea. If I *did* that' – well, mainly it was the security which interested me most, I must admit. And of course I enjoyed that sort of work.

So after your twelve months or so there at Parafield, you're then heading off to Gawler, Riverton, *et cetera*.

Yes, we went off, that's right: went out. And I think the story was, if I remember rightly, that Mr Anderson said, 'Well, yes, you can ...' – oh, he said, 'We want you to cover the North of the state in an advisory capacity, and so,' he said, 'if you can find a house in a suitable location, that'll be okay.' And so that's when we started looking for a house and finally found this one at Riverton which was ... really we would have, we could have settled at Balaklava or Jamestown perhaps preferably, but there was just no house available in those areas at the time, and so the first place we found was Riverton and that's where we stayed.

I would have thought Jamestown was the logical place and the Department might have helped you find a place.

Yes. Well, that is right. Well, no, no, they didn't suggest that, and I don't know that they had ... they *might* have had places, because they had quite a few of their officers, really ... well, I got to know the officers of course all around, Nuriootpa and Jamestown and Balaklava and Kadina, at Kadina and Balaklava as well. But yes, so we worked together pretty well, but I worked from Riverton all that time.

So you're working primarily on the poultry aspect.

Yes, I was supposed to be purely poultry.

Poultry Advisory Officer?

Yes, that's right.

And what was entailed in that work? Because now you're not just ...

Well, that's right. It was a bit ... to start with I really didn't have any specific instructions, and so I looked around and found that having got to know Egg Board personnel, that the big problem as I saw it at the time was the fact that the producers in the country, mainly farmers with just small numbers of hens, they were getting very, very poor grading for their eggs. So their eggs would go in and they'd finish up with, just out of a case of eggs, maybe half a dozen eggs would be graded as first grade and the others would be second or third grade. And of course for the lower-grade eggs they got hardly any money at all, it wasn't worth sending them down. And I thought, 'Well, if I can just get them to brush up on their egg quality, then I'll help them quite a bit.' So I knew everybody who sent eggs into the egg markets and gradually I called on those farmers who had the biggest consignments and worked with them and helped them to get their egg grading to an acceptable level. And of course in general they were – well, without exception I think one would say – they were all highly delighted, really, because they started to ... Mum started to make a bit of money out of the eggs. And so it was really, it helped quite a bit.

And then of course the next problem was bird health and feeding, so I got involved in the feeding programs and the health programs, which was a bit contentious but there you are. But I just felt that in the bush – and I did the West Coast as well – and so that in the bush you do everything; you don't just refer them to an officer in Adelaide if there's some health problem, which at the time would have been the desired thing as far as Adelaide was concerned. But I'm afraid I wasn't that co-operative and I would, hopefully, help them with their problem right then and there.

So ... ... in the farm or the property?

Yes, so I would call, I'd be on the farm, and if I saw a problem, well, then if I could help them I helped them. And generally speaking I didn't have any setbacks, really. It was very good, I had quite a good relationship – well, I think I did – and ...

When you say the 'health problems', are you talking here in general terms of the other animals and so on or are you talking about poultry, or ...?

Well, mainly poultry, mainly poultry. Of course, I did ...

I was just wondering ... ...

It did overflow a little bit because, as I said, I had had pigs and I'd had poultry and I'd had dairy and I had done wool classing, and so really I had a knowledge which was more broad than perhaps it could have been. And I got into a little bit of trouble once or twice, because those days there were two departments: the Husbandry and the Health. And they were run as separate departments, they were very much each to his own, or supposedly. But here I was, out maybe on the West Coast, and if you saw a person with a health problem, well, you couldn't just walk away and say, 'Well, I'll have to get somebody in Adelaide to tell you what to do.' And so I would, hopefully, help them. And it worked very well, really, I had no problem at all. And of course you always had the backup – and I could take blood samples or specimens and get them analysed at the Institute, and so really you had that backup which was really very good – and so really there was never a case where you couldn't really help a farmer. And there were quite some problems: quite a few had tuberculosis in their flocks, you know, and that can be quite nasty. And of course it was a notifiable disease, and if one did the right thing and notified it then they could be quarantined, and nobody liked that. For a farmer that was the worst thing that could possibly happen. And so if you could somehow get them to brush up on their husbandry and keep the poultry away from the pigs and things like that, then you could help them without any real trauma. And the farmers, they want to be helped and they do the right thing; not too many farmers will let you down. That's the way I found it. So yes, we helped them quite a bit. (laughs) And we got into a little – I mean, I got into a little bit of trouble at times, overstepping the mark, and I accept that.

Trouble within the Department?

Yes. Between those two sections, you know, Health and Husbandry. Where do you draw the line?

Which section did you belong to?

Husbandry. And animal health was rather distinct, and not all but some of their officers believed that they were the only ones who were able and qualified to help in that respect. Therefore, you were Husbandry and you had to look after that side of it. And I could never really tell where the line should be drawn, so I didn't drawn the line, I just did it.

Were they vets and so on in the Health ...?

Oh yes, they were.

So there's a little bit of professional ...?

A little bit of, yes, a little bit of professional jealousy, I suppose, yes.

And also there'd be some almost legal, administrative reasons for ...

Yes. Well, I must admit that with some, with tuberculosis, yes, that really was a notifiable disease and it was a veterinary surgeon's job. Technically, that was really so. But you would find that a farmer, if you pointed this out to him, he would immediately do the right thing, he'd get rid of the whole flock, he'd just kill them off and he'd start again. So there really wasn't a big trauma. You didn't need to quarantine them for two years or anything like that, you know, really you didn't. So it worked quite well. But mainly it wasn't ... that was only one of the things which ... you know, isolated, maybe. But those days there were troubles.

Perhaps the main thing that one saw was a problem known as spirochetosis or 'tick fever', and of course the old farmers, they had tick – which they didn't know about, but which were crawling everywhere at night and as thick as they could stick everywhere around the shed – and tick will cause a disease problem and kill poultry pretty quickly. And that was perhaps the biggest problem that I saw was that sort of problem, not notifiable diseases but just tick fever and that sort of thing which can be controlled ... they could control it at the time with a vaccine, and they could certainly control it permanently if they got rid of the tick. So that was the main thing.

I suppose you'd have to be careful there of a crossover, or the potential crossover – I'm not an agricultural scientist or a vet, but you've got cattle tick, you've got tick in the poultry, you've got tuberculosis in cattle and ...

Yes, well, that's right. Certainly with tuberculosis that could affect the pigs, mainly; cattle, maybe; and so that was a problem and you had to certainly be very careful and so used common sense. Tick, I don't suppose the tick really hurt much else except the poultry, they were poultry tick, and I don't think they think that anything else ... they didn't seem to cause any problems with other items. But at the same time they were certainly causing a lot of trouble in the poultry shed, and that was another point which ... Oh, we had troubles, you know. There was a (laughs) case at Balaklava where this particular farmer had real trouble, and he rang the Adelaide office, and so one of the veterinary surgeons and his offsider went to the farm and decided that they should take a bird back for examination at the Institute of Medical and Veterinary Science. So they took two birds and told them that they would be in touch. And a few days after that he rang me at Riverton – somebody had said, 'Oh, ring Polden.' – so he rang me and he told me what was happening with his birds, and I said, 'Oh, sounds as if you've got a bit of tick fever.' And he said, 'What does that look like?' And I said, 'Well, it looks like this. But,' I said, 'if

you're going to be about today, I'm going over to Kadina, I'll drop in.' So I did that, I got there, I opened a bird and it was definitely caused by tick, it was tick fever: there were very obvious symptoms, internal symptoms. And so I said, 'Well, step down to Gawler Chemist's and buy a bottle of tick fever vaccine and on the way back I'll show you what to do with it.' So he did that and on the way back I pulled in and showed him how to vaccinate his birds, and so he went ahead and did that. And several days later he had a call from Adelaide, veterinary surgeon saying, 'Yes, we think we know what's wrong with your birds and we're coming up tomorrow to ...' He said, 'Ooh, don't worry,' he said, 'I've already ... I'm fixed up,' he said, 'Polden called in.' (laughs) And of course I was ...

End of Tape 3

Tape 5, Side A

Polden interview, Tape 5, Side A, 17th February 2006. Errol, you were just describing a retraining program you undertook in Valuation, to become a valuer, and you made a career move to the Valuer-General's Department.

Yes, which was a very foolish thing to do, as it turned out. The difference between Agriculture and the Valuation Departments – just the Departments – was so big, and really it was sad to see.

Different culture and different ...?

It was a different culture, different way of doing things, different rules, different regulations, it was so, so very different. And so – well, the Valuation, as far as I was concerned, was a real shambles of a department – so I then, as soon as I could, I applied for a similar position with the Department of Lands, and that was really very good. And as a valuer in the Department of Lands it was really quite interesting: I did quite a few acquisition jobs. And in the Valuer-General's Department all you're doing is just roaming around and looking and writing notes and writing down what you think a value is as you walked along the street. But in the Lands Department, where you're acquiring properties, it's a very different story and you're dealing with people again. And I must admit that dealing with people was more in my line than dealing with just walking along a street.

... ...

Yes, looking at numbers. But no, I quite enjoyed that, even though it was challenging. I bought all the land that's now the Deep Creek Conservation Park and some of that was relatively straightforward in that if you offered a reasonable price people were prepared to sell, and others were not prepared to sell at any price. And just one or two had had their feathers ruffled by somebody who sort of tried to bounce them, and they weren't going to sell to anybody for any price. And so that was interesting. And I made some really quite good friends. And I bought all the land for the Deep Creek Conservation Park; and I bought quite a lot of land along the coast

for the Coast Protection Board; and I checked on all the government National Parks throughout South Australia, advised on those; and I quite enjoyed that job.

So were you doing the valuation for the Department of Lands –

Yes.

– but there was another department buying the properties, or the land and so on?

Well, the Lands Department was the purchasing agent, but they bought for other departments, yes. But they were the controllers of that whole scheme in those days. And it was very, very interesting, I thought. And you were really dealing with people on a very ticklish subject.

You weren't office-bound all the time, you were out and about.

No, I was out in the bush. And we had, on the Deep Creek area, we had one person who owned most of the scrub in that section and he wasn't going to sell to the government at any price at any time. And anyhow, I got with him and reasonably well, but no, he wasn't going to sell. And so I said, 'Well, sorry, but it's going to be acquired; you're going to lose it one way or the other.' 'No,' he said, 'well, you'll have to acquire it.' He said, 'I'll sell it to you but,' he said, 'I'm not going to do it for that other so-and-so who came down here.' And so we had to go to court for that one. And that was interesting because you had a Supreme Court or whatever they call it, or Land and Valuation Court, and a judge and QCs and probing you for a day at a time. That was daunting, I'm afraid I almost withered under that. But it was interesting. And of course one had to write a big valuation report and put in a price, and then the other person involved whose property was being acquired, he went to see his lawyer and so they got a valuer who could put up a better price, and so you had to argue your valuation against the other fellow's valuation. And in this particular case, in the report which the Justice Wells issued about the whole deal, he used my valuation and reprinted that – I think, as he said, not because he considered it to be the only one, but he had used it anyhow for some reason – and so the valuation was there; but he then decided that he would agree to a price halfway between the other person's valuation and my valuation, so it didn't favour either one of us (laughs) but he did award a bit more money. And really it was quite – I always thought that I was generous, but anyhow in this case that person got a little bit higher price. So it was interesting, and it was good to be involved in that respect. And then I gave it away after that and did some work as a valuer and a land broker myself.

But did you retire at ...?

I retired finally at about sixty-one, I think it was, sixty-two –

So round about 1979, 1980?

– yes, it would have been ’82 or something like that, ’81 perhaps. Anyhow, about that time, about ’80. And so then I worked in my own right, for myself, until I was ... well, eighty-fourth year, and when I got to my eighty-fourth year we decided it was time to retire.

But that’d bring you up to around about 2002?
Yes, about then.

About that, all right. Well, we might pick up on some of that story subsequently, but just to backtrack slightly: you came to Adelaide with Ag Department in ’69, do you remember when you transferred to Valuer-General’s?
No, it would have been about ’75, I think.

’Seventy-five. Okay. And then a short time later to Lands Department.
To the Lands Titles – no, not Lands Titles; Land Department. Or Department of Lands, I think they called it.

Yes, yes. So that would have been a matter of months or a year or ...?
Probably I was there for ...

Valuer-General’s I mean.
Oh, Valuer-General – about one year, I think, and that was ...

About a year, so about ’76 or so to Lands?
Yes. And then I was there till I retired.

So about four or five years at Lands.
Four years I suppose that would have been.

That sort of rounds out that part of it from the Agriculture history point of view, although ’69 to ’75, five or six years in Head Office, you were at Gawler Place and possibly the Black Stump[3]?
Yes, Gawler Place and the Black Stump. I continued to travel to the West Coast when needed, but I also did the Adelaide Hills area. So it broadened the field a bit.

And a bit different working in the city office to working from Riverton, I guess.
Yes, although those days it wasn’t vastly different. You were sort of trusted to do a job and I hope we did the job. And in the Agriculture Department there was a lot of trust and you surely did hope that the trust was rewarded and honoured. But not in the Valuation Department, there was just *no* trust (laughs) in that department. It was very different.

It certainly sounds like you had an enjoyable career overall in Agriculture Department, it went on for twenty-plus years. Almost thirty years.
Yes, I did, I appreciated Agriculture, I quite enjoyed it. Various aspects which one was a bit sad about. But no, in general it was a good job, good life.

[3] ‘Black Stump’ refers here to an office tower located in Grenfell Street, Adelaide.

So was there anything at any time that Errol Polden would think, 'Give this away. Blow the security that I came here for, I'm off!'? Was there a major sticking point?

Well, finally, probably it was ten years later that I was able to give medication away, and I thought then, 'Well, did I do the right thing?' But of course with a young family you sort of think, 'Oh well, at least we are able to provide, and stick with it.' So okay, I stayed on. But oh, there were times: I was offered various jobs. Offered a job at the ... Milling Company at Greenock, and I was offered a job at Noske's[?] Milling Company at Murray Bridge, you know, various things. So you were known, I suppose, a bit.

Did you think seriously about those?

Oh, yes, I did really, I thought seriously about them because I got to know Condor Lauke – *Sir* Condor, as he finished up – really quite well, and we were quite good pals, really, Condor and myself. But I was involved in a pretty broad area and so I thought, 'Well, I think I'll stick with what I know and I'm doing,' so I did. But they offered me jobs, and there you are. But it was interesting.

If you'd taken up those jobs, and indeed in the move to Adelaide, you were no longer Errol Polden working as a one-man-band, you're working with other people.

Things changed, things changed when I left Riverton because that was just all by myself and a one-man-band, as you say, but in Adelaide you're part of a team and so you worked as a team. But it was a good team, it was a happy team, and it was also good to get to know a few of the officers that you were working alongside, so in that respect I didn't mind that a bit. But of course by that time you're sort of ... I guess unless I did something for myself, as I finally did, you're getting a bit too old to transfer to other positions and jobs, so I didn't think of leaving the government any more. But I did have various offers, yes.

It's interesting that you were looking ahead when you came to Adelaide and took up the Valuation course.

Yes. Well, it's ...

Did you plan to work on beyond retirement, retirement age?

Well, yes. I didn't really think that I was ready to retire at sixty-five, and I couldn't see myself just sort of wondering what to do with myself, and so I thought, 'Well, I have to do something.' And I don't know how valuation was ... well, valuation actually came to me because after I left Mylor Dad sold the farm and he was going to retire, but one of his friends talked him into helping him in a land business down at Willunga. And so he sort of went down and helped Verne Somebody-or-other with some work down around Willunga and Mount Compass, and then that led him into doing some valuation work. And when he started this you didn't need to have qualifications, you could sort of get a registration somehow or other, which he did. And so he did a bit of valuation work. And he actually had a contract to do the valuations for the City of Elizabeth, and he had that contract and died suddenly, and so I had thought – when he was

doing it I thought, 'Ah well, that's something which I could do, too.' So that's how the valuation idea came to mind. And of course when he died I then took over and did his job for him and finished it off. So yes, it came about because I suppose my father was involved in it and talking about it and so I thought, 'Well, that's something I can do,' so I did that.

And when did he die?
'Seventy-four.

'Seventy-four. So you were able to pick up on ... finish off the work that he'd been doing.
Yes, I finished off his contract.

What job was that that he was doing?
He was the City Valuer for the township of Elizabeth.

So he was working for the Council, or ...?
Yes, yes. A contract job, and so he was just being paid as he did the job, sort of thing.

Valuing properties in the Elizabeth area and so on.
Yes, that's right, that's right.

So there was only a little bit of work for you to do?
Well, a fair bit. It was twelve months. (laughs)

I asked that as a question because you also worked as a public servant.
Now, that's a bit under the mat, I'm sorry, but I did finish it off for him anyhow.

But out-of-hours work for you.
Yes, that's right.

Well, that probably gives us the starting point for next time.
I don't know about next time.

So you thought this was the *end* of the story? It's only the ...
That's right. (laughter)

I'll put a pause on for today, Errol.
I thought we'd had it. (laughs, break in recording)

Interview with Mr Errol Polden of Toorak Gardens on the 2nd March 2006, continuing the series of interviews in about late February. Errol, when we finished a few days ago we got to the point of around about '74, '76, where you were in the Valuer-General's Department and doing some valuation and conveyancing work, and I think we described the job you were doing to complete your father's work up at Elizabeth –
Yes.

– and that's sort of where we finished. But we'll pick up from there today and perhaps look at your career from the mid-'70s and post-retirement activities and so on.

Yes. Well, in case I didn't mention it, I didn't really enjoy the Valuation Division really much at all, that was not my style really after giving advice to the farmers for all those years and helping them sort of save them money or make a bit extra money; there I was going out and setting figures which would determine their rates that they had to pay for council and everybody else, (laughs) so that didn't appeal very much at all. And the farmers thought that it was a bit odd, I must admit. So then I shifted to the Department of Lands as a valuer, and that was much better work. In fact, I did a lot of valuation and advisory work for the Parks and Wildlife section and the Coast Protection Board, and I bought a lot of the – well, all of the land for the Deep Creek Conservation Park and a lot of blocks of land along the seashore for conservation work, and that was quite good. I thought that was a worthwhile effort. But I must admit that the persons from whom we bought the land at times were not at one with the idea: (laughs) they thought that we should not be taking their land for any public use at all. But anyhow, it was an interesting period and ...

Out of curiosity, Errol, did you get involved in the Monarto ...?

Yes, yes, I did, bought quite a bit of the Monarto land, that's right. And a lot of those farmers were quite happy about it, but a lot were certainly not, and so you always had those who were antagonistic and weren't going to sell or give the government their land at any price, and others who were quite happy to accept what was a pretty good price, really, and they were able to go and reinvest in other land which probably in most cases – well, I would think in all cases they would have bettered themselves, really. So no, there were always those who just didn't want to leave at any price, but with a bit of ... after a while you were at one with them and they saw a reasoning for it and generally speaking we had no trouble at all. But we did have to go to court, I did have to go to court with one of them to buy the Deep Creek area, but he owned all the scrub, all the important scrub, in the area. And I didn't blame him one minute not wanting to sell, but at the same time he was going to clear the scrub and we didn't really want that to happen, and if he had it would have spoilt the whole area, so it was good. But we did have to go to court to get that particular block – that was the majority of the land, really. But that all turned out well. Yes, but at the same time I completed the jobs that Dad had running on contract, and got those cleaned up so that all was clear on those contracts. And so it was a busy time, really. But as well I went off to school and did the Conveyancing course. So then I reckon in around about 1980 period I retired from government service and went out and started up on my own account as a conveyancer–valuer.

Working from home?

Working from home, yes. I didn't set up office and it just was quite pleasant to work from home. There's plenty of space here, and so one worked from home and did quite a lot of conveyancing work. And it was interesting to get to know the conveyancers and meet up with

them in the Lands Titles Office which was done for settlements. That was really quite interesting, but a crowded, busy, noisy sort of a process, Settling Room, but apart from that the contact which one had with the purchaser or the seller was really quite interesting and so I met some very interesting characters and made some friendships which have lasted forever. And it's been good.

Leaving the public service, did you take up this conveyancing role as a new career or a bit more part-time?

Well, I did conveyancing and valuation more or less as a full-time job, but I didn't really ... I suppose I didn't work full-time all the time; I just had jobs as they came in and so that I didn't take a contract job which would have tied me down to a certain job at a certain time, but I did work for councils and I did work ... the normal conveyancing work, which meant that you could be tied up for a month ahead, but I always planned it so that we had time that we could go away and visit the kids, and we also took six months or so off and went overseas, so that I didn't have work flat-out all the time, there's no doubt. (laughs) It was more or less a working holiday, I suppose I always regarded it as.

Not quite full-time work –

No.

– and a bit more than a hobby.

That's right, a bit more than a hobby I must admit, but not quite full-time work.

Did you set out with a plan there, though, that you'd do this for a certain length of time, or just ...?

Oh no, well, actually, I suppose what was always in my mind was that my father was still working at the age of eighty-four. And he was fiercely independent, he would not under any circumstances accept a government handout so that he didn't ever claim a pension or anything like that, he just kept working. And he died on the job, with contracts still running. And I thought, 'Well, if he can work to eighty-four I suppose I can too,' so I sort of thought, 'Oh well, I'll retire when I get to eighty-four if I haven't retired before that.' But it so happened that my daughter, Sue, went back to university and graduated in Law in – it was when I was eighty-two-and-a-bit, anyhow, whatever year that was – and so she asked us if we would go up to her graduation ceremony. But as it happened, we weren't able to get away because I had three or four jobs running which I couldn't sort of pass off, and so weren't able to get away for the graduation ceremony that year; but in the following year she was admitted to the bar and so we decided that was it. So having in mind the fact that we wanted to go up for Sue's admission to the bar in Darwin, we decided that was the time to retire, and I think that happened when I was about eighty-three-and-a-bit, you know – it was in my eighty-fourth year, so that was reasonable.

She graduated in Darwin?

Yes. She had previously done an Arts degree down here, but she went back late in life and did Law.

Law degree. We might cover some of that family history during today, we'll see how we'll go.

We never know, we never know.

So you're keeping your hand in and obviously getting enough work?

Yes. Oh, yes; I could have done a bit more perhaps at times, but at other times I was flat out day and evening, so it was good. Probably if I had been prepared to employ somebody it could have been better, but I didn't really want to get into the employment situation at that age so I did it myself, and what I couldn't do myself I just didn't take on. But no, there were friends and there were relatives and there were also others who heard that I was here and so it went quite well, I didn't have to advertise, I didn't really do much at all except take on the jobs as they came.

It sounds like word of mouth was sufficient.

Yes, word of mouth *was* sufficient, really, yes.

Did you do more council work?

No, not after I finished the Elizabeth contract off. I did quite a bit of work for Elizabeth; and Noarlunga, Dad had a contract running for the City of Noarlunga at the time, so I did all of that as well. So for a few years I was quite busy doing the assessments for the Elizabeth and Noarlunga Councils.

I get the impression, Errol, you like to be busy.

Oh yes, well, it's better than not being busy, that's for sure.

But there was enough work coming through to give you that little bit of a balance between your own time, so to speak, and work time?

Yes, well, that's right. And the old house, of course it needed a bit of touching up, and so I was able to fit a bit of time in to paint and decorate, which was always important and was always there to be done, really, I must admit. This house, it was built by the previous owners or for the previous owners in 1930, and they told us when they left that they spent the first night of their honeymoon in this house as a new house just erected, and the titles show that Mrs Kirkman's[?] family gave her the block of land when she was engaged, and then she and her future husband had the house built and when it was ready to occupy they were married and spent the first night of their honeymoon in this house. And so apart from them we're the next owners, and so it's only had two owners in its history, and it's been quite interesting. We've had members of the family call back and ask if they could look through and have a look at the old place, which has been quite interesting, too.

So that's about almost forty years apiece in the house?

Yes, that's ... we shifted in in 1969, that's right, so yes, it's getting on towards forty years apiece. That's just good.

You mentioned your father's attitude towards taking a government pension and support benefits and so on: what about your own views?

Oh well, these days you just fall into a pension when you retire from the public service, you do get your public service pension of course, which of course you've contributed to, I guess, so that's reasonable.

That's the superannuation.

Superannuation. And of course Hazel, she doesn't work, she hasn't worked since we were married, really – well, just for a little while after our marriage she returned to work; but then after the children, Mary was born, that's in 1950, Hazel spent her time just, well, helping out in the community, really. She's been very busy in that kindergarten work and school committees, and she's kept herself very busy; but mainly she's kept herself busy looking after elderly people, she just seems to have a gift for helping people. And her mother lived with us for quite a few years in the latter end of her life, and then when the time came that she just had to go into a nursing home because we couldn't manage her and bathing and that sort of thing any more, Hazel just went to see her every day and took her some lunch, so she was with her from about twelve o'clock until about four o'clock each day whilst she was in the nursing home, until she died. And then we had two old neighbours across the road, two old maids, and Hazel looked after them for probably twenty years, I would think, and it was nothing uncommon to have a phone call from one of the Miss Knoxes at one or two o'clock in the morning and they would say, 'Oh, Errol, could you come over and put us to bed? We're a bit tipsy.' (laughs) And so, in the early hours of the morning, we would go over and put them to bed. And they were *quite* a bit tipsy, they certainly couldn't walk unaided! And so it was really quite an interesting period with these two old ...

Tape 5, Side B

Polden Tape 5, Side B. Errol, you were just describing, as the tape ran out, the long-time neighbours across the road, the two elderly ladies that Hazel and yourself cared for for twenty years or so, and until the ages of about ninety-five and ninety-seven respectively at the time of their deaths.

That's right. They were an interesting pair of old ladies, the Misses Knox, and so we learnt quite a bit from them and we helped them a lot. I had power of attorney and various things like that, and so it was interesting. And what was most interesting was to see the distant relatives gather when they died, (laughs) all interested in the will. So anyhow the distant relatives all got the money, but perhaps not in the proportions they had hoped. But then of course when those ladies died and we were not helping them any more, by that time we had also met up with a sister-in-law, another, a Mrs Knox, and that Mrs Knox because quite a regular and a friend of

Hazel's and Hazel helped *her* in her older age; and so she lived up in Tusmore and Hazel used to go up and help her do her shopping and a bit of the work around the place and any visits to doctors and things like that Hazel was always the one who took her to those places. And she was preparing and had had a new dress ordered and had bought new shoes, all with Hazel's help, preparing for her one-hundredth birthday, and she at one stage was not feeling well and went to the doctor and he admitted her to hospital and it was found that she had cancer of the liver and she died just a few weeks later. So she just didn't make her hundredth birthday by a few weeks.

The three of them lived to a fair old age!

They did, that's right. They were all named Knox, but one was married to a Knox.

What comes through, things like Hazel's sense of the volunteer duty, and another thing that comes through there is the sense of community around here, that you knew your neighbours and you interacted with neighbours and so on.

Well, we certainly helped the neighbours quite a bit, that's right. And that's the way it is, if you grow up in the country I guess that you do accept that sort of responsibility, don't you, really? I think it's a very different feeling, people who grow up in the city and people who grow up in the country, and we've grown up in the bush and you just help your neighbours or you help anybody about, whereas in the city many people don't even *know* their neighbours, (laughs) so it's not really good, that side of it.

But in your case, moving here in '69, you obviously got to know neighbours.

Oh, yes.

What sort of community was it around here?

Oh, really very good. Two old ladies down the back, the first thing *they* wanted to know is what church we would be going to and whether we would be going to Gartrell or to St Theodore's, and they were very friendly old ladies. The lady next door to us on the one side, she was friendly but she didn't sort of concern herself with which church we'd be going to, but she was a very friendly person. And on the other side of us we had an old lady who was a beautiful old lady, and she lived there with her granddaughter-in-law and the granddaughter's two children. And the grandson was a very good athlete and he had died after some racing event, sporting event, and he was running, and left this young widow with her two children. So we grew up with those two little children, in here quite a lot, and they still visit. And this elegant old lady, the grandmother, and she used to dress up ... each afternoon she would come out of the house to go for her walk and she'd have her hat and her gloves and – well, a very nice frock, whether it's her best frock or not I wouldn't be sure – but beautifully-dressed and all done up with her lipstick and everything done properly, and she'd go for her walk just up the top of the street and back. So Mrs Adams, I think. And she was a really elegant lady. And then the house next up,

further up, was 'the Countess' – she was a countess because she married a count – and she and her mother used to be very well-dressed too, and they'd go for a walk. So we'd see these folks walking up and down the street in their really best attire. These days it's very different: we see people jogging up and down the street in their very *short* attire! So things have changed in thirty-odd years.

And I guess the nature of the neighbourhood's changed as well.

Yes, it has. They're younger people these days, or young families, and so the nature of the neighbourhood has changed. Across the road when we came here there was a Yugoslav couple – not young, but middle-aged – and they were a lovely couple. And they were people who had come out after the War as displaced people and had seen concentration camps and had escaped. And they had a real story to tell, and they were lovely people. But they have both died now. But no, we had some lovely neighbours, pretty good.

There's a block of units ...

Yes. Well, that was always a nuisance, they put that up evidently just before we bought this place, and very controversial but they got permission to put it up, a land-agent type person. But since that time it has been changed into strata-titled units and it's been more or less, well, an exclusive sort of address more recently in that they just have serviced apartments. And so it really hasn't been a bother to us. But it really was when we first came here. The tenants were often quite noisy and loud, so that that wasn't pleasant. But since they converted it and have used it as more or less exclusive compartments or apartments it's been quite good.

You moved in with a young family, relatively.

It wasn't terribly young, but still we were ... yes, there was a young family, they were still going to primary school, yes – or our daughter was going, at that time, she had just finished high school and was going to university; and of course the next one, she was at primary school; and the next one, he was just about to start primary school.

Is that typical for the area? If you're talking about the middle-aged ladies and so on, but were there other families in the vicinity?

Yes. Well, see, there were the two little children next door, and then a few years after we bought this place the Merrigan[?] moved in next-door on the other side, and they came with a young family, and their children, of course, they grew up with ours, and some of them of course were younger, and the young ones used to be in here daily. And they learnt to talk in here, (laughs) we always reckon. So we've wound up with Mrs Merrigan or the Merrigan family next door to us for quite some thirty-odd years, and so we've been very lucky with our neighbours, there's no doubt about that. Very nice little area.

I think it's appropriate to put on the tape that we're talking about Grant Avenue –

Oh, yes.

– in Toorak Gardens, so the family will know that but now people know roughly what we're talking about.

I see, oh yes.

Why did you move to this area when you came down to town?

Well, when we decided we were going to come to town or had to come to town we drove down each weekend to find a house, and of course before you leave Riverton you'd have a look in the paper and mark houses which were for sale, and they were all written up as being the perfect abode: we'd get down here and find that they were anything but the perfect abode – some of them so narrow in the passage that you couldn't get furniture through, and others not built of what the paper suggested they were built, and not in the way the paper suggested they were built, and so we got very disillusioned with looking for properties, I'm afraid, with just looking at advertisements and coming down from Riverton. We wasted many a trip. But finally the agent that had taken on our job said, 'Well, what sort of a house *do* you want?' And I said, 'We want a house we can live in and we can get our furniture in.' And so he said, 'Well, I'll come up and have a look at what sort of furniture you've got,' he said. He couldn't believe that we had furniture that wouldn't go in some of these modern houses. And so he came up and had a look, and next thing we had a call from him to say that he had a house in Toorak Gardens. Of course, when we'd come down, Hazel was very definite that we had to find a house which was within cooee of a school, and near a bus route so that the children could go to high school or university, and so those things, combined with a house that we'd fit in and other things that we liked, were a bit hard to find. But anyhow, finally he said, 'I've got this house in Toorak Gardens,' and so we came down and the house hadn't actually been advertised publicly, but it was on the market and so ... And we had a look at this place and it had just one or two little problems as far as I was concerned and so we decided we wouldn't buy it, we'd think about it. So we headed for Riverton and we got out halfway up the Main North Road – and at that time the trams were still running up and down the Main North Road, of course – and Hazel was in tears because we hadn't bought a place and 'we'd never find a place', and so I was a bit, I suppose, cross and I said, (growls) 'Let's go back and buy that one.' So we did a U-ie on the Main North Road, came back and bought the house. (laughs) So that's how it all happened. So yep, so we bought the house. And it turned out to be quite good.

It's interesting. I was wondering whether you had asked your father, for example, to keep an eye open and so on.

No. Well, he lived at Stirling and no, we hadn't, really. We hadn't sort of troubled anybody. But we did have this agent who was supposed to be scouting for us, yes. And a few others knew that we wanted to shift, but no, they hadn't really thought of looking in this area. I suppose

that's the trouble. And as we were leaving on one occasion – we shifted a bit of stuff down in the trailer and that sort of thing because it wouldn't all fit in a furniture van – and on one occasion as we were driving through and out of Riverton, one of the local blokes yelled out and we stopped to say g'day to him, and he said, 'God, Polden,' he said, 'that Toorak Gardens will never be the same again with you down there!' So I don't know that we changed Toorak Gardens, but we certainly noticed a big difference between Riverton and Toorak Gardens, yes.

Did it matter to you where the house was? I'm thinking in terms of your work.

No, no, I didn't mind. But it turned out this was a very central spot, I must admit, and I was able to walk into work, that was no trouble, and I still can walk into the city if I need to go. So it's been a good spot, really, as far as we're concerned. Maybe the road is a bit noisy, and some roads would be better, but it's been good to us.

And for the younger children, Mary's the eldest, but for the younger two, a reasonably good environment for ...?

It was good, yes, they had some lovely friends. And so it was a good spot to be. We've not regretted it, I must admit.

Did they have a degree of freedom, the children, to –

Oh yes, yes.

– wander about the neighbourhood and ...?

Yes, look, they didn't have any worries, and we didn't at the time. I think these days – it's amazing what a difference thirty-odd years has made, and these days you do wonder whether you'd let the children ... We notice these days that the mothers quite often walk to school with the children, and I guess it's wise these days. But we didn't ever have that problem, thank goodness. It was a little more peaceful.

I was thinking that a younger child growing up, and you've got Victoria Park Racecourse not far away and some good streets and play areas and so on, they could wander around.

They could. David joined the Scouts so he was busy in the Scout Movement. I was Treasurer of the Scout group for that period of time, so it was quite good. And we were active with the church, too, I was on the Council of St Theodore's Anglican Church for a few years. And I was Secretary of the Bowling Club for a few years. And so there's always been something to do. It's been quite a good spot as far as we're concerned.

We'll come back, perhaps, to your community-type activity there, and obviously you got involved again: but you mention Hazel wanted ready access to a primary school.

Yes.

So where did Sue and David, where did they go?

Down to Rose Park, which is straight down the street, three blocks down, so it was close for them. And they were on the bus stop, the bus stopped here, across the road, so we were able to put them on the bus to go to high school or whatever. So it's been good.

Had they started schooling in Riverton?

Certainly Sue had started school, and I think that David had probably ... let me think. Oh! I'm not sure whether he started ... Oh yes, he must, he started school in Riverton, too. Yep, he did. He'd started school when we left Riverton.

No doubt they've got their own tales to tell about that.

They certainly would have, yes. Yes, that's right.

And Mary was off at university.

Yes, she was at university, that's right.

Had she started before you moved down?

No, I think that she started at university after we moved down, yes.

She did her primary and secondary school at Riverton?

She did her primary school, and then secondary school at that stage you couldn't do the Leaving Honours or whatever it was called, the Year 12 these days, at Riverton, so that's when she came to the city. And she was in the city, she did that at Adelaide Girls' High, and before we left Riverton. And then we left Riverton and came down here so that she could stay home and go to university.

So she was boarding down here?

Yes, she was boarding, and in various places. She stayed with my mum and dad for a while, and with another relative for a short time.

And private accommodation, or ...?

Yes, that was private accommodation.

And that's got you moving down here, and then of course your working career continued from here.

Yes.

And then the retirement phase, the retirement proper.

Yes, the retirement proper. Oh! (laughs)

You haven't stopped, have you?

No, look, I'm still retiring and I suppose it's still 'proper', but there's always something to do, which is good. I wouldn't like to be without something to do. We had time to go overseas and that was a wonderful experience, really. We visited Africa and our daughter Mary and her husband Elliot[?] over in Zimbabwe – no, that's not right; in Namibia, Namibia, that's right – and so whilst they were in Namibia we went over and spent a month with them and travelled

though Zimbabwe and South Africa and the various other places which I can't remember. And that was a lovely trip: we drove, and camped in wildlife parks and various places like that. It was a really wonderful trip.

You see so much in travelling it is hard to remember, but then you bring out the photos and –

Oh, yes!

– 'Oh, yes!'

Botswana was one of the areas we went through. That was ... the poor little fellas, living in Botswana, we felt sorry for those people. We felt sorry for a lot of people, really. But on the other hand many of them were living and that was the way they liked to live and that was good. But in Botswana these poor little fellas who were out collecting grubs. And we pulled up and had a talk to them and then asked them what they were going to do with these furry caterpillars. 'Eat 'em, mister!' And I said, '*Eat* them?' And he said, 'Ooh, yeah, they're good!' And these furry caterpillars and all green slime oozing from them, and they had billycans full of these caterpillars. And anyhow, we found that they mix them, they cook them with maize and make up a gruel of some sort. But oh, you can't believe it. But that was their protein. I don't know. It was sad, really. I would like to have been able to get a kangaroo for them (laughs) and give them some good protein. But there you are.

But did you actually sample ...?

No, I didn't sample those grubs. I've eaten plenty of witchetty grubs home here, but I couldn't ... I don't think I could probably ... I don't think I could eat one of those slimy, green, furry caterpillars. It didn't seem to be to me what one eats.

Well, I'd better ask you about your witchetty grub experiences. As a younger bloke, or ...?

Yes, well, that's right. And even I wouldn't mind eating witchetty grubs today. But no, I've spent quite a bit of time, when I was wool-classing, with the Aborigines and without exception found them to be lovely people. And of course I shared with them and I ate witchetty grubs on many occasions with a group of Aborigines. So I don't mind eating Aboriginal food, that's really quite good tucker.

This is when you were on the station?

Yes, yes, mainly. I didn't do it as a job, you know, I'd just ... when on the stations we would mix with them and help them and, well, one felt sorry for them because they were just more or less hangers-on on the station, they got little bit of money perhaps for the work they did but not very much.

Rations and ...?

Yes, they got rations and tobacco and things like that. But the children were always happy and bright, and so one got together with them and they were ... really without exception I found the Aborigines to be a really very nice race.

Were these people itinerant, in the sense of station to station, or were they local people, or ...?

Yes, just local people. They didn't travel around, no, but you would find a different group on The Twins and a different group up in the Yankalilla–... area. But they lived on the station and pretty well that was their home. They didn't have much. We were in Oodnadatta one year and an old native invited us in to see his wife and to see his collection, and he took us into his little humpy. Now, we had to almost crawl into the shelter and it was just a bit of galvanised iron, which I've got a stack of out in the backyard which I intend to throw away somewhere, (laughs) and that would have made him a humpy many times better than he was living in, really. But he and his family were living in this little humpy in Oodnadatta and they put together these strings of beads, which were just gumnuts on a bit of thread, and he was telling us he was very proud of his wife: she had ridden down the previous day on the donkey from some station further north. And no, it was really ... you meet up with these people, and they're really at heart a lovely race.

You had limited dealings, though ...?

Yes, very limited. I mean, I didn't get into any business contracts or anything like that with them. But just living amongst them – but I didn't sleep with them, I must admit – but just through the daytime. But all ages, all age groups. And of course some of the shearers were Aboriginal, and I didn't ever find an Aboriginal shearer that was hard to get along with or anything but a real gentleman. So I have a great feeling for the Aboriginal people, they're a gentle folk, really, and it's a pity that we've spoilt their life.

You mingled here, in this instance, on the station and obviously they showed you a few things – how to eat witchetty grubs was how we started talking, but other aspects of their life.

Oh yes, yes. Well, that's right. You shared in their eating of various wild peaches and berries and things like that. Although I'm no expert; I really would rather them show me which ones I should eat because I really don't know which ones are poisonous and which ones are not, even now. But *they* seem to know very well which ones they can eat and which ones they can't eat. And it's interesting.

What about subsequently, Errol, did you have contact with Aboriginal people through your work at Riverton and so on?

No. Well, yes, I did. Through the work at Riverton I got to know quite a few; and also I did projects for both the Gladstone and the Port Augusta Gaols, and also for the Cadell Training Centre. And I put in sort of poultry units in those three places so as to give the ... predominantly the Aboriginal population in those gaols, I'm afraid, were Aborigines. And as old Sergeant –

can't think of his name – he was in charge of the Gladstone Gaol, a really big person – he was a lovely person – but he said, 'Oh,' he said, 'we've given these poor beggars the right to drink but we haven't taught them *how* to drink.' And that was the big problem. So they drank and next thing they were locked up because they were drunk. And so we gave them drink but we didn't teach them how to use it and we've let them down badly. But anyhow, I set up some units in those three places to give them something to do, so they have a unit where they can attend the chickens and look after the hens and collect some eggs, so it gave them something to do.

That was something when you were working with the Department, of course.

That's when I was working ...

Was the Department interested in that or were you just left to do it yourself, or ...?

Well, I don't know that the Department took any ... well, I don't know that they even knew about it. But that was one of those things which ... you were stationed at the Department station at Riverton, and I worked from Riverton and I more or less did my own thing. Which was very good, it suited me very nicely. Now, certainly the Chief Poultry Adviser would know that I was doing that, but he didn't play any part in it, really. But he certainly would know because I would tell him what was going on.

But presumably there would be some official liaison between the Prisons Department and Ag Department for you to ...?

Well, I don't know. (laughs) I doubt that there would have been, even ... I doubt that the ... apart from my boss, who was the Senior Poultry Adviser, I doubt that anybody would have known much about that part of it, really.

Would you have had to requisition supplies or just provide them, or ...?

No, I didn't. The Prisons Department or their affiliates, they did all the expenditure; I just did the advice work and showed them how to do it, showed them how to build a shed and helped them just for an hour or two sometimes, and showed them how to feed the chickens and what to do. And I supplied a little bit of stuff, just odds and ends but nothing much. But they did it. No, it was just something to give the inmates an interest, really.

To jump back to before the wool classing stint on the station, when did you first become aware of Aboriginal people? In younger days, when you were in Adelaide, or ...?

Yes, well, we ... I was born in Orroroo, of course, and there were still a few Aborigines around the place at that time. But I didn't really become interested in Aborigines in very much of a way until I went out wool classing. Oh, no! Before that, I must admit, we used to meet up with families of Aborigines down at Wellington, and the Karpanys were one group, one family of Aborigines, the Karpanys: they lived towards Tailem Bend from Wellington. But we would see a lot of them when we were down there; in fact, we used to give them all of the catfish we

caught. And we saw quite a lot of the Karpany family, and they were always there when we were down there fishing at any time. We had a boat which we kept just moored at Wellington, and so we went down weekends, and when we were down we would see the Karpanys and they would always come along to get the catfish that we caught before we went home. So I did become interested in Aborigines about that time, really. And there it carried on when I went out wool classing.

But you hadn't seen many Aboriginal people around Adelaide, for example, or ...?

No, not around Adelaide, no. We didn't see much of Adelaide, those days. We lived in Mylor, so we came to Adelaide ... or I worked in Adelaide for a little while but not a lot. And then we shifted up to Riverton and so I really wasn't an Adelaide boy for very long.

No, I was just focusing on Adelaide, that includes Mylor, because ...

Yes, one does. It's not far away, is it? These days it's just ...

[INTERVIEW CONTINUES AT TAPE 6]

Tape 6, Side A

Polden interview, Tape 6, Side A, 2nd March 2006. Errol, we've talked a fair bit about your working career and your overall life, and I think it's probably appropriate now to talk about a few specific aspects, more of a personal nature, but from the point of view of recording some of the family history and the family stories and family attitudes and so on. You were talking on the previous tape, for example, about some experiences with Aboriginal people and Hazel's volunteer duties in the area, and those sorts of issues suggest a good community ethos in the Polden family, and perhaps even a strong religious line. Can we talk a little bit about, say, perhaps, religion, the importance of religion?

Yes. With the ethos part of it, my father, he was one who always stressed that if you live in a township or in a district you should do something to help the district. And so we grew up with the thought that yes, you should do something to help. And so I found that I was Secretary of the Institute Committee at Mylor when I was round about eighteen years of age, and so really I suppose I started helping the district from a fairly tender age. And then I was also the librarian of the local library, and all that in my late teens. And from then it's gone on so that we've helped with school committees and with church organisations.

As far as the religion was concerned, my mother's family were Catholic, and for some reason they had ... my grandmother on my mother's side, she and her husband had trouble with some official of the Catholic Church, and in an accidental ... an accident resulted in the death of their only son. He was out shooting rabbits, he was climbing through a fence and his rifle discharged and wounded him and he died from that wound. And the head of the church told them that if they had been decent, church-abiding folks, that wouldn't have happened. And that was the end of the Catholic faith for my mother's family. And so we actually grew up ... my Dad's family, they were all of the Methodist faith, so we grew up knowing and attending Methodist Church,

Methodist Sunday School, Methodist Church, and we did that. But Dad, later in life, he sort of withdrew from the church activities. He used to, as a newly-married person, he used to conduct the services at their local churches in the Orroroo district. But for some reason or other he then ... I suppose the main reason was that they lost their ... Mum and Dad lost their eldest son, he died of meningitis when he was about four years of age. And at that time I was sick with meningitis and pneumonia and he was sick with the same conditions. He died and I survived. But that upset Dad quite a bit and I don't think that he really attended church again after that. So Mum was always one who would like to go to church and I took her to church through the years, but I didn't really ever see Dad in a church except for marriage after that, or funeral services. So we grew up as Methodists, as far as our family was concerned.

Your mother had converted to ...?

Yes, well, yes – she had gone, she was Methodist.

When I say 'converted', I was just wondering whether she'd gone through any formal process.

I don't think so, I think she just joined the Methodist Church and that was it. And so she more or less ... she liked to go to church, and I took her to church and just every so often, and so that's the way the family grew up. Not intensely, I suppose, churchgoing, but moderately so.

With your parents, was there much evidence of religion about the house – a Bible –

Oh, yes.

– a crucifix on the wall, or ...?

No, we didn't have such thing as a crucifix on the wall, but there was always a Bible and Mum was one who read her Bible, and she encouraged us to read the Bible also. And of course other little religious texts which ... No, she was very thoughtful about it. But not intensely so, I suppose you would have to say.

And you mentioned you went to Sunday School?

Oh yes, we certainly were always sent to Sunday School. And then of course a bit of church as well, and Endeavours and those sorts of organisations. So we were always sent off to church and Sunday School when we were young. And in Mylor we always used to walk down to the Methodist Church and join in. And of course some of the tests we'd always take home for Mum because she'd look them up in the Concordance and (laughs) we'd pass with flying colours, all due to Mother. But not our own industry, I'm afraid.

Do you remember how long you would have gone to Sunday School for? Is that a couple of years or longer?

Until I was probably fifteen or so years of age it was just the regular thing to do. And then after that I did attend, but only because I took Mum to church. I mean not *only*, but probably mainly because of that. And we were married, Hazel was Anglican, and so I joined the Anglican

Church thinking that it was best to have just one rather than two different things, one going one way and one another. So from then on I attended the Anglican Church.

Did you have to go, again, through any formal process for that?

Oh yes, I had to be confirmed when I went to the Anglican Church, oh yes. (laughs) Had to go and have a lesson or two in something, and so yes, I had to be confirmed, which I was.

Was that before you married?

That was – yes, that was before I married, that was so that we could be married in the right church at the right place. And I wonder if that's necessary, but there you are: I joined as a full member of the Anglican Church. And subsequently I was a warden of the church for quite a number of years and I was a lay reader in the Anglican Church for quite a number of years, and that was in the Riverton era, so yes, we associated with the Church quite a bit. I'm afraid we've sort of fallen away a little bit in later years. Since the children left home we haven't been so good.

But my father, he joined the Masonic Lodge – oh, probably in about 1921 or '22 – and he was a very sincere member of the Masonic Lodge all his life, really, from that time on. And he got a lot of pleasure from his associations with the Lodge. And he had some very nice friends, there's no doubt about that, through the Masonic institution.

Did he talk much about it?

No, he didn't talk much about it probably. We just knew, we knew his friends and we knew his connections, but he didn't talk much about it at all, really. No. But he was a very active member of the Lodge.

And that would have depended where he was living, of course, up at Mylor or ...

Yes. Well, he retained his membership of the Orroroo Lodge all those years, and when we lived at Mylor he joined the Stirling Masonic Lodge, and so he was a member of Sir Samuel Way at Stirling until he died. He was still an active member when he died.

Did that trait pass on to you?

Oh yes, he suggested that I might like to join when I was twenty-one, and not knowing much about the whole business I joined when I was twenty-one, (laughs) and so I've been a member of the Masonic institution for sixty-odd years.

So you retained the membership?

Oh yes, yes, I retained membership of that institution. And it's a good ... there's lots of things said about the Masons and what they do and what they don't do. A lot of them are quite crazy, and maybe some of them are spot-on. But no, in general it's an institution which does a lot of good. Probably over the years it's been a bit selfish, but in more recent times it's been

thoughtful of their fellow men, you know, and they've set up various groups to ... They're very active in aged care, very active in relief – tsunami and bushfire and that sort of thing – and in many ways – they encourage students with scholarships – so really, in many ways, they've done a lot of good. And the fact that they get together as a secret society, well, it doesn't matter very much, I suppose, everything's a little bit secret.

Well, I think the mystique is breaking down somewhat.

The mystique I think is completely broken down, yes, there's really not much about it ...

What about your own level of participation, Errol, are you ...?

Oh well, I was Master of the Stirling Lodge, the Sir Samuel Way Lodge at Stirling, when I was about twenty-eight years of age – certainly before I was married – and so at the time I was, and probably am still, one of the youngest masters they've ever had. And then, following that, I met up with Hazel and was married and I haven't really attended lodge much since then.

You've maintained the membership?

I've maintained the membership: initially it was mainly because my father was a member and still there, and I didn't feel like letting him down; but then, in more recent years, they made me a Life Member and so I more or less continue in that capacity. So I must admit I'm not a good member these days, I haven't done a lot to help for some years. Mainly I think when living in Riverton Hazel didn't like being home by herself with the kids at night, and so I gave a lot of that sort of thing away, mainly because I didn't want to leave her at home by herself and be away half my evenings visiting and joining in that sort of work. And also I thought it was important to give something to the schools and the churches in the district, so I was on committees and other things, so more or less gave the private, or male-only, lodge business away, really.

But you say you maintain the membership: which Lodge do you belong to now?

Sir Samuel Way, I've belonged to Sir Samuel Way all my life and ... well, since I was twenty-one. And initially and whilst I was single I probably was a foundation member of Henley ... no, that's not the right name – some other lodge down Henley Beach; and I was a member of the Henley Mark[?] Lodge and I was a member of the Riverton Lodge and was Treasurer of the Riverton Lodge for a few years. But not a constant, not a regular attender, I'm afraid.

Have you passed that interest, that connection, on to David?

No, I haven't really done that. I don't know that David's terribly interested, and also the Lodge these days ... When I was a member of the Sir Samuel Way Lodge, we had something like two hundred members. There were many of them were young, and they were of course a wide mixture of age groups. Quite a few my age or just a little older, maybe. And there were some very interesting and some very, very nice persons attached to that lodge, and it was nothing to

go to a lodge meeting and there would be fifty or more members present, all a really nice group of people. Today, you go to a lodge group and that same lodge, if I may just quote that one lodge, and there would be probably no more than ten members present, and whilst in those days we had something like two hundred members, today there's around about thirty members at the most. So its influence has really waned and its membership has dropped off so very much that it now is ... well, I wouldn't, I don't encourage David to join. But if he wished to join, of course I would help him. But there are other things which I think would give him more satisfaction today. It's a shame, but there you are.

It's interesting that, like a lot of the service groups, church groups, volunteer groups, that there's this big decline in participation.

Yes. It is, it's sad really, in a way; but, on the other hand, I suppose ... well, one wonders, because you've got church groups that have fallen off completely, we've got junior ... or whatever they call themselves, and we've got Rotary and we've got other, there are various other groups –

Lions Clubs and so on.

– that's right, all those – Lions, that's right, Lions Clubs, and I can't think of all their names – but they have all fallen off so very, very much, really. And even in the golf club, you have a job to get enough people to run a golf club these days, whereas once upon a time it was overflowing, you were turning people away. And the same with Masonic Lodge, they were turning people – not away, but they were waiting, people were on a waiting list for six, ten, twelve months; today, you've got a job to find somebody who is prepared or wishes to join. In fact, you go out *looking* for candidates, and you almost go out looking for people to come and play golf and tennis. Things have changed so completely, and that I think would be a study for somebody to do: why has it happened, and what's changed in the world that the young people don't wish to belong to anything in that ...?

And it's happened in a relatively short time frame as well.

Yes, that's right. It's just in so many years. One does wonder why, and whether there is some reason or some remedy. But we've changed, there's no doubt about that. So yeah, I did; I'm a member of the Masonic Lodge, I'm a life member. And that's that. But as far as church is concerned I helped in the Anglican Church and I was a warden, I was Secretary of the Synod and I was a lay reader.

And these are relevant to Riverton, or ...?

That was mainly Riverton, yes, mainly Riverton. And then I was on the Council at the St Theodore's Church across here for a few years, and after a while I gave that away. But until ... not really, I haven't got any capacity on any church groups any more, but we attend church every now and then. In fact I've given most things away these days.

Oh, there are still a lot of competing demands: grandchildren and houses and ...

That's right, grandchildren and great-grandchildren and houses to fix up. Yep.

Interesting to get a feel for aspects of religion in your life. Obviously it ebbs and flows, sometimes more important than others. Interesting your comments about the parental influence. What about religion and – don't want to say in the workplace, but you're talking about the Masonic Lodge and so on ...

Well, look, in particular I think that we have become much more tolerant, haven't we, of our various groups. In fact, the neighbours, the Merrigans on this side, they're very staunch Catholic people, and I said to John – we have always been very, very good friends, the Merrigans and us, and it's been a delight to live next door to them – but on one occasion John said to me, 'Oh, Errol,' he said, 'aren't things different,' he said, 'these days? You know,' he said, 'when I went to school,' he said, 'my parents were ...' He said, 'If you were walking down this side of the footpath, of the road, I'd have to walk down the other side.' And I said, 'Yeah, and we'd probably throw a pebble or two at each other along the way!' And he said, 'Yes.' And then he said, 'Today,' he said, 'we can walk down the same side of the street and we can live next door to each other,' and he said, 'that's very valuable.' So you see we have changed, we've become much more tolerant. And it's a funny thing, it's good that that has happened. So some good things have happened, yes.

I'm putting you on the spot, but did you ever throw stones at the other kids?

(laughs) No, I didn't. No, I didn't. We didn't grow up like that, I'm afraid.

I've heard of it happening.

Look, I know it has happened, I know that it *has* happened, and I know that my mother had some stories to tell which she didn't like, things which she heard had happened to her parents when their son died. And if that happened, well, it was pretty sad, really. These days you sort of witness the hysteria which goes on within the Muslim community overseas, and you think, 'Well, that must have been a bit like that out here one day, years ago.' So you do hope that those things have changed and that they will change overseas. There's hope.

So harking back to your younger days: all right, you mightn't have had pebbles thrown at you and you mightn't have thrown stones, but do you recall Mum and Dad just saying things like you couldn't associate with Person X because of the religious factor, or ...?

No, no, they weren't like that. (laughs) I had an aunt who certainly said that, but not with Mum and Dad, no, they were broad-minded and they reckoned that there was good in all sides; but I did have an aunt who was very strict about it, and she used to teach her Sunday School pupils that they shouldn't mix with those other dreadful people. So you know that it happened in your time, but you wish it hadn't.

I asked you about David and the Masonic Lodge connection; more generally, importance of religion for your children? What sort of value did you and Hazel put on religion in ...?

Well, they knew that ... the kids all grew up attending Sunday School and attending church with us, and they knew that I was active in that field for those years. And it's good to see, particularly with Mary: she and her family have been very, very loyal supporters of her church and they are really very, very good. Now, as far as David and Sue are concerned, they are just single: I'm afraid that they've gone their way, they don't sort of place a lot of emphasis on the church or religion. They are very open about the whole thing but they don't attend, and they don't go ahead. I guess if they had a family it would be different, because Mary is quite different and she's very active in it and the kids are all very active, too. So I'm wondering whether it does make a difference if you're single and therefore you have no real responsibility as far as bringing up youngsters is concerned, and if you have a responsibility then I think that you accept that religion is an essential part of a young life, I think.

In your growing up years, how important was the religious connection with things like the sports groups, social groups and so on: were you a participant?

No. You see, it's a small village, Mylor – in those days, was a small village – and it was just *a* tennis club and everybody was a member of the Tennis Club and it didn't matter much whether you were Anglican or Methodist or anything, nobody worried. In that light, we didn't really worry *what* people were; they were members of the Tennis Club. And the same thing with the Football Club, those who could kick a ball were members of the Football Club, I was Secretary of the Football Club – I was Secretary only because that's the only way I could get a game, I think, I wasn't good enough otherwise! (laughs) But anyhow, no, we had a badminton club and I was Captain of the Badminton Club, Captain of the Table Tennis Club. But goodness me, religion was never a thought, really. So we grew up in an area where nobody really worried too much. There were all types of religions were connected there: we had Plymouth Brethren, that was quite a small, little group – sorry, it has to be small if it's little, doesn't it? – quite a small group; and then of course there was the Anglican Church, and Hazel and her group were there; and we had a Methodist Church and that was our family and their groups; no, we didn't have a Catholic Church in the area, but there were certainly Catholics who used to go to church somewhere; but no, it was really very much everybody lived in Mylor was at one. Whatever religion they were didn't matter.

What about in Riverton when you were a little bit older with a family and so on? Similar sorts of ...?

At Riverton? No, we didn't have church groups at sporting bodies, we just had a tennis club and that comprised everybody – you know, the matron of the hospital, she was a very active tennis player and member of the group, and she was certainly of the Catholic faith – and we had Anglicans and we had Methodists, we had Lutherans in particular, they were quite an active group in Riverton. But no, religion didn't really matter much. I think when we first went to Riverton there was a little bit of a tension between the Catholic and the rest of them, but that

soon disappeared, and some of our best friends were members of the Catholic Church really. Although I thought, as I said, that when we first went there there was a little bit of feeling that the children who were walking to the Catholic Church would sort of shy clear, maybe. But when we left Riverton that didn't exist any more, we were very much at one with ... You know, our team, our primary school team, used to go up and play sport against the Catholic children, and we had a common day of field events, and thank goodness those sort of things didn't persist. Although I do think that initially that was – the 1950 period – there was a little bit of tension between the religious groups. But by 1970 that had pretty well dissipated.

But even in a small place like Riverton you could sense some level of tension?

You could just sense some level of tension. But it didn't last very long, and it was very good, [there] really were some lovely families in the district – the McInernys, you know, and you really wouldn't find nicer families anywhere than the McInernys – so no, really I've never had a problem in any real sense with religious groups.

And religion is of course so significant in people's lives, and you're talking here say in Riverton in the '50s, reminds me you've got the DLP–ALP split at the political level, but that's based on religious lines and so on.

That's right, that's right. And it's a shame. And as my old neighbour, John – of course, who's not now alive – but as he said, they were told to walk down the other side of the street by their parents. And thank goodness our parents didn't ever tell us to walk down the other side of the street. But we grew up sort of knowing that this happens, but it didn't happen in our lives.

Things like the split at political level just keeps religion to the fore for a lot of people, but probably not something that's so important in Riverton.

No, it really wasn't. It wasn't important in Mylor and it certainly wasn't important in Riverton – well, shall I say from 1960 onwards, anyhow; but I just did feel that perhaps there was a little bit of tension there early, maybe 1950, and then it dissipated.

Tape 6, Side B

Polden Tape 6, Side B. Errol, perhaps just to round out the religious part of the story we're recording, religion in the workplace, and in the areas between the younger days in the garage at Mylor and Ag Department at Riverton and working in town: but was religion a significant factor ...?

Look, no, I don't think it was.

I meant that also for you personally, or just something that you'd observe with other people.

For me, I did ... it's amazing – it certainly existed – I really didn't have a problem, and I don't think that anybody else associated with me had the problem; but it's amazing, even at golf today or at some organisations today, you hear people say, 'Oh well, you know why *that* happened,' when they're talking about some thing that shouldn't have happened, 'because you know *he* was a Freemason.' And so you do know that there are groups who are against other

groups. And I know I had an aunt who was very much against Catholics for some unknown reason, and I have friends who are very much against Freemasons for some unknown reason. So I really don't know why we get these fads, I'm sure I don't. But no, just as our own family, we've had no problems with any groups, we really haven't. We've been asked to be godparents for various people and religion or associations haven't really been worried about, and we've joined in with various groups and we've helped in many fields where we've not even thought of the religion as being significant, it's just the particular event which is significant. But some people do, and I know it still happens because I've heard it only just recently: 'It happened to this fella because he was a Catholic, but it didn't happen to him because he was a Freemason.' So you know that these sort of things exist in some people's minds, and you wonder if you could perhaps get to the bottom of it if you had time to do so. I don't know; it hasn't been a problem with me at all, nor with our family.

... ... in the workplace it's not something you observed, say particularly the public service, that had a Catholic bias, a Protestant leaning or ...?

No, I really haven't observed that at all. In fact I really wouldn't know much the actual religious tendencies of most of the people that I've worked with. It wasn't something that I ever sort of raised – they went their way and I went my way, as far as that part of it was concerned. But look, there were some ... the fellows, without doubt, in the Ag Department were really lovely persons and I didn't think it mattered whether they were one religion or another, or of one political persuasion. I grew up in a house with one parent in particular who was very much a Liberal person, and Labor just didn't exist, they couldn't be trusted with anything, it was Liberal, and it wouldn't matter who stood to be Liberal Member for the district, he was the right bloke. I'm afraid I look at the members and think, 'Well, gosh, what a mad person to put in parliament, and here we've got a parliament full of dimwits, mainly because we vote for the fella who's the Liberal or fella who's Labor.' It's silly, it's so stupid, isn't it.

Is politics something that came up much around the home?

Yes, as we were growing up, the Member for the district, of course he got quite a right royal reception in the house because he was the Liberal Member, you know; and it didn't matter whether he was a really good-living bloke. (laughs) You know, the Member for the district, he was a real ... well, he was a live wire, shall I say, and I don't know whether he had a friend in every township, but he certainly had a female friend in Mylor. And so the Liberal Member would spend a lot of time at this particular lady's house. So I don't know, really, whether one should delve too deeply into the politics.

Well, there's that broad level of politics and then there's of course the personal politics, in your own development of political beliefs and ideas.

Yes. Well, as I said, we just grew up always thinking that the Liberal side was right – always being *told* the Liberal side was the only side – but I'm afraid as we've grown up and that we've got to be thinking more or less for ourselves, we don't go along with that particular line, and I wouldn't vote just because a person is Liberal or just because a person is Labor. I think that really we need to start looking at the individual, because we certainly have got a parliament with a lot of incompetent people in it.

But your own attitude there, has that changed much over time or would you have been ... the way you're describing there is more of a 'swinging' voter, looking at the person and the policies at the time, but would you be more rigid yourself in the '40s and '50s and '60s?

Probably I was, probably I grew up thinking Liberal was the only way to go. And look, I guess I still have a bit of that feeling in me; but I do look at the person these days, and if there's a Democrat or somebody whom I think is a worthwhile person I'll give them a vote – knowing full well that in this particular area my vote doesn't count for anything: I've got to get a few thousand votes before it would even start to count, so my vote doesn't really mean a thing.

Again, harking back to the younger days, you've said your father wasn't one for welfarism and being a Liberal philosophy, following the Liberal line: was politics talked much around the house?

No, not really, no, no. They didn't really talk politics much. They did talk about the Members of Parliament who weren't doing the right thing in their respect, in their eyes, and my parents were pretty ... well, they weren't broad-minded (laughs) in that respect. So they spoke of various persons, but not of various Liberals or Labors or anything like that, they didn't speak much of that sort of thing.

But they talked the ... ..., the local government issues, the federal issues?

Oh yes, well, Dad was a justice of the peace and he protected his badge of office very, very solidly. He did quite a bit of time working in the courts at Stirling, on the bench, meting out justice, as we heard at times – and sometimes we thought *in*justice, but still he did his job, and he was very proud of his commission as a justice of the peace and spent quite a bit of time in that field, doing that work. So yes, we grew up thinking that we had to obey the law, that's for sure, and we tried to do that.

Another aspect of growing up and also carrying on to your own adult life, the notion of class. You know, we've talked about politics and we've mentioned you had ... ... Labor view, *et cetera*, the welfare state and the independent self-belief attitudes and so on, but did you have much concept of class?

No, we didn't really grow up thinking that the Queen or the King was in a class above everybody else; we grew up thinking that we were all human beings and that we treated each person fairly and honourably, more or less. And whether they were kings or queens or dukes or anything, really it didn't matter a darn. I was a bit remiss in that respect, really, because ... I suppose because of the way we were brought up, we had the Governor of South Australia come

to Riverton on the occasion of I think it was the anniversary of the Riverton Primary School, and I was at the time President of the School Committee, and so I had the job of introducing the Governor and his entourage, and the Member of Parliament and that sort of thing who of course all hang on at that sort of time, and I didn't really perhaps address the Governor and the Members of Parliament with as much ceremony as I should have, I just feel that I perhaps let the school down a bit then. And I guess that's because you sort of grow up thinking, 'Well, they're no better than we are,' sort of thing, 'we're all human beings.' So I'm not sure just how it was all done but I certainly introduced the Governor as His Excellency and that sort of thing, but I didn't spend a lot of time welcoming the Members of Parliament as individuals and the various other celebrity as individuals; I addressed the Governor and welcomed him, and included the others with 'ladies and gentlemen'. So I'm a little remiss, but that's the way we were brought up.

Did they send you the book of protocol subsequently, or ...?

(laughs) No, I didn't see it. But I often think that perhaps I didn't represent the town as well as I should have, that's all.

But I'm sure they'd be understanding and saying, 'Just another rural yokel!'

'Just a fella who doesn't know what he's doing!' Oh, dear.

It's interesting how those things change over time. In asking you about class, the notion that there is a working class, there is a middle class, there's an upper class: to some families it's ... it is bred, in that sense.

You do, you do, you even find today that some people reckon that they're 'just the working class'. I don't ever look at life like that, I always think it's your own doing. You can be better if you wish to be, or you can be of a different class. It's your own making, really. I don't really do much on class, and I really wouldn't be any good at all if I went to Britain, I couldn't possibly do that sort of thing.

But a practical aspect of that is family, as in parental, or personal aspirations, you know, people trying to 'better' themselves and so on: in the old language, that's trying to get from one class to the next.

Yes, I suppose that's right. No, I always think you aim for the highest, and the utmost for the highest, sort of thing, and I know you fall short for sure ... not as good as everybody else, that's for sure. But it's been good to see the kids grow up and take their part and do something worthwhile, particularly with Mary and Eliot and their children, they've all qualified and they're all out working in a professional capacity and they've done really very well. So I suppose really, although I might be just working-class I don't ever consider myself as a working-class, really; I've got the opportunity to be what I wish to be, really, and you don't have to sort of hang around downstairs just because something else happened years ago that put you downstairs.

That's fine. We're going back not quite a quantum leap, but we've talked a little bit about sport, we've talked a little bit about religion, we've talked a little bit about politics, and there's another subject we haven't talked much about but we should in the little time we've got left here today: the family. We haven't talked about courtship, marriage, having a family.

(laughs) I'm not much good at any of those things, I'm just a hanger-on! But I grew up thinking that I was going to be a bachelor – I don't know why I always thought I was going to be a bachelor. But I think I had ... well, I had an uncle who was a bachelor for a long time and I suppose I always appreciated the fact that when he'd come from Orroroo down to the city or to Mylor where we lived for a while, whenever he came down he would have my bed. And when he'd leave he'd always give me two shillings or something, for my bed. And so I of course thought, 'Ooh, he's got plenty of money, I might be a bachelor like him, maybe.' (laughs) But anyhow, then of course met up with ... I suppose grew up; but Hazel came along and, there you are, we got together and we got married, and then along came Mary after twelve months or so and so that was – well, certainly the end of being single, or being a bachelor. And so Mary was born in what, 1950 – we were married in '48, I suppose and she was born 1950, I think that's right – and then about six years later the local doctor called in and he said, 'I'm wondering if you would like to adopt or take care of a baby, because a friend of mine in a nearby town has got a problem. A lady is expecting, she's been in a very nasty accident, they have other children and she can't look after any more, and they're wondering about having this child adopted.' And of course we're taken by surprise and I said, 'Well, I'm not terribly interested.' But Hazel said, 'Well, I would be.' And so I said, 'Well, if you would be, well, fair enough.' So it progressed from there and we took this child when she was born, and then within a few months we adopted her and so she's our second child. All thrust upon us, more or less. (laughs) So that's Susan. And she's grown up as ours. And then, six years after that, blow me down if Hazel is in a bit more trouble and David is on the way. So there you are, we have three children, six years apart each one – or thereabouts – and so they're ... our life together, for eighteen years, was bringing up a baby each six years. And so it meant that the schooling period was dragged out over a long period and everything else had been dragged out over a long period in that respect. So we have ... Susan is an adopted child and Mary and David are our natural children, but they've all grown up as kids and it's the way it is, it's good.

I should ask you for the record, Errol, it's known with Susan that she was adopted?

Mm.

So it's okay on ...

She grew up knowing that.

So it's okay on the record here, then.

Yes, she grew up knowing that, and we always told her that she was our chosen one. But, mind you, when she got older, and probably eighteen, nineteen period, she did start to think that

perhaps she should know more, and fortunately I had kept a record of everything and was able to tell her just who her parents were and we found out where they lived and I phoned them and said ... I told them, 'Do you remember this?' And oh yes, they did. And I said, 'Well, would you like to meet her?' And yes, they would. So we were able to tell Sue that these were her parents and they lived there and they'd be happy to see her if she wished to see them. So she did that, met up with them, and knows them – or knew them. So yes, they do grow up, they question it, the facts that they should know, and I don't blame them for that, that's how it should be. So Sue's all right, all's well.

That's good. Just going back to the adoption process, you didn't know the parents? Were you aware of ...?

No – well, we didn't know them at the time, and we still didn't get to know them but I looked around, I did ask some questions, and I knew quite a bit about them by the time the baby was born, but I hadn't met them and I really ... I suppose I have met them now, I don't remember now, but certainly I knew who they were, I'd seen them, they didn't know who I was and I don't think they sort of knew that I was looking at them, but they lived in a nearby town. We found out their history and that sort of thing.

I thought from the way you described it, with the doctor coming to see you and so on, it was more a 'helping hand' you were giving at the time, then it becomes a formal adoption.

That's what we thought, you know. We thought, 'We can help them out a bit.' But then of course it became a formal adoption. And it was rather an unusual set-up, really, that doesn't often happen.

Right, interesting. The other interesting thing – and I hope I'm not prying – but there's a long gap between Mary and David.

Yeah, well, that's right.

Had you planned the family?

Oh, no, no. Well, we didn't have anything to do with it, it just happened that way. And I think that the medical opinion was that there wouldn't be any more children, and so that I think influenced Hazel in caring for Sue.

Hazel had been unwell, or ...?

Yes, she was not a hundred per cent, and the medical opinion was that there would be no more children as far as she was concerned. So she had some treatment and that sort of thing but it didn't seem to work, so that was that. But anyhow, when Sue came along, that's fine, she filled in the gap as far as Hazel was concerned. I didn't worry, it wouldn't worry me if we'd had one, two or – well, I don't know about six; I think that would have been a bit more than ... (laughs) But really I was not fussed about it and I certainly didn't see any sense in adopting children. We had one and we had a good experience that way and we'd experienced a child, I didn't see

any need for experiencing any more. But anyhow, after a while David came along, so that was quite a bit ... I suppose 'exciting', you'd have to say, to think that this had happened after all these years.

Going back to the start of the – I won't say 'episode', but that's as good a word as I can think of – meeting Hazel, before marriage.

Well, we grew up in the same town. Yes, we grew up in the same town, and so I sort of knew Hazel from the time she was more or less born. I was a bit older. And so I was going to school and walking up the street to get the loaf of bread and the mail to take home after school and Hazel was running around as a junior, and so I had known her all *her* life and I suppose she had known me pretty well all her life. They were local people and working on the same groups. Her mother used always to prepare the coffee for our dances and things that we ran for the Tennis Club and the Football Club. If there was a dance on in Mylor, you could bet your socks that Hazel's mother prepared the coffee for the evening. So it was always done with coffee grounds and cooked up, it wasn't instant coffee – I don't suppose we *had* instant coffee, those days – it was always done with ... I know her mixture was a certain amount of coffee and a certain amount of mustard and so much milk, and all boiled up. So we had quite a good time and Hazel's mother was always the one who prepared the coffee for the local dances.

Had there been any connection between the families – you know, your parents and her parents?

The parents were at one, but no, we didn't visit. As parents, my parents didn't really visit. Well, they used to play cards together so perhaps they did visit a bit, but not a lot. But Mum wasn't a great one for going out, I'm afraid, but she got to know everybody but she didn't go out a lot and she didn't mix a lot. I suppose those days getting from one side of the village to a mile the other side of the village was too much effort for Mum, and she didn't drive, so Mum didn't go out very much at all, really. But we did have card evenings, and on those occasions Hazel's parents would have been there.

And what converted you from the notion of bachelorhood?

I don't know.

I phrase it deliberately that way.

I don't know. (laughs) I just grew up thinking I was going to be a bachelor, I think, and I don't know why I decided otherwise. I guess it was just the fact that Hazel came along.

Other girls at primary school, secondary school ...?

Oh, yeah, plenty of girls around the place, that's right!

But had you other girlfriends, or ...?

Oh, I might have ... Oh yes, I suppose I did look at a couple of girls –

Different stage of seriousness.

– in various stage ... Yes, very different. Not with any great intent, that's for sure. But no, I maybe took a couple of girls out to the pictures and that sort of thing, yes. I wasn't a great ... I'm afraid I wasn't too good in those respects, I was more of a loner. I really preferred to go fishing with a couple of blokes than to go to a dance with the girls, really, and so I really spent ... I would have been quite happy – these days, probably I wouldn't be doing the right thing, because I was quite happy to go camping and shooting and fishing with a boyfriend, with a fellow male, you know, and I certainly didn't ever think of doing that sort of thing with a girl. I thought that was perhaps the wrong thing to do, anyhow, and I suppose my parents would have thought that, too. These days of course it's just the natural thing to do, and probably it's a wonderful idea. But no, not in my day; you went fishing with your fellow *male* partners, not with your female partners.

And how long did your courtship last, once you became attracted to Hazel?

I don't know. Couple of years, I suppose, couple of years and then we were married. I suppose two or three years. Yes, Hazel used to come along ... used to have, in the Masonic Lodge process, at the installation, which happens once a year, we used to often have a ball, a dance, to celebrate, and so Hazel would have been involved in one of those, you see, she would have come to the dance with me – to the ball, I suppose you would call it – and it went on from then. We got married in the next year.

Then you went off on a honeymoon?

Oh yes, oh yes. That was not much money and so we hired a caravan and went caravanning over to New South Wales and around Victoria, and got flooded and ... It was interesting – it was good, though, we had a good time. But no overseas trip, I'm afraid, I didn't think of that.

And have you done the male thing and forgotten the wedding date?

Well, pretty well, but I do remember it – unfortunately, I always remember at the wrong time – but it was the 15th October 1949, I think. That's a good question. But I have to remember that because I have gone to golf on two occasions, and I've written the date on my scorecard and I think, 'Golly! Today's my wedding anniversary, I've got to remember that when I get home!' (laughter)

'I should be elsewhere!' Were you under any pressure to get married, from family or relatives sort of thing?

No, no pressure. No, I don't think anybody ever worried too much. Well, I don't know that I worried too much, either. Certainly it wasn't suggested ... Although I do, it's a point which ... maybe there was pressure and I was too silly to recognise it: but my mother or father bought me a book to read – I didn't read a lot but I used to read a bit – and they gave me this book. Can't think what it was called. *Immortal wife*, yes, I think that was the title, *Immortal wife*. I don't

know who wrote it and I'm not sure that I read it right through, but whether that was a hint that I should perhaps think about getting married, I sometimes wonder about that.

Well, there's a degree of subtlety there. And I'm afraid we're going to run out of time on the tape to pursue such matters, and you're probably relieved!

It's just as well.

But I'll just say, because we are running out, Errol, that that might have been 1949; we're now talking 2006, so whatever was in the book, you've done all right, both of you.

Yes, well, I don't know where the book is these days, but I almost think that was the only book my parents ever gave me. Others have given me books – friends, that sort of thing – but not my parents, so it could well have been a bit of a thought that maybe ...

END OF INTERVIEW