

VICTOR HARBOR ORAL HISTORY PROJECT, '*Beside the Seaside*'.
Interview with Lester James on 12th December 2013.
Interviewer: Rob Linn.

Lester, thank you very much for being willing to be interviewed. It's been wonderful to have the privilege of talking with you. So you were born in 1922, Lester?

LJ: Yes.

I wonder if you could tell us a little bit. Who were your parents?

LJ: My father was Frederick Alexander James, who was a market gardener at Payneham, following his father who came out from Cornwall and settled there. He married my mother, who was Rachel May Scarborough, an old family from Glenelg.

My father and some of his cousins who migrated from Cornwall were younger chaps and decided that they wanted to get on in life and the fruit industry around Payneham was fairly well taken up at the time. They went off down to James Well on the Yorke Peninsula and decided that they would go in for wheat farming, which they did. Unfortunately they chose a time when a drought was in the offing and they finished up going broke there and coming back to Payneham and getting involved again in the fruit industry.

My father worked in conjunction with his father in the East End Market where they sold their fruit. The market area developed rapidly and started to expand. My father had one brother, William, and between the three of them they couldn't sort of get full agreement, which is often the case in families like that as to what they all wanted to do.

My father decided to go off up to Berri because that was just being opened up after the First World War. A returned soldiers' settlement had started there. So he went up there and took up some country and turned it into orchards. He did quite well at that because it was in his background and so on. He not only grew fruit, he decided to dry it, and he set up at what at that time was fairly advanced drying equipment and became very successful, to the extent that he started packing fruit and exporting it to New Zealand and Great Britain.

So are we talking stone fruits, Lester?

LJ: Yes. Vine fruits and stone fruits were what they produced. So he started packing it. That was quite successful because there were big markets in Great Britain for it, and also New Zealand. And the eastern states was another market.

His first packing shed was inadequate. He then turned around and built a much larger one. The business was really thriving. But governments got involved, which they always do in these situations of productivity, and they developed what was known as the South Australian Dried Fruits Board. The Dried Fruits Board idea was to tell people, particularly the returned servicemen, what they could and couldn't do in respect to dried fruit. Well, my father soon fell out with that idea. He knew perfectly well what he wished to do and how to do it. He was a man who was rather single-minded and had a natural understanding of the legalities of life. So he disagreed with the Dried Fruits Board to the extent that they started taking him to Court to prove their authority. Then the decade from 1920 to 1930 he had fourteen law cases, if you can imagine that -

No, I couldn't. (Laughs)

LJ: - to prove his point, mainly in the Supreme Court in South Australia. But three of them went beyond that to the High Court of Australia. Actually at that time to the Privy Council. They went to the High Court and then on to the Privy Council, which was the supreme jurisdiction for Australia in those days.

When I came along in 1922, from the time I could understand a language I suppose, I was hearing all this talk about jurisdictions and law court cases. So I really had that all my life and it's been quite interesting because I had an insight as to what the law is really all about. It used to be talked three meals a day at the meal tables because there was always something happening.

Was he successful, Lester?

LJ: Well, he was successful in more than half the State cases, and he finished up having three cases in the Privy Council. He won two of them and lost one of them. They involved large sums of money, both in the cost of it and the awards that the Court gave in these situations. It became a very interesting thing and he really made Australian history in law in the determination of section 92 of our Constitution. And Section 92 basically says that trade between the states shall be absolutely free. And it's the key to the Commonwealth being able to exist as a group.

Yes.

LJ: Since my father's time and the judgements that were given then has determined largely the way the states were able to get along and form Australia as it exists.

Yes. So he did us all a favour, Lester? (Laughter)

LJ: Yes, well, actually quite a few primary industries have used and been affected by that judgement.

Am I talking too much?

No, this is excellent, Lester. Wonderful, thank you.

LJ: We got to this stage in my life when, by the time I was four years of age, my father's business was so great that he required to move to Adelaide to deal with it.

Well, he must've been one of the most successful growers at Berri at the time.

LJ: Yes, he was.

By a mile.

LJ: Well, the industry up there was divided. There were private growers and packers, and also the government ones. The government one really was controlling the return servicemen 's productivity.

Another firm that grew out of that at that time was Woodson Series(?), a well known fruit firm in South Australia. I think probably my father became on the opposite side of the argument with the Dried Fruit Board and the Dried Fruit Association. There were two organizations involved in their situation.

A very interesting side effect of this was that while this government development—and I mean this is going on only twenty years after the foundation of the Commonwealth and a lot of the administrative type of primary production was still being developed. The grain industry was involved in it in that in New South Wales the government was trying to, what they called, orderly market the grain industry. One of the leaders of the grain production in New South Wales was a chap who finished up as the head fellow in the National Bank when that was formed. He was a man who could see what was likely to happen and he realised that if the government was successful in trying to control the small dried fruit industry that it was sort of training for them to get their hands on the Australian grain industry. So he took a personal interest in it to the effect that he financed my father in his law cases from the National Bank. I've still got an account with the National Bank a good many years later. *(Laughter)*

Where do we go from this story? We're trying to get back to Victor.

So you come down to Adelaide with your parents to live so your father can handle his business affairs more.

LJ: Yes.

How do you eventually come to Parawa not long after?

LJ: It was a few years after. He bought a place in Alexander Avenue, Ashford, to move down here. I was a bit of a young lad. I started a year later at the Richmond School for my education.

That was an interesting thing because in those days parents took their children along to the gate of the school and they poked them through it and they were picked up inside by the teachers. That happened to me. And we were lined up in a row and the teacher down the end of the row was writing down the names. I came to her and she said, 'What's your name, little boy?' I said, 'Lester James'. And she said, 'Oh no, that wouldn't be right'. So she wrote down James Lester. And for about four years I was known as Jimmy Lester. Well, it didn't worry me much. They knew who I was and I knew who I was. *(Laughs)* But today I'm still receiving mail to Mr James Lester, and I got some today as a matter of fact.

That all goes back to being eight years old at Richmond.

LJ: Yes. Five, I was then.

Five?

LJ: Yes, I went to school at five. So that was when I got started in education and so on. My father had a law case on at the time in the Privy Council, which he finished up winning and they awarded him, in 1936, the sum of £11,000, which back in those days was quite a handy amount of money.

Huge!

LJ: Of course business was going okay, he had won his law case and things were going on alright, and he decided that he could use a bit better lifestyle. At that particular time the big depression had just started and, as it hit, the wool industry was in dire straits and that brought the Collins family, who were one of the pioneers of growing wool in Australia, into the picture. The Collins stud had been founded by the first generation and had passed to the second generation who were equivalent to my father's age. And some of them decided they'd retire.

There were two brothers—Horace Collins and Maurice Collins—and one of those built a large home on an acre of land at St Georges in Adelaide and moved in, but then the wool market collapsed and they were under financial stress. He couldn't cope with the mortgage he'd taken out on the place so his brother took it over. Well, he had the same result. It

was just too much. It was a pretty big home and bit of an upkeep and so on and so it came on the market.

It was at the same time my father just had this success in the Privy Council. The Collins family—I don't know whether they approached my father or he approached them. He heard that this place was for sale, that they were in some problems with finance. They made contact and he had a look at it, and that was just right up his alley. He thought it was just what he was wanting. So he said to them that he'd give them £5,000, which was a fair price for a house in those days, for this property at Wootoona Terrace. Well, he acquired it and moved up there, the family with him. He lived in that house from then until he died in the middle 50s.

So you spent your teenage years there, Lester?

LJ: I was in my teens up there then. I used to go to PAC college. It was good riding my bike downhill but it was pretty hard in the afternoon riding it back up again.

(Laughs) Yes, that would've been challenging.

LJ: Wootoona Terrace was an interesting place. The people next door, by the name of Allchurch, a family that developed the dairying industry in South Australia. Next door to them was Mr Maughan, who was one of the founders of Maughan Thiem motor company, which still goes. And next door to them was a chap who was a leading solicitor in Adelaide. Over the road from us was the newly retired Headmaster of Prince Alfred College, Mr Bailey. Below him was a young chap who was in the sweets industry by the name of Claude Haigh. Haigh's chocolates are still going today.

And they're going pretty well.

LJ: Yes. Further down the road on one side was a leading architect and surveyor fellow called Parsons, and on the other side of the road was a chappie who was the general manager of the gas company. So there were some interesting neighbours in the street.

So you attended PAC, Lester, when John Ward was Headmaster?

LJ: John Ward used to teach us Latin. He was a very tall fellow and a nice bloke and the blackboards at PAC in those days were fixed to the wall as a permanent situation, and they had a wooden beading around them. Well, the little brushes that they used to clean the boards with—Ward would be scribbling on the thing and rubbing it out and then he'd put it on this bead at the top. But none of the other teachers could reach it. They'd have to get

a chair to get up on it. *(Laughs)* Mr Potts, who was our French master, and French followed Latin at the time, he'd come in and he'd write on the board and then look around for the duster and couldn't see it. He'd look up, and he'd say, 'Oh, the Head's been in here, has he?' *(Laughs)*

That would've been Ren Potts' father?

LJ: Yes. Do you know Ren Potts?

I knew him, yes. I know Barbara as well.

LJ: Ren Potts and my brother, Alan, who was a professor at the Adelaide University, were great mates. And one of the boys, and I can't remember which one it was, was in one of the grades when I was there.

I was just thinking, so you would've had Mr Mutton as well?

LJ: Yes.

And Tag Luke?

LJ: Juicy Mutton and Tag Luke, and the two Davies. Bogger Davies was one of them. He incidentally taught the Chappell boys how to play cricket. What do we call the other Davies?

I can't help you there. That's before my time, Lester.

LJ: Did you go there, did you?

Yes, I did. My father may have actually been in your year, I'm just thinking.

LJ: It was a pretty good life actually. Anyway we're trying to get to Parawa, aren't we? Well, my father was a businessman in Adelaide and quite a group of them used to meet every day for lunch at Balfours old café in Rundle Street.

Yes, I knew it well.

LJ: Did you?

Yes.

LJ: There was a group of about a dozen of them that used to meet there for lunch, and one of them had bought some land at Second Valley. It was all scrub country. The government had just formed the Second Valley pine forest. This chappie could perceive that the forest had some land but they were going to expand it obviously and they would

be looking for the country, so he bought this range road country. He was telling my father about it, urging him to buy some, that it was all coming on the market and to get some because it was going to be a good deal. So my father bought 5,000 acres sight unseen of uncleared scrub at Parawa.

Sight unseen?

LJ: Yes. It was five shillings an acre. Whether people knew that he had some money in his pocket, a land agent tried to sell him 100,000 acres of scrubland at Parawa for sixpence an acre. But he hadn't got his money from the law court and he couldn't get that lot.

Sixpence an acre!

LJ: If you can imagine it.

That's crazy.

LJ: That millionaire fellow from Western Australia owns a large wad of that now.

Kerry Stokes.

LJ: Yes. It's all being written up at the moment. Well, that was part of that parcel. But anyway, Dad bought this land sight unseen.

I was having my breakfast one Saturday morning and he came in the dining room and he said, 'Come on, Lester. Hurry it up. We'll go down and find this land I've bought'. I thought that would be a good lurk. He had a big Hudson car and I climbed in the back of that and he went off and picked up a mate of his to take with him, and we headed south. We went through Yankalilla and then on to Second Valley, and through Second Valley out to the new road going out to the pine forest.

My father said to Alan Jones, who was a forester—he had his section map and he showed him where his land was—asked him how to get there. Well, the forester said, 'Look, we've just planted this first planting of pines behind the house here. Go down the firebreak alongside it and you will come to a wagon track through the scrub'. That wagon track was the old original track from Encounter Bay to Rapid Bay. In the early days they travelled to Adelaide via Rapid Bay.

That would've been for bullock drays, Lester.

LJ: That was the bullock track. So we went out and found this bullock track and forester Jones said, 'Turn left. I think if you go up there about a mile you'll pick up signs of the survey marks'. But the fellow that set up Adelaide –

William Light.

LJ: William Light. He was at Rapid Bay for a number of months until he could make up his mind where to make the capital, and in that time he started surveying all the land around there. What they used to do was that they'd dig a trench on a corner if there was a bend, dig a trench and fill it with ironstone boulders, which were everywhere there, and you could see where their survey marks were.

So anyway, we drove this mile up the road and got out into the scrub. Well, it was big timber, two or three feet diameter stringy bark stuff with dense scrub underneath. We pushed our way through that and we walked around for an hour trying to find these marks. In my youthful enthusiasm I had decided at one time that I would be an outback sort of a bloke and the family had given me a tommyhawk for Christmas, which I had taken with me, because if you're going in the scrub you needed some implement. *(Laughs)* So I had my tommyhawk. I'd read stories about bushmen and so on that as you go through the scrub you make a mark. So that's what I was doing with my tommyhawk—making marks as we worked our way through the scrub.

We'd been doing this for an hour and we came to a tree that I'd already marked, and I said to my father, 'Dad, we've been here. Look, there's my mark on the tree'. My father saw it there and realised that he was thoroughly bushed and it was time to give it away. All we knew was that we'd left the car on the ridge and we'd walked down, so that we knew that if we climbed up the ridge again we'd come to the track, and if we walked along that we'd find the car, which was what happened. We came home that day and he was no wiser where his land was. *(Laughter)* He realised that he needed help.

As I mentioned one of the residents in Woottona Terrace was a surveyor, a fellow called Parsons, and he gave him the job of finding this land and marking it. Well, it took Parsons and a crew of several men three months to find the boundaries of this piece of land, and to mark it sufficiently for them to be able to fence it.

Your poor dad must've been broke. *(Laughs)*

LJ: Oh, he was making money. He'd kept his dried fruit business and that was going well. And he started up a jam factory and canning factory on the Port Road at Mile End.

Oh, really?

LJ: Yes. Which is part of my story, too. So he was involved in dried fruit, canned fruit and jam making. Of course down the road was another big jam works, too. I don't know

whether you remember—I can't think of the name now. They were the biggest jam makers in South Australia.

Was that Glen Ewin?

LJ: No, they were up in the hills.

Yes. They were at Houghton.

LJ: Yes. They'd started up by then. Any rate, we'd better get back to the story.

So you saw the family's land at Parawa, Lester, but you were none the wiser at that time.

LJ: Yes. *(Laughs)* Anyway, he had it surveyed and by about 1931 or 2 he'd got a couple of men and put up a shed on it and cleared a bit of land and had them starting the development of the property. Near where these sheds were there was a nice bed of flat on one of the creeks. So he cleared that up and he started to grow tomatoes to make sauce in his factory. *(Laughs)*

Oh!

LJ: That was one of my first learnings about country living because at holiday time my dad said, 'You can go down and stay with the two blokes in the shed and learn a bit about the farm'. I was only a kid of about ten or twelve. It was all good fun. By that time, as a kid, you were starting to use a 22 rifle and all that sort of stuff. I'd got my hands on a rifle by that time and had a couple of packets of bullets. A mate came with me and we went down messing around in the scrub, shooting parrots and all that sort of business.

When did you leave school, Lester? At what age?

LJ: My father was pretty busy in his business. He was having law cases and trying to be a pastoralist and all the rest of it. My eldest sister was ten years older than I was and she managed the office and sort of ran the day to day business. He had an office in Rechabite Chambers in Victoria Square. So she did that. And as young ladies do, they leave Methodist Ladies' College and make a debut and then get the eye of some bloke and they get married. So she got married and gave the work away.

My next sister, she was a couple of years younger than the older one, she then moved into the job and ran the office and so on. Well, she got engaged and looked as if she was going to take off. So my father got the idea—I was coming up fourteen and I could leave school

at fourteen—that I'd better leave school and start learning the business, that I'd go and work in the jam factory, which happened at the age of fourteen.

Well, that was a very educational process because a fourteen-year old son of the boss was put into a jam factory. There were about twenty or thirty women cutting fruit -

Oh, dear!

LJ: - and their sole purpose, each one individually, was to teach this young fellow some of the facts of life. So I learnt those pretty quickly. (*Laughs*) But I found my niche in that job in that I was the gopher for everybody else. I was the last in the level of the labour force. (*Laughs*) My father had made it known that he was sending me down there to learn the job and they took the task of teaching me.

I was fourteen then, and I was there for about a year and my second sister got married and I was moved up into the office to fill her place. So to learn that I was sent to the School of Mines to learn bookkeeping and the principles of business in industry and get a bit of useful knowledge to take over the business at some future date. I got a pretty good grounding in business as a young chap then. I knew what was happening business-wise in our office, and also I was studying the principles of the thing. That went on okay.

After a couple of years I got to the stage where I had a driving licence. My elder sister had married a chappie who came to work for my father as a salesman for the canned fruit, and my Dad bought two vans and he divided the city into two parts. He had one salesman doing the north and one doing the southern part of the city. He had a van full of products and you'd drive around to all the grocer shops. In those days every district had a local grocer shop. Coles and Woolworths and all that stuff hadn't been heard of.

But there was one multi-store owner, a Scottish chap called Rogerson who owned and developed the Central Provision Stores. If you ever remember the CPS stores.

Yes, I do indeed. Very clearly.

LJ: He was an interesting chappie. Rogerson had his office in the market place there, and my Dad said, 'Rogerson's due to give us his order'. The old fellow used to give Dad an order every three months for jam and fruit and other stuff like that. He said to me, 'Rogerson hasn't sent in his order. Lester, go around and see him and get his order from him'. I said, 'Okay, Dad'. Away I went.

I got into Rogerson's office and he wanted to know what I wanted. I said, 'I've come for your order, Mr Rogerson'. He said, 'What makes you think I'd give you an order?' I said, 'Well, you have in the past. I hope our product is still as good as it's ever been'. He said,

'Look here! I've got a thing about this stuff. I don't really see why I should give you an order'. And he put me through about twenty minutes of hard sell. In the end he wrote out what he wanted and gave it to me.

I went back to the office and I said to my father, 'Oh, hell, that bloke Rogerson is a bit hard to get on with'. But unbeknown to me, I'd been sent around there and Rogerson knew that I was coming and his job was to give me a hard time and make me sell. *(Laughs)*

Oh, your dad had fixed this up, had he? *(Laughs)*

LJ: It had all been teed up. *(Laughs)* Those days you sort of grew up in a certain way, and that was to meet the times, the way things were at those times. So that gave me another good grounding in life. We still haven't got to Victor Harbor, have we?

We're getting there, Lester.

LJ: Slowly. Do you want to record all this sort of stuff?

Yes. It's very interesting to me as a background as to how you get there. So how long did you last in the office working with your father?

LJ: I was there for all the time he had the business. The Dried Fruits Board all this time, and it was over a period of years, were still trying to get the better of my father. And they never ever did. He had some more law cases. In the end they decided they'd buy him out. That would be a certain way to get rid of him. They wanted him right out of the industry because other people were saying that James has done it, so we'll do what he's doing. Resist the process.

I've just lost my train of thought.

I was in the office while this was going on but the sale did go through. They gave my father about £30,000 I think at the time.

For his dried fruit business?

LJ: Yes.

That's a pretty big whack of money for the time.

LJ: Well, it was big money but it was a fair bit of business. There was a big packing shed on the river and the gardens and the land and the factory down at Mile End.

Yes, sure.

LJ: By that time it affected his health, all the stress of what he was doing with law cases and so on. He got a bright idea that he would go and develop this land down there. So that's what happened.

But unfortunately, in the meantime he'd got involved with a woman on a cruise that he went on to the Barrier Reef as a holiday sort of thing. He didn't take my mother and he got involved with a woman on the cruise, which eventually meant the break-up of his marriage.

Oh, dear!

LJ: That happened, and at about twelve years of age or thereabouts I was given the option of having to decide whether I wanted to live with him or with my mother. Well, I realised then what it was all about. I thought that, well, Dad can look after himself, he's got a swag of dough. I thought I had better stay with my mother.

He bought her a house in Glenelg, where she had come from originally. I went to live with her but it affected the relationship with my father because he had forced me to make a choice and I hadn't chosen him. So from thereon to the end of our days it was always a factor in the background. At one stage he wouldn't call me by my name. He used to address me as Mr James, if you can imagine that. *(Laughs)*

No, I can't, Lester. It's pretty hard to imagine.

LJ: Yes.

It's a pretty hard thing to ask of a young boy though, isn't it?

LJ: Well, yes. I didn't realise at the time. I just thought I was doing the right thing in looking after my mother, who needed it more than him. But he apparently took it as some sort of an affront I guess. It's all history now.

So Lester, at what age did you end up coming to Parawa, and how did that happen?

LJ: With the break-up of my parents, my mother was very concerned about my future. I'd left school at fourteen. My brother went on through the university and got himself a heap of degrees but I was virtually poorly educated actually. So my mother got the idea that I should go and learn agriculture if that's where the family fortune was going to be.

(Laughs) I suppose on some assumption that I might get a leg in on this property at Parawa. So I went off to Roseworthy College and did the course up there. I finished up third in my year but by the time we got through the college it was time to go to war.

So was Allan Callaghan the boss at Roseworthy?

LJ: Yes. He was a great bloke. Actually he did a lot for me, not knowing it. He was the (*sounds like, most*) knowledgeable wheat breeder in the world. He was a very knowledgeable bloke. He was the Head then.

So did you go off to war, Lester?

LJ: Yes. We were supposed to have our final exam in March and Callaghan put them forward to December to let us do our finals and see if we could get our certificate. Of that year there were seventeen or eighteen blokes and every one of them joined the forces. January I'd signed up for the AIF and I was in camp at Wayville.

At the showgrounds?

LJ: Yes. That's where they recruited people in South Australia.

Yes, I know. They'd taken it over from the Society. (Laughter) I've just read about it. I've been going through the records.

LJ: Yes. You never know what little things affect individual lives. We were in camp there and they were just gathering up the next group of blokes. The seventh 'divy' had been to Greece and Africa and getting a hammering from the Germans, and they were just building up the 9th division.

There was a group of fellows, about a dozen miners, who came down from Broken Hill and joined up. They were chaps in their late twenties. I was a lad of about eighteen or nineteen. I sort of palled up with them. They took a bit of an interest and looked after me in the camp. They got trained and were put into the 9th 'divy' and went off to Africa. One day on parade they'd called out was there anyone able to drive vehicles? Well, I'd been driving since I was about fourteen. The first couple of years were unofficial. (*Laughs*) I went to see the Registrar of Motor Vehicles to see if I could get a licence. You had to be sixteen. I was about fifteen then. He said, 'You come back in a year and I'll give it to you', which I did.

But anyway, they said on parade, 'Can anyone drive trucks?' I stepped forward. I was the only one. So I was sent off to do a driving test and I was then classified as a driver. The Army didn't have a lot of chaps that were able to drive at that time. So I got pulled out of this mob that were going in the 9th 'divy' to Egypt and became a driver.

The Army gets ideas and you can't shift them. The 8th Division had been sent to Malaya and was getting pounded by the Japs. They had no anti-aircraft ability to protect them,

and as they moved down the peninsula they were really getting hammered by the Japanese Air Force. So the Army decided they'd have to get anti-aircraft unit built up and sent off. Course if you've got an anti-aircraft gun it's got to be serviced, and if you've got searchlights they've got to be maintained. So I got sent off to be turned into an electrical fitter, which wasn't my idea of life at all.

I tried to go to New Guinea in the Light Horse. They were calling for reinforcements and I volunteered for the first independent company, which turned out to be—oh, what do they call them? They've got a name. Commando. They were forming the first commando unit in Australia. So I volunteered for that. I had a couple of mates from Roseworthy—Frank Hilton, whose father was the Headmaster of Urrbrae College, and Johnny Cornell, whose father sold cigars and tobacco. Can you recall Cornells?

I know the name, yes.

LJ: The three of us were mates and we joined up together. Where am I now?

Went to the war.

LJ: Well, I survived the war and came back. About a fortnight after I was discharged I was down on the property at Parawa starting to do a bit of manual work.

Was this at your father's bidding?

LJ: Yes. He'd battled through the war. He'd had his tractors confiscated and he'd had his big ploughs confiscated. The government just took anything they needed at that time. I suppose there was a reason for them having them. But he got thoroughly jack of trying to run the place and his age just catching up on him. He said, 'You can come down here and run this place, Lester. I'm going to move back to Woottona Terrace', which he did. I then went down there and started to think about what I'd learnt at Roseworthy.

Lester, it would've been pretty different, the Roseworthy education from actually having to clear a virgin block, wouldn't it?

LJ: By that time he'd had 2,000 acres actually cleared.

Okay.

LJ: A lot of it had just been ploughed—the scrub cleared and ploughed up. When I got there I was supposed to carry the process on.

Had he known about the trace element needs there and all that?

LJ: No. I'd learnt that at Roseworthy. We were taken on a day trip one day. They used to do these trips with the students and take a busload around and look at farms and study things. And we'd been to—I can't think of the bloke's name. Up at Meadows.

Brookman's.

LJ: Yes. One of the Brookmans was at Roseworthy College.

Was that Nigel?

LJ: There were two boys. It was the younger one.

Might've been Nigel I think.

LJ: That was Nigel, yes.

Anyway, Brookmans had a lot of flat country through Meadows there but the hills at the back were carrying stringy bark. Same as Parawa. They'd bulldozed this stuff on the hills into big heaps and they'd burnt it, and much to their surprise where the ash was the Mount Barker (*couldn't decipher word*) grew like crazy. Nobody could quite say why that had happened but they noted that it had happened. Well, it wasn't too much longer when someone found out about molybdenum. We were told about it at Roseworthy, that there was a thing called trace elements that was involved in pasture country, particularly in higher rainfall. So I learnt the secret of molybdenum.

That was interesting, too, because I went for a trip to New Zealand. I was travelling around the south island and got down to the bottom of the island and went past a property that was covered with prime lamb production, and they were beautiful. There was a farmer coming out of his gateway as I came along and I pulled up to say gooday to him and compliment him on his stock and how well they looked.

I said, 'How do you get them like that?' And he said, 'I think really it's due to molybdenum'. I'd never heard of the stuff. And I said, 'How do you do that?' He said, 'Doesn't take much. You mix a bit up with your fertiliser'. It's a trace element that helps(?) the plants. I said, 'Gosh, that's good. I wonder whether anyone in South Australia knows about it'. He said, 'Would you like a bit? Come back to the shearing shed'. And he gave me a tin of it. He said, 'Mix up a couple of ounces of that in a bag of phosphate and see how you get on'.

So I brought it back, and coming back into the country I thought I'd better declare this going through customs, and the bloke said, 'Have you got anything to declare?' I said, 'Well, I don't know whether I have or I haven't'. He said, 'What are you talking about?' I said, 'I've been to New Zealand and I've got some stuff to put on my pasture'. He said,

What is it?' I said, 'Molybdenum'. He said, 'I've never heard of it'. So he had a look at the tin, and I said, 'What do I do about this?' He said, 'Nobody knows about it. Take it with you. Away you go'. So I brought it home and set a bit of ground aside and I mixed it up and fertilised a little bit of pasture with it. Crikey! It grew like crazy.

So there was a huge difference between that piece and any other piece?

LJ: Oh, yeah. The property out at Parawa, behind the homestead, there was—my father had built himself a nice tiled roof brick home and he'd put individual pine trees around it—radiatas he'd got from the forest. Well, they grew like wildfire. They really stood out. And the fellow who was in charge of the forest in South Australia—can't think of his name. Starts with a B. He was driving past one day on his way to -

That's Brian -

LJ: Starts with a B.

Yes. I met him.

LJ: It's a name like Bonsack. Broomhill, was it?

No. I know who you mean though, Lester.

LJ: Well, he was driving past and he picked the difference in these pine trees and his own.

Brian Bednall. Is that who it was?

LJ: Yes, I think.

Bednall. He was Conservator of Forests.

LJ: It was in his earlier days but he was in charge of the one up in the north and Second Valley. He came in and he was talking about the pines and he said, 'Your pines are doing very well, Mr James. What do you do?' I said, 'Nothing much but I fertilise them'. He said, 'What do you put on them?' And I said, 'Superphosphate. I put a bag to the acre'. He said, 'Is that all you put on?' I said, 'Only a bit of molybdenum I mix up in the fertiliser'. Well, he didn't cotton on that he knew what I was talking about but he'd picked up the molybdenum thing and he went off and decided that he'd fertilise his own pines with superphosphate with molybdenum in it. They had no way of doing it in those days except to mix it up in sacks and give each man about half a sack draped around his neck and for him to -

Broadcast it.

LJ: - walk along and broadcast it around each tree. So that happened and that was the start of fertilising pine trees.

Course once we got onto this idea of trace elements being deficient, they got on to the zinc story. And that had been evolved down in the upper south east. So I got on to that and researched it out and got in touch with a fellow called Rodda who was developing a fair bit of country down there. From then on I was using molybdenum and zinc.

They were having trouble with the soldiers' settlement blocks on Kangaroo Island. And a mate of mine from Roseworthy, who was in the same year as I was, Don Russell—I don't know whether you've ever –

Yes, I have heard of him.

LJ: He was one of the leading blokes in the Department of Ag. Whenever he was down our way he'd drop in and say gooday. He was up to date with what I was doing with these trace elements and he realised that they'd need them over on the island. Well, the copper and the zinc made Kangaroo Island—the soldiers' settlement.

Yes.

LJ: How far do we go?

Well, Lester, so you've come down to live at Parawa, and just returned from the war. Was Victor Harbor your centre or was it more Yankalilla?

LJ: How I came to be involved with Victor Harbor was that—I was running the place down there and I'd got married and I thought I was there for life really. A fellow from the west coast by the name of Whitlock Jones—have you ever heard of him?

No.

LJ: He was a funny fellow. (*Laughs*) He went to the Boer war, he went to the Second World War, and he was getting well up in years and he owned a large part of the west coast, around Lincoln. He decided that he needed high rainfall country nearer Adelaide to work in with these properties over there. My father had one of the bigger areas at the time and old Whitlock decided that if he was going to buy any it would probably be that place because they had good sheds and three homes on the property and so on. It was well set up. So he offered my father £28,000, which was a fair bit of dough for the process. So my Dad said that that would do him. 'You go and find yourself a job, Lester, somewhere else because I'm going to sell the place'. And he did. So myself and my wife, and child at the time, were heading out the gate looking for something to do.

Well, you wouldn't credit how life works out. I was going to Victor along the Range Road—it was a dirt road in those days—and a place nearer (*couldn't decipher word*) had a for sale sign up. And it was one of the earlier developed countries down there. A fellow called Waymouth had developed it. Do you know Waymouth?

Yes, I know who that is.

LJ: A vegetable grower.

Yes.

LJ: Well, Waymouth had developed it. He was going about the same time as my father, doing the same thing. There was my father, Waymouth, Shearers—they were further towards Victor—and another wealthy fellow from Adelaide. They had all started developing all this new country. They were all Adelaide businessmen out to make a few bob.

Waymouth had sold his land to a fellow called Carter, and Carter had a son about my age but the lad wanted to go off and do something or other and his old man wasn't satisfied with that so he decided to sell the property. I thought, gee, that's a beautiful property. The front of it had been established for a bit of time.

So I went in to see him. I asked him what the situation was, whether he wanted to sell it. And he said, 'Yes, I haven't got the sign there for nothing'. I said, 'I'm just moving off one place and I want to get on a property and yours looks pretty good. How much do you want for it?' He'd sold all the back half of it and he had about 354 acres left around his homestead, and it was the best part of the property.

I said, 'I wonder what you want for that'. He said, 'I'll sell it to you for £14,000'. I said, 'I don't know whether I can make it'. He said, 'Well, how much can you get? I'll tell you what I'll do, I'll leave £8,000 on it as a mortgage if you can rake the rest up'.

I'd just bought a new Chev truck, and I had that and a bit of other money. My mother had saved all my pay that I'd left her instead of using it herself, which I thought she should have. She saved it all and I had nearly 500 quid there.

Whitlock Jones had plenty of money and he wanted a quick sale and all the rest of it. And he wanted me off the joint. So I said, 'Okay, I'll go on my way but I've got a signed lease on the property and it's got about three years to go'. And Jones said, 'You're not going to have that'. I said, 'Do you want to buy me out of my lease?' He said, 'Yes, that's an idea. How much do you want?' I said, 'About £500 a year'. So I got 1500 quid, which added to the money that I was getting together to get into Carter's place. Well, that's what happened. I got that country and I was there for forty years.

Lester, could you get a war service loan as well?

LJ: At that time the Savings Bank got this new idea of what they called Credit Foncier Loans.

Yes, I know what that is.

LJ: And I had one of those. I was there for forty years and I never paid the loan off until I sold that property. It was cheaper to pay the interest on it and use the money.

Exactly. So would that have been a State Bank loan?

LJ: Similar sort of thing. The idea of it was to do what it actually was doing with me, get people on the land.

So did you add more land to that property over time, Lester?

LJ: No, but I developed it. It wasn't all developed when I took it over. I developed it all and finished up selling it for about 300,000 bucks.

Before we get on to the Victor side of things, Lester, how did you start breeding Corriedales?

LJ: I started milking cows because everybody milked cows in those days just to get a few bob in each month, or week. I started with cows and I soon got jack of that idea. The fellow nearby had bought a mob of ewes and lambs at foot and he was a stock dealer of cattle and sheep. He didn't know what to do with ewes and lambs. They needed tailing and all the rest of it.

I met him on the road one day and said, 'What are you going to do? You are in trouble with these sheep'. He said, 'Hell, am I ever!' I said, 'I wouldn't mind getting into sheep. I've got about twenty head of dairy cows now. That's all I've got but I'd like to get out of that and get some sheep'. 'Oh', he said, 'I'll buy your cows and you can buy my sheep'. So that's what happened. So that's how I got into sheep. I made a few bob out of breeding fat lambs.

This was happening prior to when I moved to the (*sounds like, rural*) property. I don't know how I came to be looking at Corriedales. They are a dual purpose sheep.

Yes.

LJ: Footrot was a problem in those days, and Corriedales were fairly resistant to foot rot. They've got black hooves. So I thought they would be an ideal sheep—a bit of meat and a bit of wool. So I decided to go into Corriedales.

When you get into sheep breeding, like everything, it's a specialist thing and you've got to know what you're doing. My son was just leaving PAC at the time and he was going to come back on the property. I'd go to the sheep stud sales in Melbourne and see the sheep. I decided I'd go for Corriedales, so I looked up the original Corriedale stud in Australia. It was Wettenhalls and they were at -

I've heard of Wettenhalls.

LJ: I went and bought my 50 foundation ewes from them, and a ram, and got to know Mrs Wettenhall. She used to run the property. Did you ever know Darcy Wettenhall?

No. I didn't know them personally. I know the name well.

LJ: They adopted him as a lad but he'd grown up as their son. When Rodney was due to leave school I thought that he'd better go to Wettenhalls and learn the sheep game. So I booked him as a jackeroo. They used to take two jackeroos a year for training to teach them about Corriedales. So I got Rod booked in and he went there for a year and I got him to write notes of what he had done for every day of the year that he was there. I've still got the notes in the filing cabinet. And he sent back everything they knew about Corriedale sheep. So I knew how to prepare the sheep and what to do when you show them and so on. That's how I got into Corriedales.

That's pretty fascinating, Lester. And they did well here, didn't they? At Parawa.

LJ: The ribbons are still hanging up -

I saw them as I came in.

Lester, what got you involved at Victor Harbor initially as a councillor, for instance.

LJ: It was the jolly road. We had to get fertiliser there. We used to get some fertiliser come by rail to Victor Harbor and the government in its wisdom decided to chop out the rail line there. They had an enquiry and I went along and argued the toss that they keep the thing but that didn't amount to much. They scrapped it and then we were trying to get our fertiliser down to Second Valley by barge.

Tom Playford was down looking at the country one time. The council had got him down and we met him on the side of the road. I organised a group of the locals to meet him.

We wanted him to repair the jetty at Second Valley so we could unload the barges there. He was a good bloke. I got to be friendly with him over the years.

While we were meeting him it was time to go for things so I had a list of about twenty things that I needed the government to do. *(Laughs)* I reeled all those off to him. He said to me in the end, 'Lester, if you want something from a politician, keep it down to one or two things and they can't dodge it. But you've presented me with all this stuff. And you don't know what you want first. That's not the way to go about it'. He told me how to approach governments. I became quite friendly with him.

It was a bit surprising because when he took over the Electric Light Company my father was one of the shareholders in it and he and Playford had a real ding dong go about him nationalising.

That doesn't surprise me at all.

LJ: But in later years I became chairman of the council in Yankalilla and I used to have Tom down once a year to have a look about and so on. He used to invite me to his property to see how well he was growing his apples.

A couple of months before he died I got into a lift in one of the buildings in Adelaide in Grenfell Street and, blow me down, who's in the lift when the door opened but Tom Playford. I hadn't seen him for a while and I said gooday to him and I stepped alongside him. There was only he and I in the lift and he put his arm across around my shoulder and felt my muscle and he said, 'You're still working a bit'. *(Laughter)* He was a shrewd fellow.

Yes, he was.

So you said that it was because of the road that you got involved with Victor Council, Lester.

LJ: Yes. The Range Road goes from Victor to Cape Jervis and winds all along the top of the range. It followed the old bullock track. But when they surveyed it, the section line was put on the northern side of the road so that the whole of the district virtually was in Encounter Bay. But Encounter Bay weren't doing too much. So we lobbied and so on and we got the Waitpinga ward, which started at Waitpinga Hill and went through nearly to Delamere, and it was all just scrub. Nobody worried about it. We got that chopped in halves. It had two wards—Waitpinga ward and Callawonga ward. It was the name of a big creek that ran down through the area, called Callawonga. And when that was created they needed a council for that—Callawonga. I stood for that and I was the first councillor elected. Well, from then on it was just on and off battling with council and government to get the area developed. If you're going to argue with councils you don't argue from

outside, you get in the council and argue inside. And that's what I did. In 1952 I was elected to the District Council of Encounter Bay.

Did that include Victor Harbor, Lester?

LJ: No. At that time Victor Harbor had the corporation and that was a body that operated as a corporation between the two bridges. Just that area.

Yes.

LJ: That was the actual town. There wasn't much town outside of that actually then. And the rural land was all in the council of Encounter Bay. Because that had been founded down in Encounter Bay here down at the (*couldn't decipher word*) in 1854.

Was Victor Harbor your centre? Where you shopped and did all those things?

LJ: Well, it was divided. We'd buy our groceries in Yank but the hospital and the doctors and all that stuff was in Victor. So I was going both ways.

Was Dr Douglas here in those days?

LJ: Yes. And his house was in Crozier Road. Dr Douglas and another doctor there. They had homes alongside each other.

And by the way, the old council chambers was in Crozier Road on part of that land where you turn off Crozier Road into Woolworths carpark.

Is that right?

LJ: Yes. It was a single room and it was small. They had a big table and six chairs—seven chairs because there were six councillors and the clerk—and when we were all in there there wasn't room for the typiste to work. (*Laughs*) So she had a day off and the clerk would have to take pencil notes and she'd type the minutes up the next day.

So Victor wasn't a huge place at that time?

LJ: No. Between the bridges was that and Newland Town. You've heard of Newland Town? It's that area there that runs either side of the road out to the roundabout on the Ring Road.

That's coming up Victoria Street, and up that way, you mean? That roundabout?

LJ: No, the roundabout in the bridge.

Yes.

LJ: That road that runs out to the next roundabout.

Yes.

LJ: And the local blacksmith, old Bill Armstrong, had his forge and everything out there. It was a bit of an area.

Is it true, Lester, that a lot of that land from there up towards Encounter Bay was under water for a lot of the time?

LJ: I've seen this land from Tabernacle Road through to Bartel Boulevard under three feet of water.

Goodness me!

LJ: And where all the Encounter Lakes are, that was all built up four feet, otherwise it was subject to flooding.

Goodness!

LJ: See, the hills run right around the town and a lot of water drains off these hills and it all goes down past the hospital there. The inlet and outlet of the Encounter Lakes is a four-foot pipe and the water goes in and out, but if we ever get another one of these years where these floods occur, I don't know where the water is going to go. It will run into Encounter Lakes there but it can't get out of there unless through this pipe. It will probably break out into the river.

Yes. I've had people say to me that the river itself no longer runs as it once did.

LJ: Yes, that's true. Well, it's silting up. I've fished out here for twenty-eight years and a good few years ago now a whale calved in the bay here, between the store and the island, and it stayed there for a couple of weeks with this calf. Well, I was fishing and I was a bit surprised that the animal stayed there that long, but after it had gone I thought I wonder how much water it was there in. So I went and measured it and it was eighteen feet of water just inside that island there. Well, just before I sold my boat I thought I wonder whether that bay is still the same depth and I went and tested that point and found that it was fourteen feet. So over the years there's been a fair bit of silting in that bay there.

Well, that makes sense.

LJ: Yes. Well, if you see the silt that comes out of the river! It comes out and turns right and runs down to the boat ramp.

I know that around Melbourne they've done a lot of tests in Port Phillip Bay, and that's happened all around Port Phillip Bay.

LJ: Has it?

And they now constantly de-silt. They've worked out a strategy for doing it.

LJ: Have they?

Yes. It's been going on for about twenty years.

LJ: Well, I don't know whether anyone is worried about this.

**Sorry, Lester, I got off the track to your fishing. (Laughter)
Come back to council. So you join in 1952. Is that right?**

LJ: Yes, I was elected in 1952.

How long did you serve on council? Can you recall?

LJ: I was four years on Encounter Bay. I'd gone in there to get the ward shifted to Yankalilla. The chairman of the Yankalilla Council was a mate of mine, so I spoke to him about what I had in mind. Would they take it? He said, 'Oh, yes, we'll have it if you can work it'. So he wised his council up and lobbied to get it through there, and then I had the job of getting Encounter Bay come to the party. Well, most of the councillors were keen. It was just a money sink for them. All their rates would go. It was (*couldn't decipher word*) out clearing the scrub.

But the chairman, Alf—lives out here at Waitpinga. The family is still there. His name will come to me in a minute. He was the chairman but he was a pretty shrewd fellow and he realised that in local government if you lose land you lose rates. He was bitterly against it. But I lobbied and got the numbers to get it through. They didn't all agree but I got the numbers to get it through. So I arranged for the two councils to advise the Minister for Roads with their position and he agreed to transfer the Callawonga ward to Yankalilla. And in his wisdom he not only decreed that but he appointed me the councillor for two years. (*Laughter*) So I was off to a start in Yankalilla. So I served another eighteen years on council in Yank, which was all good fun.

Lester, I wonder if you could tell me about Victor Harbor itself as a town. Were you aware that there was a large influx of people in summer and holiday periods to the town?

LJ: Yes. That's grown. And another thing that affected Victor Harbor, and nearly affected it—do you remember when Adelaide closed the Housing Trust?

Yes.

LJ: Well, the Housing Trust were housing a lot of these immigrants, and a few no-gooders amongst that lot. And they decreed that they would kick them all out and close the Housing Trust down. Well, all these people had to find homes and they were organising and lobbying to move them into Victor Harbor because that was one of the biggest near country centres. But fortunately some of the people in town realised that we could be inundated with a whole heap of these people that were really dependent, and some of them pretty questionable. All the land brokers got together and they closed their books. They wouldn't sell any houses. These people were all sent to Murray Bridge. So we had a let-off there.

Yes, too right.

Lester, looking at Victor, what have been the biggest changes to the town over the years that you've known it?

LJ: I tried to make a big change. It was the time when the Adelaide University got too big and they decided that they'd build another one. I'd heard of these country universities in New South Wales and I got the idea that I'd make Victor a university town, that we would establish a university here and all these houses around on higher ground level would be built on for homes for people going to the university. I stood for Parliament on that idea, and I included saving the McLaren Vale area for grape production rather than let it be overrun with housing, but it was twenty years ahead of time.

Might've been forty years ahead of its time I think, Lester. (Laughs)

LJ: I didn't get elected to Parliament, and Victor didn't become a university town, but it would've been a nice university town.

Actually that would've been a brilliant idea, given what's gone on at Geelong, New England at Armidale and all that.

LJ: Yes. And as a university town it would've made the future of the town.

It would've. Given it a shape unlike what has happened now.

LJ: Yes. And it would have given it an industry because there's a lot of money spent on education.

Were there any locals listening to you, Lester?

LJ: I don't know. I stood for Parliament four times. Whenever you're standing for Parliament you've got your ideas and other people have got their ideas. It's a pretty hard battle I think. In the end of it I stood four times.

And then David Brookman resigned. I'd known him for years. *(couldn't decipher word)* used to be elected chairman for a number of years and he decided to resign. He contacted me and told me what he was going to do. He said, 'I've put in a request for you to get the nomination'. But in the meantime I'd left the old Liberal and Country League. I was involved with that when the Liberal Movement was going because I was state president of the Country Party, which had been revitalised.

But with all politics, there's a deal involved in the thing. They offered me the Alexandra seat to follow David provided I reneged on the Country Party, and I was the state president. Well, I'd have been in the nose of a lot of people to do a thing like that. So I knocked it back. I stood against Chapman but I was running about a couple of thousand votes short of beating him.

So what are we up to now? Victor Harbor?

We're up to Victor Harbor and the changes you've known over time. So when you first knew it, Lester—we are sitting in Encounter Bay here—there wouldn't have been housing here at all?

LJ: No. We're standing here and looking around and the only place here was that corner place, and that was a holiday house built by John Clayton from Clayton Furniture. Did you know John?

No, I didn't.

LJ: His father established Clayton Furniture and he had the business there, and this was his holiday house. He and I were good mates. He eventually sold the business for five million dollars.

So what else has happened? Quite a lot has happened really in the town.

So in the recent past—I'm talking the last decade, Lester—there's been a lot of development at Victor.

LJ: Oh, yes. It's going on every day. Up this road here there's two or three houses being built, and you go down the road somewhere and there's a house. You drive along the front and there's homes being built.

Has that surprised you? The pace of it all.

LJ: No. The fastest growing town in Australia is Goolwa. Now Goolwa really takes in the south coast—Middleton, Port Elliot and Victor Harbor. No, it doesn't surprise me. Over the last couple of years when building has been hit a bit, it's still going on in Victor Harbor. Houses are being built by people who have saved their money over their life to retire to Victor Harbor.

Yes, it does seem that way.

LJ: That's what's happening.

I can remember, say forty years ago, it was a place where a few people came to retire but that was normally older homes that they'd had as holiday homes for decades. Now this seems a much more planned move over a number of years, that people plan their retirement here.

LJ: Yes. They save up all their working life to be able to retire at Victor Harbor. And it costs them a bit to do it, you know. (*Laughs*) The houses on the foreshore are a million, and around here a place sold not that long ago for 680,000.

Well, Lester, is there anything else you'd like to talk about with Victor and your knowledge of it?

LJ: Well, if you'd like to ask some questions that could sort of jog my memory.

I was thinking more about your involvement with the council and how that impacted—that wasn't about the corporation so much as around the outskirts, wasn't it?

LJ: Yes. My local government work—I had a bit to do with the chairman of the various adjoining councils because there's a hills association takes that in and they work pretty closely. The government got the idea they'd reduce the number of councils. I was a bit involved in that, looking at whether there would be an amalgamation with the Victor Council and who could be amalgamated. Then I realised that a good amalgamation would be with Yankalilla but the peninsula is divided in two. Willunga and Yankalilla are that side and the other side is from Victor to Strath. They are natural boundaries. I don't know that I've had direct interest or influence on Victor itself but I've had close dealings with what was going on.

So in terms of Yankalilla, Lester, during the time that you were on council that area also changed a lot, didn't it?

LJ: Oh, yes. That's grown immensely. Well, the land development at Cape Jervis, and the land development at Carrickalinga, I had an influence in all of that. Down at Cape Jervis,

the main town area there now, all the utilities are underground, and I personally insisted on that when I was chairman of the council. A fellow called Hooper owned the land and he would've cut my throat if he'd have half a chance. *(Laughs)* Because it cost them to develop it. He had to put in all the underground facilities before he could flog the land off. If he didn't do that we wouldn't pass the thing for subdivision.

The locals would be pretty grateful today, I would've thought.

LJ: Well, they've got a better town than they could have had.

So Lester, looking back over all those years, I'm amazed at the story you've told really about how you came originally with your family from Berri down to Adelaide as a very young boy, and then Adelaide off to war, and then Adelaide to Parawa. It's really quite incredible to think that even though your father sold that Parawa property you ended up only being a few blocks down the road.

LJ: Yes. But looking back on it you can see that I didn't have a real lot of say in my life. It was all dealing with what had to be done.

Yes.

LJ: And my whole life has been from one step to the next step.

Before we finish, Lester, how did you come to end up retiring here yourself?

LJ: Well, we sold the property out there at Parawa, and I said to my wife, 'We've got to go somewhere and I reckon it would be just as well to stay in Victor'. We didn't want to go back to Adelaide. She was involved in Victor. She was one of the leading lights in the choral society. She used to sing. She had a beautiful voice and she was their leading contralto voice in the choral society. And I was involved in stuff in the area. So we thought we would retire to Victor. Crikey, we got here and I started another round—and she did, too. She was a local preacher. She preached in fourteen pulpits in the Fleurieu.

Goodness!

LJ: She's pretty well known for what she did in that field. So we retired here. A chap called Garnet Hutchinson was a land agent, and I knew him and knew the Hutchinson family for years back. I rang him up and said, 'What have you got for sale, Garnet?' And he said, 'There's a place down near the boat ramp. It's a nice home, it's fairly new and hasn't long been built and the people have decided they have to sell it. Come and have a look at that'.

So I hopped in the car with my wife and we came over and he took us down and showed it to us. It was a nice new home but it was on a bend in the road there. It was a little bit cramped I thought. I'm glad that I didn't buy it. They've put two-storey places overlooking it now.

Anyway, we looked at that and one another, and I said to him—he was sitting in his car down there—'Haven't you got anything else? He said, 'No. Houses are a bit short at the moment'. Then he said, 'Oh, there's a place up in Clair Avenue, about halfway up the hill. I don't know whether you'd be interested in that'. The bloke had retired from Mount Gambier and came here because his kids were in school down here and they don't want to come out to Victor to say gooday. They were just starting up Westlakes at the time and the chap decided he would leave here and go up to Westlakes and the kids would be nearby in school and they could come and see them. He said, 'He told me he wants to sell'. So I said, 'Let's have a look at it'.

I've got a theory about buying houses, is that you go and have a look at them and you come back a fortnight later. You go home and think about it and you come back a fortnight later and walk in, and if you still like it, you can buy it. *(Laughs)* We had a look at it and we went off. I said to my wife, 'Don't make up your mind about it. We'll think and talk about it, what we saw and what needed to be done'. So we did that for the fortnight.

We came back and walked in. I said to her, 'What do you reckon?' She said, 'I want it'. And I said, 'Yes, it will do us. It will do us nicely'. So we bought it.

I rang up Garnet Hutchinson and I said, 'We've decided to take it, Garnet'. He said, 'Good. I'll make a contract'. I said, 'Do it today, Garnet. I want to sign it tomorrow'. He grumbled a bit but he did it. I signed the contract and the day after that a bloke from Broken Hill rang him up. He had the money in his pocket and he'd seen this house and he wanted to buy it. And he said, 'Do you want to make a few bob on your contract?' I said, 'No. I want the house and I'm going to keep it. You can tell him to go back to Broken Hill'. *(Laughs)* So I've still got it now, forty years later.

Well, Lester, thank you so much for talking about your memories of your life. I found it fascinating listening to your account.

LJ: Did you?

Yes, I did.

And also, too, recording what you could remember about Victor being in between the two rivers because that actually makes a lot of sense to me. So thank you very much, Lester.

LJ: You can imagine livestock being—I told you where the yard used to be?

Yes.

LJ: You can imagine them letting livestock out and having to drive them through the town.

Actually we should recount that story before we finish this because you did tell me that when we were down at the library, didn't you?

LJ: Yes.

The yards were near where the railway turntable is now?

LJ: Yes. That's the exact spot.

So did you actually bring a mob down there?

LJ: No. I brought a mob of cattle and I brought a large mob of sheep the two times that I brought them through Victor. Looking back I reckon I got drovers to handle them. They were two days getting them out to Parawa. I don't know what sort of fun they had with these cattle because they were young ones. *(Laughs)* About fifty young cattle.

Well, look, thank you again, Lester. It's been a delight to talk with you. Thank you.