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OH 658/1

Full transcript of an interview with

ASHLEY SUTTON

on 24 November 2002

By Chris Woodman

Recording available on CD

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J.D. SOMERVILLE ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION, STATE LIBRARY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA: INTERVIEW NO. OH 658/1

Interview with Mr Ashley Sutton by Chris Woodman at Peterborough, South Australia, on the 24th November 2002 for The State Library of South Australia's Peterborough Oral History Project 'Relaying Our Tracks'.

TAPE 1 SIDE A

This interview is between Ashley Sutton and Chris Woodman on November 24 the year 2002. Ashley, could you give me your full name, please?

Reginald Ashley Sutton.

And your date of birth?

18th July 1944.

And where were you born?

I was born at Maylands in Adelaide, which is an eastern suburb of Adelaide.

Okay. And where did you grow up?

About the first two or three years was in Adelaide, around the eastern suburbs again, market gardens and what not, and then in Booborowie after that, we moved to Booborowie. And I was there in Booborowie probably until I was about fourteen.

Okay, and where did you go from there?

Well, when I went to work at Burra in the Post Office I literally boarded everywhere I went. I started work in Burra in the Post Office and then went on the relief staff and used to board everywhere.

Okay, yes. Get back to that in a minute. What type of education did you receive?

I did most of my primary level schooling at Booborowie and North Booborowie, a little bit at Burra – from year six and seven I think I did at Burra – and then my secondary education I did at Burra.

Okay. And the previous interview we had you said that you didn't really like going to high school. Could you expand on that?

Oh, we used to live about five miles north of Booborowie, and it meant riding a bike from North Booborowie down to Booborowie to catch the bus, and I think the bus used to leave Booborowie about seven in the morning and then go to Burra, and then

it did a circular run after it dropped us off, so it meant often – especially in the winter time – you're leaving home in the dark and getting back home in the dark afterwards at night, and it was just a bit of a trial to get to and from school. It just wasn't enjoyable at all.

All right. Okay, and then the job came up, did it, or you went looking for a job?

Yes, well, I mean I probably should have went on and done further education. A lot of people say that they should have stayed on, but I was just glad to get out of school because another twelve months or more of that to say do an extra year after Intermediate would have been just – just wouldn't have been bearable for me, so I decided I'd find some work.

I was initially offered a job with an accountancy firm in Booborowie and it didn't suit me at all because it was inside work and I preferred to work outside, so I joined the Post Office at Burra. That was as a junior Postal Officer. As it turned out it was certainly outside work, riding a bike around and pushing a pushbike around in the hills of Burra. And it probably wasn't what I should have been doing, anyway. I sat for an entrance exam for the Post Office at Burra and got full marks for the entrance exam, and one of the blokes in the Post Office said to me on the first day I presented, 'Why did you decide to join the Post Office? With marks like that you should be able to do something else.' And I really didn't know – I was only fourteen years old. So it was just a job.

All right. So we'll continue on. So you did that for a while.

Yes, four and a half years I was in the Post Office. I was on the relief staff at Burra after a little while, because they needed people to relieve for a few weeks in various places while other people went on leave. So my first relief job was at Loxton, and I think I spent six months there. And I went back there several times afterwards in the following years, but a lot of the other places I went relieving were places like Riverton and Saddleworth, Hallett, Auburn, around that area. And Spalding, of course. And I got stuck in Spalding because the fellow I went over there to relieve went AWOL – wasn't really a nice place to work, although it was very busy because just at that time they were duplicating the Morgan to Whyalla pipeline and there was a big waterworks camp at Spalding. And there was quite a lot of work in the Post Office when on pay day all the people that worked there, a lot of them were

immigrants, and they'd come in to send money back home to Maria or mother or the family back in their home country, and sometimes that would lead to staying back quite a long time. So after a while I got to find out why the other bloke went AWOL and didn't come back! (laughs)

But I was getting pestered from the Postmaster at Burra because I was still on the staff at Burra as a full-time employee although I was away relieving everywhere else, and the fellow they'd had at Burra as a casual just to replace me, they wanted to put him on as a permanent. So he eventually badgered me into applying for a position at Orroroo that was advertised in the *Gazette*, and as it happened I got it, but I didn't really want it. So it wasn't that long after that I decided I'd have a shot at getting into the railways, because I'd been in Peterborough relieving about probably four or five months every year and got to know quite a few people up here, and decided that I might have a better opportunity work-wise in the railways than I did have in the Post Office, because Post Office was very poor pay. The only thing that made it reasonable were the expenses that you used to get on relief staff, and of course that had its own pitfalls. You were living at boarding houses and hotels and all around the place everywhere you went, you weren't in many places longer than about three weeks unless you had more than one person to relieve. And of course Peterborough was the exception – they had quite a few here that used to relieve, and as a result I spent four or five months of the year here. But when I decided to try for a job in the railways, somebody suggested that it's no good trying as a job as a cleaner to get on the engines because they don't need any, and that's really where I wanted to be. And I thought, 'Well, perhaps if I apply to join as a porter I could transfer to the engine ranks later on.' And when I made some enquiries at the staff office at Peterborough they said, 'We don't need any porters, we need a cleaner, need cleaners!' And I said, 'Oh, that's good, that's what I wanted.' So I virtually started within about a week of that. And the career in the railways went from there. (break in recording)

When I started work in the Post Office I think my wage was eleven pounds, sixteen and elevenpence. Out of that I needed to pay seven pound for board, and I think I banked two pound ten and had six and elevenpence to spend. I think by the time I finished in the Post Office my wages were probably not much more

than about fourteen or fifteen pounds – for the four and a half years I was there it was pretty poor. When I joined the railways I think I was a couple of days short of a full fortnight's work and because of the shift allowances and the work I'd actually done I think the money was about twice as much as whatever I earned in the Post Office. So the job started to look more and more attractive by the minute.

Okay. So when did you join the railways?

The date was the thirteenth of April 1964. I joined at Peterborough. On the same day – or the day before, I think – Brian Simms and Colin Howard started. I transferred to Adelaide for a short time, I did twenty months in Adelaide when Janina went off down to Adelaide because her parents had moved there.

Okay, just before we go any further, so you actually met Janina as a result of working in the Post Office, didn't you?

Yes, I did, yes. Yes, I think I was one of the new lads in town working in the Post Office and the word had got around that there was a new lad in the Post Office might be worth a look at, and so she came in on the pretext of buying some stamps or an envelope or something to look me over. And I think we met a bit later on – we used to go to the pictures in groups, and as it happened we just sort of paired up after a few weeks. And so she was the girlfriend.

She was the girlfriend, okay.

Yes.

And so that continued on when you joined the railways, obviously.

Yes. Well, I mean, I was away relieving in the Post Office and often came back to Peterborough on weekends because Janina lived here and because I'd made a lot of other friendships in the time that I was at the Post Office. And it was certainly a deciding factor in me actually leaving the Post Office and coming to settle in Peterborough.

So then she moved to Adelaide.

Yes, well, promotion was always an issue in the railways, and moving from one place to another for health reasons and what not, and Janina's Mum and Dad moved

back to Adelaide and Janina boarded here for a while with the Winchester family. That worked quite all right for a little while, and then she suddenly started to get homesick or family sick and she applied for a job in David Jones in Adelaide and got that, so she moved to Adelaide. And I used to travel back and forwards on weekends if I had them or when I had them off, and that started to get a bit wearing as well so I put in for a transfer to Mile End. And I worked down there for twenty months until we got married and came back and settled in Peterborough.

Why did you come back to Peterborough?

Well, I didn't like Adelaide in the first place, (laughs) and, strange as it seems, it was a lot more expensive to live in Adelaide. I mean, to go backwards and forwards to work, you used to go through a tank of petrol a week easily. When we came back to Peterborough you'd fill the tank up on pay day and – I mean, the values were a bit different then, but it might cost you two dollars to fill the tank up and you wouldn't have to fill it up for another three pay days. But also the housing – there were a lot of available housing, railways houses, in Peterborough and the rents were cheap, and so it sort of gave you the opportunity to start gathering your things together. When we first moved in to Peterborough down a stone railway cottage in Queen Street we had just enough for a kitchen suite – it was a second-hand kitchen suite that somebody had sold us or given us – and we bought a new bedroom suite, and then we had to work from there. We gradually carpeted the lounge and bought a lounge suite, and so things sort of happened bit by bit.

So Janina worked as well?

She worked for a little while in the telephone exchange. And I think she was actually pregnant before she got the job, but she worked until she couldn't reach the – couldn't comfortably sit behind the switchboard any more. And then she gave birth to our first child, Vicki – that was in 1968 – and then of course looking after a small child on your own was a full-time job. And then Shane was born about two and a half years later, in January '71, so with two small children there wasn't really the opportunity for her to work. And there wasn't a need to either, probably, because she was busy raising the family and I was away working shift work and travelling to and from.

But you could live comfortably on what you were earning, though, with your shift work?

Yes. Yes, there was quite a lot of work around at that time.

So how long have you lived here? When did you actually move her permanently?

I came here permanently, I suppose, when we got married I suppose you'd say the permanent time, because I was relieving here in the Post Office, then I came and joined the railways so I actually boarded with Bill and Nell Girdler who are great-aunt and uncle, down on Main Street. And then, when I went to Mile End for a time, I lived in a unit down there, boarding house, and when we came back here – I suppose when we came back and got married and came back here that's when you'd say we took up permanent residency here, and been here ever since.

Oh, okay. So how old were you when you joined the railways?

I think I was twenty. Because I joined – yes, I joined on 13th April '64.

And how long had you been in there when you decided to get out?

Oh, almost thirty years. So I'd actually – yes, it was just under thirty years that I'd been.

So what was it like, the first day at work at the railways?

Well, it was a bit of a new experience, because sort of in the Post Office you were dressed in the uniform, sort of in the public eye all the time delivering letters or telegrams or serving behind the counter. Of course in the railways suddenly you were dressed in overalls and your job was to clean and polish steam engines, so it was certainly a bit different. And of course you were working – rather than just working the day shift you were working shift work as well.

So there was plenty of work available when you joined?

There was a lot of work available, yes, because you used to progress from cleaner to fireman –

Work your way through.

– and work your way through the ranks. And of course, as blokes qualified, whilst they were doing correspondence and what not to qualify to go out on the track, and they went out on the track and that left a shortage of cleaners. And so the area of

employment was to be on the locomotives, obviously be employed in the first instance as a cleaner.

Right. Okay, so your first job was a cleaner. Could you explain what a cleaner was?

A cleaner used to polish up the steam engines, clean the cabs, get everything nice and clean, shine the boilers up with tallow, and we used to clean all the hot areas with tallow to make them shine and the cold areas we used to use Solv-F it was called – it was a bit like kerosene. Didn't smell like it but it was something like kerosene with a little bit of oil in it – and it used to make those areas, you know, clean and shiny.

Was there a reason for that? Did it make the trains efficient or was it just for purely cosmetic – – –?

Well, I suppose if you just let the things get dirtier and dirtier and dirtier they would have looked horrible in the first place. But it probably certainly made them easier to work on – even the firemen and drivers had to do a certain amount of work around the engines, and I mean if they were dirty and filthy, well, then it would have made their job a bit harder.

All right. So then you worked your way up the ladder.

Yes. Well, of course, whilst you were cleaning engines you used to also do correspondence courses in – I mean, I think the first exam we did was called a 'Cleaner's Preliminary', and once you'd done the Cleaner's Preliminary and then some basic safe working rules, and then with a bit of instruction you could actually go out and work on a shunt loco as a fireman. But mainly your time while you were cleaning, a lot of it as well as the cleaning was involved in correspondence courses and instructional lectures to get you trained up and ready to be a fireman. And it was never-ending. I mean, the correspondence and the education and the training sessions and lectures, they were just ongoing. I remember when I did my first diesel examination in preparation to be a driver and it was scheduled for twelve hours, and I think I managed it in about eight. But after it had finished and I'd successfully passed it I thought, 'Oh, that's good, that's my last exam.' (laughs)

Yes. Just the beginning?

Just the beginning. I reckon that in the twenty-nine to thirty years in the railways I probably would have done several exams a year.

All right. So your next job was acting fireman.

Yes. Once you were qualified to actually work on a steam engine or work on an engine you trained to be a fireman by acting in that capacity. You'd go out and actually do the same work as the fireman would, under direction of a driver, and you'd work as if you were a fireman. You'd do everything the fireman would do. And that was the role you undertook until you might have got to the stage you'd progressed and you'd done your fireman's mechanical examination, which involved examination and lectures about steam engines and boilers and what not, and then if you were lucky you got promoted to fireman, and you'd actually be appointed to the position of fireman. So then, once you're appointed to the position of fireman, you could – after doing some more correspondence and rules and engineman's examination – you could act in the role of engineman. And then you'd go out working as an engineman. You'd start on shunt engines and then you'd progress to different sorts of trades, and eventually work your way up to that you could work the high-speed trains and passenger trains.

Okay. So what was the role of an acting fireman when you're actually working?

Well, the fireman on a steam engine used to tend the fire and, you know, make sure there was plenty of water in the boiler and generally operate the steam engine in a way to keep the steam pressure up so the driver could work the train.

And the fireman? You were acting - that was an acting fireman.

Well, the fireman and acting fireman were –

The same thing, was it?

– basically the same thing, yes.

Okay.

It was only a difference in – once you got rated as a fireman you were then a fireman.

Right, okay. So were you – so were you being an apprentice? If you were an acting fireman were you being an apprentice, or were you actually – so in other words, were there three of you on the train?

No, no, no. There were still only ever two of you on there. I mean, it was just the slow promotional process meant to – you started as a cleaner, and when you went out onto the engines you were an acting fireman. And then after you'd done a certain amount of examinations and the certain time there you may get a rate as a fireman, so you became a fireman rather than an acting fireman. And there was a difference in wage levels. And the 'Acting' was also a way of the work was done at a bit to the rate[?] as well.

To the rate? Yes, okay.

And the process slowed down quite a lot going from fireman, acting driver, and from acting driver to rated driver, because to get a position as a rated driver or rated engineman you needed to apply for a position which was vacant for engineman.

So what actually did the driver do?

What, during the preparation of the – – –?

Yes, start from the beginning, yes.

Well, from the beginning, from sign-on, the driver's job primarily – particularly with a steam engine – was you'd collect toolbox and the required lubricants and all that sort of stuff for the loco, go round to the locomotive and then start oiling up and checking all the loco to make sure and get it – virtually prepare it to get it ready to work the train. The fireman would book on a little bit later and he'd have some things to pick up and get as well from the store, and his job was to make sure that the fire was nice and clean, and prepare the fire, get it ready for – also to generate the steam so that once the train was in a position to get under way everything was ready to go.

When you say 'the fire was nice and clean', what do you mean by that?

Well, I mean, if a fire – a clean fire had a nice bed of active coal, you know, nice, red hot coals, and little or no ash or clinker in amongst it, so it was clean. You used to use the rocker bars in the fire and it used to shake the ashes down into the ash pan, and before you went out you'd stop on the ash pit and you'd turn on the ash wetter

which would sort of wet the ashes in the ash pan to make sure they weren't hot when they landed in the pit – there was water in the pit, anyway – and you'd empty the ash pan out. But a clean fire was one that had a nice – everything was burning nicely and there wasn't a lot of ash or clinker or built-up areas in it, it was just nice, thin, clean, that the air would pass through and when you threw raw coal on there it would respond quickly.

Okay, yes. So you explained once before that a driver had to learn how to basically pull a train apart and put it back together.

Yes. Initially the engineman's examination, the steam engine driver's certificate, required pulling down of an engine side, which was basically disabling one side of a locomotive so you could work it. It would mean pulling the main connecting rod off and then securing the valve gear in a position where it wasn't going to operate and do any damage. And then you could operate the engine on one side if necessary. It wasn't a popular exercise because it used to take you a fair while to do it, but I only ever did one and that was in the shed, so it was just part of an exercise with a group of us to disable a side. And even then a lot of it was explained rather than actually physically doing it because it was quite a job.

Yes. It was part of your training.

Yes.

Okay. Can you actually explain how a steam train works?

Well, a steam train works by the heat from the firebox heating up water – very basic explanation – heating water to generate steam. And the steam is stored under pressure in the boiler in the free space above the water in the boiler. Mostly the steam engines that I worked on were super-heated, which meant that once the steam started to be used from the boiler it went back through super-heated tubes in the vent pipes in the firebox and it got reheated, and it would dry the steam out and expand it so that the steam was more useful while it was dry. Wet steam was a bit of a problem because it used to wash lubrication off the walls of cylinders, and it would generally not be good for an engine. But dry steam was almost like compressed air except that it was very hot. And of course dry steam used to develop in volume and you could do a lot more work with dry steam. An engine which picked up water or

foam and eventually found its way into the super-heated tubes as water, it was known to 'prime', where it would pick up the foam or the water from the boiler and go through into the super-heated tubes and then generate wet steam in the super-heated tubes instead of drying out existing steam, and it would come out of the funnel almost like black rain. And a lot of the people around Peterborough would certainly remember going out to get the washing and finding out it had all little black spots all over it from an engine that had 'primed' while it was trying to leave the yard because it had too much water to start with and it had picked up water.

Right. So it would build up steam and push it into areas which actually pushed the pistons.

Yes. The steam, through the main valve, under the control of the driver, he'd open the main valve or the throttle valve and the steam would pass through the super-heated tubes into the steam chest, and then it would go from there to the pistons on the side of the loco. And the time of the admission and exhaust of the steam to the pistons was determined by the valve gear. And if you've ever been on a steam engine you'll see the big wheel there with a handle on it on the driver's side, and that's where you control the stroke and the timing of the valves, to allow the engine to move forward or to move it backwards. And you can vary the cut-off of the valves to get more work out of the engines. And when an engine first starts, a steam engine first pulls away, the cylinders and valve gear and everything are quite – or relatively – cool to how they should be, and you'll notice that quite a lot of steam issues out of the relief cocks on the front and back of the cylinders as they start off. But once a cylinder starts to warm up a bit and the engine gets under way those will be closed so that they can use the full extent of the steam pressure to do the work. And as the engine develops speed then the valve cut-off can be varied so that instead of the piston being pushed all the way from one end of the stroke to the other it literally just puts the steam in into bursts because the thing already had momentum, it was only a matter of keeping it going. And you used to have – the valving systems used to let in what they called a little bit of 'lead steam' in some cases, where the piston would actually bounce off the other end rather than the piston sort of reaching the end and having nothing left and nothing to go against, just to put a little bit of

lead steam in so that it would bounce off the end, and that would improve the efficiency as well.

So actually starting up a steam train is a very long process, isn't it, from cold to – – –?

From cold, yes. Yes.

So could you go through that?

Well, most times that we got on an engine it was already under steam. But if you were required to get an engine under steam, in the loco the box boy used to load up wood on a cold engine, and then it was the liver-up's job to start the fire up. And of course, being in a loco, if the boiler house was under steam – in most cases it was – they used to put a steam ring in the engine exhaust or in the flue pipe and that would speed up the lighting up process by creating a bit of draught in the firebox so that it would start a bit quicker. But once you got a good bed of coals from the wood then you could start adding a bit of coal and you'd gradually build up the fire, warm up the boiler, and once it started to boil you could develop some steam pressure. And once it got to that stage, where it had a reasonable amount of steam pressure, and it was then the fireman and driver used to take over and start actually preparing the engine for travel.

You said earlier the engine crew would pick up a toolbox. What was in the toolbox?

Oh, most of the things in the toolbox were various-sized spanners, like dedicated to particular jobs; big hammer; there were a little spatula device which was used to slop water out of the oil boxes or the axle boxes. With steam there was always quite a lot of water about, and sometimes the axle boxes, which were just oil boxes with a flat lid on top of the axle box and a cotton wick in it that used to wick the oil down onto the bearing, and if you got water in there it would hold less oil. So your spatula used to have to get the engine in just the right place so you could reach through the spokes of the wheel to get at this axle box and you'd flip the lid up with this thing and then slop the water out and then add oil. So that was another device that was in there. And of course the King Dick spanner was always an essential item in the toolbox because it used to fit all sorts of sizes from about three inches down.

What were they called?

A King Dick. A King Dick spanner is just an adjustable spanner. But just the shape of it, it could double as a small hammer as well. (laughter)

And the railway workshops and the roundhouse – how was that all set up down here at Peterborough?

Well, the roundhouse itself, when I first started in the railways, had quite a lot of steam engines in there. And about the first, I suppose, ten roads were dedicated to steam engines and narrow gauge. And then later, when the diesels arrived, they – – –. (tape ends)

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE A: TAPE 1 SIDE B

[And then later, when the diesels arrived, they] modified a section of the roundhouse with about four roads to accommodate diesels. And they had elevated walk platforms along so that you could reach the footplates, and they also had sunken areas so that the fitters and whoever was tending the engines or repairing the engines could walk along at virtually eye-level with the bogeys. And then a little bit further round there was an area that housed the motor inspection cars, or MIC cars, and then there was a break then. I believe the roundhouse was a continuous structure for about twenty-three roads, but there was a break just after the MIC sheds which was the store road, and there was a store, oil store, a storehouse, built there. And then, as you moved further round towards the machine shop, there was one track that used to lead out alongside of the machine shop, and then one or two dead-end roads that led up to the wall of the machine shop and then, once you got outside of that, there was a couple of roads that went down between the roundhouse and the boilerhouse, which led down to the wagon repair area.

Later on, they built the diesel shed, which was a dedicated area for maintaining and servicing diesels, and it's quite a large structure, and it had some pretty modern innovations in it at the time. There's a drop pit in there which enabled you – didn't matter what size engine it was, but they could actually physically hold one end of the engine up and then drop the bogey out of it and then traverse it out of the way so that they could either replace the bogey or do some work on it and then put it back. So once the diesel had come there was quite a lot of work,

especially with the standard gauge, there was a tremendous amount of work done on locomotives in that new diesel section.

What about the brick building alongside the roundhouse? I believe that's where everyone booked on and booked off?

Yes. That was built when I first started. That was called the 'amenities block'. They had a locker room area, they had showers, they also had Loco Foreman's office and the Loco Foreman's clerk were housed in that area. There was another building – once you walked through there, there was another building when I first started which had the time checkers and it was the sign-on areas for the crews, and that was a wood and iron structure, and that was between the existing brick building and the first set of tracks alongside of the new diesel shed.

Oh, okay.

There were also – just a little bit east of that, there were also a brick building there when they put the diesel tanks in, they were built there so that they could fuel the diesels and what not, so they used to bring diesel fuel over from Port Pirie and then pump it up into the tanks.

There's also, between where the – the showers and toilets there's one building, and there's also another building alongside, in between that and the roundhouse.

Oh, well, that was original old amenities block before they built the new brick one. That one's a sort of pre-cast concrete structure much the same as a lot of the stone cottages that were built or the cement cottages. That was the original amenities block for loco crews and for shed staff. Had showers and that sort of stuff in it. Later on, a portion of that was used for the electrician staff, the people that used to work on the electrical side of the diesel locos, and also they used to do some electrical work on brake vans. Originally, those facilities were housed up near the old goods shed up in the railway yard itself, but then when they moved it down to loco they moved into that area of the amenities block. And just on the other end, on the northern end of that building, they converted that into the loco crews' pilot[?] room.

The boiler house, where did they get all their water from?

I think it used to come out of the railway dam.

Reservoir.

Railway dam or the reservoir, yes. And they also had a couple of water towers around, you'll know the one, down near loco, or in the loco yards. And there was another one up on what's now Jack O'Toole's paddock. And I think the water used to come from the railway reservoir for those.

Right. That's what that big concrete tank would be across the road there, alongside where the hostel was.

Yes.

Yes. There's still water in there, they pump it in.

Yes. Water used to get pumped up into that, there was electric motors down in the bottom of those, used to pump it up into the tank then it [would] gravitate to the various areas around the loco area.

So there would be a hell of a lot of men working in that area, wouldn't there, especially during the day shift.

Yes, there were a lot, like, in the first instance. Like I can recall going into the loco as a kid when we came up to stay with our – relations of ours, with Girdlers, and there were mobile forges, you know, in the loco area and people chucking hot rivets around and, you know, jackhammers or pneumatic hammers working, riveting boilers, and all that sort of – it was a terrific amount of noise and activity. And they reckon at that time that that turntable used to be manned full-time and hardly ever stopped. But when I started there were a couple of diesels here when I first started, and that activity had fallen away a bit. But there was still a lot of work to do on the maintenance and repair of steam engines. There were also, in the wagon repair area, there was a lot of work done there. All the wagons from the narrow gauge, which was virtually from Pirie up to Quorn up to Cockburn and across to Terowie, all of the maintenance for those vehicles was done in the loco at Peterborough. They had all sorts of trades there, wagon repairers and fitters, and of course the machine shop used to handle quite a bit of – quite a lot of people worked there, and they used to handle all the – used to do all sorts of things. They had forges in there and big slotting machines, lathes and mills and – – –.

They had big scales in there too, didn't they?

I think – I'm not sure about in the workshop. They may have done – there was some sort of weighbridge there, was there?

It's still there, yes.

Yes, they're still there.

Yes, there's twelve, I think, twelve scales. It actually weighs each side –

Okay.

– of the bogeys.

Yes.

Yes, there's twelve of them there. And then I think later on they put electronic ones out, down past the diesel workshops.

Yes, I don't know that they were electronic. They used to – they had a weighbridge down past the – yes, it was just east of where the diesel workshop is now. But whenever they needed the service of a weighbridge they used to bring trucks in from the yard to weigh them and that sort of stuff. But no, I don't think it was electronic; it was still a bit like an oversized bag scale, you know? The bloke would slide the thing along. And then periodically they'd have to come up – they had a special truck, you know, with a known weight, with these big weights on it, and come up and calibrate the thing to make sure they were right.

The Weights and Measures, basically.

Yes, yes.

Yes, all right.

Yes.

The gauges – we were lucky, we had three gauges coming in here and that caused a lot of work, didn't it?

Yes. Well, of course, initially there was only narrow gauge, and then once the standard gauge started and they brought the broad gauge across from Terowie to connect to Peterborough there was a tremendous amount of work. There was a lot of work in transferring goods from vehicle to vehicle. I mean, all livestock was actually manually transferred from one gauge to another, and they had specific areas for that.

Which were? Where were they?

They were just east of the bogey exchange. They used to transfer – you'd run a big string of, say, broad gauge sheep vans or cattle vans into that area, and then transfer stuff into standard gauge trucks on there. Sometimes you'd run them up against each other so you'd have dual tracks and you'd run – with sheep you could run them right through from one set of vehicles right through into another set. But with cattle, needed to be physically unloaded into a yard and then loaded back into a standard gauge or *vice versa* that was going the other way.

But they didn't use the saleyards at all for that?

Yes, there was an area there near the saleyards, but most of that was for loading and unloading stock, which was actually –

At a sale?

– at a sale or, yes, was coming in for sale or being loaded after a sale.

So these other yards were actually out by the bogey exchange.

Yes. They're not actually yards; they were an area of road set aside for transferring livestock.

Oh, okay.

And, as I said, they needed to be – like, for instance, the broad gauge to standard gauge, they needed to be – tracks needed to be fairly close. There wasn't a big difference in the gauges, but you needed the trucks to be able to line up so that you could put them one gauge against another truck. What you had to be careful of there is that when you pulled a string of trucks out you didn't have a broad gauge one or two hanging on the end if you were pulling back up into the standard gauge yard to put the trucks out on the train. But it wasn't that uncommon for the vehicles to run out of, say, broad gauge track out onto a standard gauge area when there was no track for it. ....

....

Yes, well, that's right. There was no specific dead end to stop them, it was just where the broad gauge track – and you used to have a notice there to say 'end of broad gauge track', but it didn't stop a truck that had a mind of its own. But they

also had a lot of work there with the bogey exchange area, where broad gauge trucks used to come in one side, used to come in the southern side of the yards, and standard gauge would come in from the northern side and then they'd exchange bogeys. And so stuff that was – if they were lucky they had a train coming in, standard gauge train, and it'd be transferred to broad gauge and broad gauge transferred to standard gauge, so it was almost a clean swap with the bogeys although there were different – sometimes there were different sorts of bogeys went on different sorts of tracks. And so there was quite a big stack of bogeys out there that you were being moved from one truck to another. And they had jacks there that would physically lift the trucks, and they'd roll the bogeys out after disconnecting all the brake gear and what not, and they'd roll the bogeys out, and pick them up with their Cranville cranes and put them in a stack, and then grab the appropriate-gauge bogey and put that, and roll it in, and then the brakes would have to be all adjusted and lowered down onto the pins and everything examined to make sure it was working properly before it was rolled out into the other end.

How many people were employed out there?

I'm not sure exactly, but I mean on a shift, if they were working both sides of the shed, I had a feeling there were probably about sixteen working, because you had a couple of crane drivers and you had lifters and you had brake riggers and, you know, general labourers there. So there were quite a lot of people worked in the physical bogey exchange side itself. And of course to feed the bogey exchange from either side you needed shunters, and so you had a shunter and an assistant shunter on the ground. You'd have a shunt driver and a fireman on the locomotive, so just to feed the trucks in and out of each end you needed those people as well. Then you had yard masters and truck checkers, and you had shunters and porters, and so you had quite a lot of people working in that area there with the bogey exchange. It was a very busy area, twenty-four hours a day.

What closed it down?

Well, completion of the standard gauge from Adelaide to Crystal Brook, which actually closed the bogey exchange because there was no need to run stuff up on the broad gauge any more. And they built a bogey exchange down at Islington, or Dry Creek, and any stuff that was on the broad gauge from down the South-East or down

that area or come across from Melbourne was bogey-exchanged there and then sent up on the standard gauge. So there was no need for the bogey exchange here any more, because that devastated that area of operations as far as we were concerned. But it also made things a lot more efficient.

Which would eventually kill the railways anyway.

Which eventually – yes, eventually killed them.

The three different gauges, was narrow gauge South Australian?

Yes. There's narrow gauge in Western Australia – was in Western Australia and South Australia. Victoria was all broad gauge, New South Wales was standard gauge; and the Commonwealth Railways area, which was from Port Pirie northwards and westwards, was standard gauge. So there was quite a mixture. The roundhouse here was originally built to accommodate broad gauge as well as narrow gauge, and if you look at the roundhouse now on those narrow gauge roads you can actually see timber sleepers laid lengthways in alongside the other tracks, which meant that the pits and the gauge could be widened to accommodate a broad gauge truck.

So they're running the steam train between here and Cockburn – that caused a few problems with different things, didn't it? As in water – – –.

Yes, well, I mean especially with the steam trains. I mean, an engine could only go so far without having to take water on, particularly if it was over a hardworking area. And at every station there was actually somewhere to take water – not that you took water at every station, but it was something that you needed to watch all the time. And I didn't do a great deal of work on the steam between Cockburn and Peterborough or Peterborough and Cockburn, because – although there were still some engines, steam engines, working on various jobs there, and most of the work that we used to do involved shuttle service between Paratoo and Peterborough, picking up the bank loading that was put off at Paratoo to come to Peterborough. Most of the track from Cockburn to Paratoo was – with the steam engine I'm just not sure what the starting load was, but it may well have been, say, about five hundred ton, but by the time it got to Paratoo you could only pull about two hundred and seventy-five, so you'd have to jettison the excess and that would stay there and get

built up till it made a load and then you'd work a steam engine out from Peterborough to pick up the bank loading from Paratoo.

Was the quality of the water a problem between here and there?

Not so much on the line to Cockburn because most of it was fresh water, but the water on the Quorn track – up at Quorn the water was very hard, and that used to create some problems.

Because it was bore water?

It would have been bore water, yes. And we used to work a train up to Quorn and then a Commonwealth crew would take the thing out to Hawker, take our engine out to Hawker, and usually if that happened, by the time the thing got back to Quorn and then you had to work it out of Quorn back to Peterborough, the boiler was absolutely rotten because of this hard water they'd been using. And we used to have to use what we called flocculents – Alfloc[?], it was commonly known as – and you'd add that to the water, it was a powder, and depending on where you were whether you used stuff from the blue drum or from the red drum. But you'd add so many dippers per tender of water, and the flocculent used to cause the solids in the water to coagulate and just settle to the bottom once it was in the boiler. If you didn't do that the water would foam a lot and you'd finish up with the free space in the top of the boiler would be full of foam and then you'd pick that up through the main valve and that's when the engine would start priming and give you all sorts of problems. So that was the main way you used to deal with the variation in the qualities of water. So it depended where you took water what quantities or what sort of flocculent you used.

Right. So the narrow gauge line that went up to Quorn, where did it go from Quorn? To Hawker, like you said?

Well, going back years it used to go up to Marree, it used to go up to Leigh Creek for the coal and that, because they used to work – that was long before I ever started – and they used to work coal trains from Leigh Creek down through Peterborough to Terowie, and you would have called that our 'tippler' at Terowie – it used to tip the trucks and transfer the stuff into broad gauge trucks, and from there it would go off down to the power stations in Adelaide. That was Leigh Creek coal. And Leigh

Creek coal wasn't – they used a bit of it here in the steam engines and it wasn't good coal. It was commonly known as brown coal, and in effect it was young coal by comparison with some of the others. The stuff that used to come from Muswellbrook in New South Wales was the best you could get – it was glistening, black, glossy stuff – and you'd chuck a shovelful of that in the firebox and it would just start crackling and spitting up straight away. But the brown coal would sit there and literally smoulder and smoke away, it didn't matter how hot the boiler was, until it started to break up and then got going. So it created a lot of problems in those days with actually working trains. And they used to use mixtures of it to try and overcome the problem.

You once told me that some of the drivers, they could really make it harder for the fireman.

Yes, well, some people sort of had a feeling for how an engine should work and how you could conserve steam and conserve energy and make it a bit easier to work and more efficient to work, and some blokes just seemed to have no idea. They would get on an engine and when the guard waved the green flag they'd release the brakes and get stuck into it, and of course the engine wasn't hot enough. I mean, it might look hot when you open the firebox door, but until an engine actually starts working and starts drawing draught through the fire and the fire really starts getting agitated and working, well, then the engine is not hot – it's literally termed as a 'cold' engine. So if you start flat strap with a cold engine, the poor old fellow on the banjo he's got his work cut out trying to keep up. And sometimes you could never catch up. I can remember working an engine one day to Terowie with a bloke, and we were buggered by the time we got around by the Catholic Church! We just ran out of steam before we got around there. But if he'd just nursed it around over the crossing and up then gradually built up speed and warmed the engine up we could have made it easily to the top. But that was – I mean, it wasn't a long trip to Terowie, but boy, that one was long. And we'd stop there at the Catholic Church to blow up and get some extra steam and get going again, and then he wanted to get going before we had a full head of steam and we didn't last much longer, much out past the cemetery, before we did it again, and it was just one of those trips. But then you'd get other blokes who could just jog along – I mean, old Alan Wellesley and Gordon Jess were

good to watch, you know. They used to just do it in slow motion and they'd warm things up and just jog along. And I can remember working with Jesse on a steam engine once and I thought I was doing it all right as the driver, and he just sauntered over and said, 'Oh, if you pull the wheel back a little bit,' he said, 'it'll make it easier on both of us.' So years of experience, you know, of working together and working out the best way to nurse an engine – – –. I mean, some engines were easy to work, they were good, they would steam freely and for some reason they just seemed to be more efficient and easier to work, and other engines you could work your butt off and be battling to get any much sense out of them – the harder you tried to work them or the more you looked after them the worse they treated you.

You saw the transition from steam to diesel – what did you think of it?

Well, I mean, the switch to diesel was certainly a lot cleaner – a lot noisier too, but a lot cleaner. I mean, a pair of overalls on a steam engine would last you a shift. A pair on a diesel would last you a week. So the job is a lot cleaner, but it also – the introduction of diesels also meant that they were a lot stronger, they were a lot less maintenance-intensive along the way. A full tank of fuel would take you through from Peterborough to Cockburn without having to stop for water or stop, you know, for coal or oil or water. And they also pulled a lot more load. The average diesel, 830-class diesel on the narrow gauge, pulled about three times as much as a steam engine. So it meant that you had, rather than three engine crews and three guards to work three separate trains, you had one engine crew and one guard to work to pull three times as much. So the efficiency then, was a big improvement in efficiency with the introduction of the diesels. But of course also it meant the reduction in the workforce in the workshops and what not as well. Whilst a lot of those fitters and engine repairers needed to change skills to be able to work on diesels, it required less of them because of a lot less maintenance. There were some areas that required a different sort of skill like electricians because they were diesel-electric engines, so you had the mechanical side of it which was the diesel itself, the physical engine, but then you had the electrical side of it which not everybody was skilled in, so the diesel electricians were a specialist field on their own, so there was a gain in that area. But there was also a loss of a lot of people in the workforce who were actually physically maintaining and repairing steam engines every day.

Initially when the diesel started, where was their main line? Where did they work mainly?

They worked mainly from Peterborough to Cockburn was their main function, because that was the longest haul for us, and that was the area that they were likely to give the most benefit. We still worked steam engines on the Terowie and Pirie and Quorn line right up until the narrow gauge actually closed, but whilst they weren't – steam wasn't dedicated to, say, the Pirie line or Quorn line, but it was used a lot of the time. Most of the trains on the Quorn line were run under steam right up until – almost up until the close.

And the reason they used the diesel was because it was ore, wasn't it – they'd bring the ore down from Broken Hill.

Yes. Yes, that was your main payload coming from Cockburn. The Silverton tramline used to bring it in as far as Cockburn, and then they'd make up the trains into quite a large train and have one or two diesels on it and work it from – the train would then work from Cockburn through to Peterborough and maybe put off some or put on some extra loading, particularly if there was wagon repairs and things like that to be done, the train would get remarshalled a little bit and then it would go on to Pirie. But that was the main payload, from Cockburn through to Pirie. And of course that's where all the money was, too. There was a story that the mines and the smelters used to pay for all the freight to bring the silver, lead and zinc ore down to Pirie by the little bit of gold or silver that they got out of the stuff. But it was also true, I think, that the ore train literally carried virtually the whole of the SAR[1] system. The freight revenue from that was tremendous, because it was a dedicated load on a dedicated track, if you like, and it was a guaranteed load all the time; it was always there.

So the tramline from Silverton to Cockburn, that was privately owned, wasn't it?

Yes, that's why it was called a tramway, because you weren't allowed to – nobody was allowed in Australia to have a private railway at that time, so it was called a 'tramway'. And Silverton tramway used to work – it was a railway, for all intents and purposes, but they called it a tramway.

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[1] South Australian Railways.

Yes. And they used to charge who? They used to do all the work, so they used to charge – – –?

Well, they would have been charged back to the mines or whoever they were carrying the stuff for. I mean, they even used to work the passenger train and what freight came from Broken Hill, ordinary freight, other than ore. They used to work those trains as well out to Cockburn. Nobody from Cockburn – no-one from the SAR system worked past Cockburn, that was the border. You were then into New South Wales, it was nothing to do with us except that we were getting fed with the freight from that side.

Right. And then South Australia would take it down to Port Pirie.

South Australia would take it down to Port Pirie.

And they would charge the company.

I guess so, yes. It would have been – I just can't remember what it was. The figure of seven dollars per ton comes into it at some stage – yes, that may have been different, I don't know. But apparently the – I mean, there was – I just can't remember what the tonnages were every day that were coming out of there, but I know once the standard gauge started they just worked one ore train a day. Occasionally there were other trains with extra loading on there that they couldn't fit on the one train, but I can recall working a train out of Broken Hill with a hundred vehicles on it, and I mean at eighty ton per vehicle it would probably [be] a net load of sixty tons, sixty to seventy tons, per vehicle. You know, that's a fair bit. And of course with the narrow gauge there were quite a number of trains. Nearly every train, with the exception of passenger trains, every train had some ore on it. Ore was usually on the front section because it was the heaviest, and then the lighter vehicles were on the back. So virtually every train coming out of Cockburn had some ore on it, except maybe dedicated livestock trains and passenger trains didn't.

Can you explain to me how the passenger – even to catch a train from Adelaide to Broken Hill, you'd come up through Peterborough. Would you?

We used to come up to Terowie on a broad gauge, yes. I mean, they used to have the 'Broken Express', they called it. It was broad gauge up as far as Terowie and then they had quite a long platform there in those days, and then you'd move across

into the Broken Hill Express that was way down the other side on the narrow gauge, and then you'd go from there to Peterborough and they'd swap the engine around onto the other end of the train or put a different engine on it – this is while it was still narrow gauge – and then off we'd go to Cockburn, and then Silverton Tramway engines would get on it and take it through to Broken Hill.

Right. So that would be a fairly long trip, wouldn't it?

Yes. I don't remember how long it was. Just the section from Peterborough to Cockburn probably used to take about six hours with a passenger train, so probably another hour and a half or so from Cockburn to Broken Hill. On this end I suppose it would be half hour, forty minutes Terowie to Peterborough, so then you've got the broad gauge piece on top of that. So yes, it would have been quite a long trip. I know that it used to get into Broken Hill quite late at night after leaving Adelaide, I think, at about mid-afternoon.

Right. So it was an inefficient system wasn't it, really, when you think about it?

Well, compared to what was available – I mean, what else was there?

No. Yes, but – – –.

I mean, you never had road crashes and things like you have now. But certainly it would have been reasonably inefficient. But they used to have sleeper cars on that Broken Hill Express. Once you got on at Peterborough, if you'd reserved sleeper accommodation you'd have a sleeper car all the way from Terowie to Broken Hill, and so if you're all night on the train it was a good idea to have a bed, but for those people in sit-up areas, well, you'd just sleep anywhere. Some people used to sleep up in the parcel racks. (laughter)

It used to happen on the troop trains, I believe.

Yes.

But it did employ a lot of people, though. Whilst it was inefficient – or what is now perceived as being inefficient – it did employ a lot of people.

Oh, certainly. Yes. There was – – –. (tape ends)

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE B: TAPE 2 SIDE A

[It used to happen on the troop trains, I believe.

Yes.

But it did employ a lot of people, though. Whilst it was inefficient – or what is now perceived as being inefficient – it did employ a lot of people.

Oh, certainly. Yes. There was] – in the rail operations there were so many areas that employed people. For a start, you had track maintenance as well. Just about every little station had a ghan[?], you know, cluster of houses at every station right round virtually right from Ucolta, was only ten mile out of Peterborough. Every station had a cluster of houses with people living there – they looked after track maintenance and what not. And then, of course, railway people needed houses to live in, so as I said every town had a house in it, so you also needed people to maintain the houses. And so you had what was called the Works Foreman area here in Peterborough that often gangs used to go out and do repairs and painting and all that sort of stuff to houses out along the track, and they'd be out there for weeks sometimes. And then of course all the wagon maintenance and engine maintenance. And then the administration. Peterborough was the hub for the standard gauge railway system in South Australia, and there were people from the Area Superintendents, and then you had the Locomotive Superintendents and Traffic Superintendents. You had the clerks and roster people and payroll staff, and –

It just went on.

– yes. There were enormous amount of people employed in the administration area as well. And then of course the larger stations along the way you also had – like, for instance, Gladstone had, say, a Station Master and a couple of Assistant Station Masters, and they'd have quite a few shunters there too because the line branched from Gladstone to go up to Wilmington, so there was another little hub there. And Pirie was the same, Pirie had quite a lot because they connected with the Commonwealth Railways and also the Adelaide broad gauge system came up to Port Pirie, so there was another hub there as well. So there was a lot of people employed in the railways.

There was a railcar drove from Port Pirie to – or from Peterborough to Port Pirie.

Yes.

How often did that go?

I've got a feeling it worked every day.

Did it?

Yes, because I worked on it and yes, we used to pick up – at Gladstone we used to pick up another couple of carriages and then pick up school kids all the way to take to Pirie, they used to go to school at Pirie, so it was a – – –.

It would be early in the morning then?

Yes, it used to go down in the morning and then you'd have eight hours or so off in Pirie, and then you'd work it back at night. Also at Gladstone you used to pick up a milk van, like it was a cool car, it had 'Golden North' written all over the side of the thing. You used to pick that up. They also had one used to connect with the broad gauge railcar, the Bluebird railcar, coming up through Blyth and Brinkworth up to Gladstone, so that had a cool car on it as well sometimes. So they used to cart the milk and that, see, from the Mid-North.

So that was, you reckon, every day?

Yes, every day.

As in seven –

Initially.

– days a week, or five days a week?

Five days a week.

Five days.

Yes.

Yes. So it'd go in the morning, come back at night.

Yes.

They also had the Bluebird, didn't they, going down to Adelaide in the morning, from Peterborough to – – –?

From Peterborough initially. It used to have the 75-class railcar would work and connect with the Bluebird at Terowie.

That's right, yes.

But once they brought the broad gauge through from Terowie to Peterborough then the Bluebirds used to run straight through to Peterborough. By then, as well, you had the Indian Pacific running so they had extra Bluebird services which used to connect with the Indian Pacific from Adelaide –

That's right, yes.

– because the Indian Pacific used to run and never went into Adelaide at that time; it was a dedicated standard gauge, used to run from Sydney across to Perth and *vice versa*. And so you would meet that train at Peterborough with passengers that would join her from Peterborough or getting off the train and going to Adelaide. So that was a dedicated Bluebird service connection with those.

So with that service you would have done that as well –

I did a lot of that, yes.

– yes, so you'd be going to Adelaide first thing in the morning and stay up there all day and then come back?

Yes. On the normal daily service, yes, you'd go to Adelaide first thing in the morning and you'd have a bare eight hours off, perhaps, in Adelaide. Sometimes maybe a little bit more. And then, whilst you were down there, you'd stay in the barracks at Mile End and then you'd book on later that evening to work the train from Adelaide back to Peterborough. They weren't long shifts, but it was still very tiring because you never got a lot of time off in Adelaide, you see.

It would have been a long day, too. You would have left here at half past five in the morning.

Well, initially you used to leave very early, but as the train speeds improved and they kept tightening and tightening the schedule and got a better path into Adelaide, you know, the certain hour of the day, it left a little bit later here, from Peterborough, and I think it used to leave about five-fifty or something in morning. I've got a feeling it left somewhere around that time. But I know it was always the fellow that was on four a.m. pilot, standby pilot at the station, needed to be a qualified Bluebird driver so that, as well as covering for the bloke that had to work the Bluebird to Adelaide, he also prepared the train. He used to get the Bluebird ready, start it up and, you know, get everything running and make sure all the fuel levels and water levels were

right and air working successfully; maybe had to marshall, you know, swap things around because sometimes they might want the baggage car leading and sometimes trailing into Adelaide, depending on the circumstances. And then he'd bring it out and sit it on the platform and the driver would book on probably twenty minutes before the train actually left to work the job to Adelaide.

So when you – right, so you took it from Peterborough to Adelaide. And it wouldn't have stopped – when you got into Adelaide you dropped the passengers off, then what happened from there?

Well, from there used to – sometimes you would get relieved on the platform in Adelaide by a pilot driver in Adelaide, or sometimes you may – if you were on one of the Indian Pacific connections where you didn't have to do relief so that you could have your time off – you would take the train from there out into the railcar depot which was about, oh, half a kilometre or so from the Adelaide Station platforms, and then you'd go through to the fuel area and water area and then perhaps stable the cars. If they had work to do they'd park them in the maintenance area and then you'd get off there and go and sign off at the railcar depot rather than in the Adelaide Station. But usually the job that we worked from Peterborough to Adelaide and then back again, because you needed your time off you needed to be relieved when you got there, and so you got about ten minutes after that to fill in your time sheet and get where you were going and book off, and then you'd have to walk in your own time or try and find your own way out to Mile End to the barracks. And then you'd have to get yourself back in Adelaide in time to book on, and they would have had the railcars prepared and put on the platform for you. Most of the people would be already on the train before you got anywhere near it. And then you'd work it from there to Peterborough.

When you got to Peterborough you'd wait or help with the unloading and then you might have to re-marshall the cars and what not and then poke them away in the dead end and stable them and shut them down for the night.

The process of setting up a diesel, is that very time-consuming?

Setting up – as in getting ready to work a train?

Yes.

Nowhere near as time-consuming as the steam engines, of course, because there was a set preparation, set of preparation duties, to go through and series of tests and what not to do. I mean, they had their own sets of batteries. The first job you did when you got on a diesel was to throw the major battery switch, a big knife switch, in so that you could at least get some light and see what you were doing. Then you'd go round and you'd start the fuel pump, and then you'd go round and make some checks around the engine to make sure that it was safe to actually crank the engine to start it. And once you got the thing started up then build up air pressure and do your various checks of your brakes and make sure all your brake blocks were there and in good condition. And you'd walk around the engine at top level checking all the engine, and down at ground level checking the couplings and hoses and all that sort of stuff.

So they were diesel-electric, weren't they?

They were diesel-electric. The diesel engine used to turn a main generator. Your main generator was on one end of the engine; the other end of the engine, which they called the 'free' end of the engine, used to drive things like water pumps and air compressors and cooling fans and all that sort of stuff. But the main generator used to generate electricity which threw the contacts and relays that get fed to the motors on each of the wheels. Most diesels, the main line diesels, they had six traction motors, and they'd be connected in the first instance in series so that once you moved the throttle a notch from nought into one it would pick up power and just start generating power down to the main traction motors and then move the train away. As the thing developed speed then the series of the engines would change automatically with speed and load so that they were in a bit different configuration and then run more efficiently at high speed. But the control of the actual speed of the diesel engine itself was under the control of the driver through his throttle. In most cases most engines had eight throttle notches. Some of the later ones had ten or a dozen notches, but it didn't make much difference. All they did was virtually vary the engine speed and then from there the engine governor would load up the main generator to determine how much power actually went from the main generator to the traction motors.

So was there much could go wrong with them?

Oh! Quite a lot. In the first instance there was a lot of problems with electrics. I mean, the first diesel engines they had in the railways were the 900-class. They were an English electric system, and they had – they were built at Islington and operated on the broad gauge and used mainly for passenger work. But they had a lot of problems, and they were – – –. I mean, when we did the examinations on the 900-class by the time you got out of there you were virtually a qualified diesel mechanic and a diesel electrician. But the electrical systems on the ..... were seen to be a lot more reliable. They used a General Electric electric system, and they seemed to be a lot more reliable. But there were things that could go wrong with contacts that didn't mate properly or didn't pick up, or wires that would be loose and something wasn't quite right. But by and large you could put in – expect to do a trip without any problems, but if you did have problems sometimes it took quite a while to nut it out.

Right. And you had to do your own repairs?

Mostly out on the track you'd do your own repairs. It was unusual to have a total engine failure. There were circumstances where you had physical failures with turbochargers and things like that on a diesel, that virtually resulted in the thing being a cot-case and useless. And if you had another engine with you you might have to reduce load somewhere to put some off and then just proceed with the one engine and the other one would just trundle along as a dead unit until it got somewhere where you could take it off and they could put it into the workshops. But they were – most of the problems that used to arise with – probably during the preparation of diesel engines when you were coupling and uncoupling and matching up different classes of engines to other classes. You couldn't get control of the back engine and it might be a problem with a jumper receptacle or the jumper itself, or something wasn't set up properly on the back engine to enable it to work properly through the front one. But experience used to tell you most of the time what was wrong, and you could get out of it reasonably quickly. It wasn't often that you'd have delays resolving an engine failure during the preparation stage, but it could get a bit complex if you had three different types of locos coupled up together to work out of Broken Hill.

Going back to steam, between here and Cockburn, it would have been a real nightmare because there was a lot of traffic on there, wasn't there?

There was a *lot* of traffic and that, and when it was all steam, because there was just about trains to cross at every second station because the trains were so small. About the same amount of load that was coming through nowadays – oh, not nowadays, but once the standard gauge started – but it was worked by a lot more trains. Some of the engines actually worked as double-headers, which meant you had two – a driver and fireman on the front engine and a driver and a fireman on the back engine – but I only ever worked one like that in my time.

What I was getting at, like you'd have trains in sidings all the way along there. It'd be a bit of a nightmare making sure that everything was running – – –.

Well, I mean that was all initially – the electric staff system only allowed one train to be in a section at one time, and most of those stations where you crossed a train were attended. Stations like Oodla Wirra was attended, Paratoo was attended, Yunta, Mannahill, Olary, even Mingary was attended. So those places, most of the time you crossed a train, that's where it was. But then, later on, as more and more of the stations closed, particularly with the dieselisation, well then those station staff were withdrawn.

But what I was getting at, like as far as I know there was never any head-ons, but it could have quite conceivably happened there would have been a head-on, couldn't there?

Well, there was a lot of safe working rules and practices in place to make sure that didn't happen, but the potential – whenever, I suppose, when you get two trains heading in opposite directions there's a potential there, but it's a matter of working within the rules and requirements and the safe working practices to make sure it doesn't happen.

But someone would have to co-ordinate it all.

Well, the Train Controllers are the people that determine where the trains actually have to cross.

And where were they based? Peterborough?

They were based in Peterborough, yes.

So they controlled everything between here and Cockburn.

They controlled everything between here and Cockburn, across to Pirie, up to Quorn and down to Terowie on the narrow gauge.

So they could make some really good friends from that job, couldn't they! (laughter)

Yes. Well, the Train Controller was always – probably, if things weren't going quite the way *he* expected, he probably tended to blame the engine crew, and if things weren't going the way the engine crew expected they more than likely blamed the Train Controller for getting it wrong. But by and large it was the Train Controller's job to co-ordinate the movements of the trains, knowing what load was on there, and I think he probably also had to make some allowances depending on what crew was on there, too, because some blokes used to move a bit quicker than others. Some fellows could just jog along all day and eventually get there, but other fellows were dead-set, they wanted to get home, so they'd – you know, if it was time to go, they'd go. There wasn't a two minute wait before they decided to start moving. But yes, I could well imagine that the Train Controller would have been very busy in those days.

And of course in the very early days they had the bell system, where they never had any contact with Train Control, I don't think, where they had a bell on the electric staff device, on the staff instrument, where they used to communicate with the next station with the bells. If they had a train – you know, you had 'up' trains and 'down' trains: 'up' train was one that headed towards a major depot, so everything coming towards Peterborough was an 'up' train and everything going away was a 'down' train. But the stations originally used to communicate by using bell codes on the staff instruments between one station and the next station.

So is that what those little white buildings were – they look like old toilets, but they're obviously – – –.

No, most of those were telephone boxes or pillboxes at each end of the yard, and most stations had some sort of station building in the middle of the yard which housed the electric staff instruments. And the electric staff instruments – the electric staff system consisted of an aluminium rod with rings around it spaced at varying

intervals, and they were a bit like a key. And at each end of each section you had an electric staff instrument which matched those particular staffs for that section. And, for instance, if you were going from Yunta to Mannahill, you pulled a staff out of the Yunta-Mannahill instrument, and then that meant that locked the one at the other end and no-one could get a staff out the other end until you'd put – either put it in the other end or put it back in the instrument there. So even if you were going to do a shunt out into the next section, the Station Master would often pull a staff for there to make sure that nothing could get in from the other end.

Okay.

And later on, of course, that was replaced with the standard gauge with automatic signalling, which was a different prospect altogether.

Yes. So getting back to co-ordinating, you told me that you had a problem with a gang working on the track one day between here and just the other side of Jamestown.

Yes, well, of course, obstacles on the track were always – I mean, people say to you, 'What did you do as an engine driver? You just sit there and look at what's going on.' But there were a lot of things to look at and a lot of things to think about, you know. And because of the loads you were carrying and the gradients you were travelling over, you needed to know what was in front of you, what was ahead of you. And of course it was the Train Controller's job, in conjunction with the track maintenance crews, to know where everybody was – trains and maintenance people as well. And so the Train Controller might allocate a track maintenance crew a certain amount of time on a track, or on a particular section in a particular area, while there were no trains around; but they needed to keep in touch with Train Controller or report to the Train Controller by such-and-such a time, and they also needed to report clear by such-and-such a time if there was a train going to come. And the instance that you're referring to was one when we were working the Indian Pacific from Peterborough to Port Pirie, and we were approaching Slattery's Hill, which was just a few kilometres outside of Jamestown on the way to Caltowie. And there's a cutting there and there was a gang working, and they had pneumatic drills and air compressor equipment and trucks and all that sort of stuff all around the track, and these fellows were actually physically working with jackhammers and

what not on the track. And as soon as we saw them – it was always a job to sound the warning device even if they *weren't* on the track – if you saw someone adjacent to the track you'd sound the warning device, the horn, to let them know that you were coming. And of course even before we let the whistle cord go we realised that they were still working on the track, we'd sort of got a bit clearer view of them: they were working in the cutting on the track. I'm not sure, but I think we might have been about, say, three-quarters to half a kilometres from them when we saw them, and slammed the brakes into emergency. But the train didn't actually stop until a kilometre after we passed them, because at the time we put the brakes on we were doing a hundred and ten kilometres an hour. And so it was just an example of how long it takes to stop the train, but there was a breakdown in communication in that instance between the Train Controller and the gangs and they were looking the wrong way for a train – they were given instructions that there were two trains coming, one from one direction and one from the other, and apparently they were looking the wrong way. And it was a very close call, there was a lot of noise and smashing and bangings of things, and blokes actually appeared to us as if they'd disappeared under the front of the engine. We'd lost sight of them. But luckily nobody was killed, they got off in time. But most of the noise was the jackhammers and air hoses being banged around and chopped up. But I'm very lucky that nobody was hurt or injured, but it was a – wasn't a nice experience because we had to cross the other train that I was talking about at Caltowie, and under normal circumstances if you went to stop a train to enter a crossing loop you could judge the reduction in speed and braking and that to pull you up within a reasonable distance of the points so that you could get down and open the road to let yourself in to go into the siding. But this sort of shook us up a fair bit, and I think I remember having about three or four stops before we got close enough to be able to open the road. It just totally destroyed your judgment.

So safety's a big issue now. Has it always been like that?

Well, it's always – Peterborough's always had a reputation of – had always had a reputation of being safety-conscious – well, for as long as I was in the railways, anyway. I can remember that it was always an issue, and the time that I was

involved – and even as Secretary of the union[2] - most of the issues you had revolved around safety. And with all the examinations in safe working and changes to rules and all the revision and all that sort of stuff all concentrated on safety all the time. And so it *was* a big issue, yes. Where it became particularly important is when we started mixing with people from other depots where, for instance, you started working trains down on the broad gauge track from Peterborough down to cross other crews coming from Mile End, and they had a different attitude towards safety at work. They might have been complacent working in their particular area of operation all the time and did things in particular ways and that might not have been right. When you had two trains approaching each other and you weren't sure what the other one was doing it became an issue there. And oftentimes you used to have – not so much disputes, but you used to have disagreements with the Department[3] or with other depots about crossing trains and things like that, where obviously they weren't doing things in the right way and people didn't know what was happening. Suited them all right. But so that sort of introduced a little bit of uncertainty in that area, which we used to be particularly vigilant in trying to keep to a minimum.

Just getting back, shunting in the yard – what did that entail?

Shunting in the yard, you were always under the direction of the fellow on the ground, the shunter or his assistant shunter, but your primary job was to be virtually pulling trains apart and remarshalling them. Could be for labour requirements or it could be stuff that comes off the train, say, going from Cockburn to Pirie but the stuff actually needs to go to Adelaide so it would go down to Terowie. You also had vehicles which were scheduled for maintenance which needed to come off or might have come out of the workshops and needed to go on the train. And so that was your main role there. Our role was to shunt things and rearrange things so that they could be put on particular trains and get the trains all ready and put together ready for them to put the main line engines on and work them out. The shunting yards here and the old narrow gauge yards between where the station is now and the Post Office area, that was always a very busy area. You had two shunters working in that yard most

[2] Union name?

[3] Name of Department?

of the time. The north – the east end shunter, sorry, that used to mainly work back over the Federal Hotel crossing, working within the yard there and shunting back over the crossing, and it could be getting stuff from the sheep ranch which was further out near the saleyards and bring it in, or remarshalling from that end. Then you had the one from the other end, the west end shunter, it used to often work on the back end of trains and also used to work a lot in marshalling stuff for the Quorn line, working down that end of the yard. You also had a shunter in the loco we used to call the 'carp shunter' or the 'carp siding', 'carpenter siding shunter', and it used to shunt stuff in and out of the truck maintenance area. And whenever they wanted something done there whoever was in charge of the yard area would come up and unlock a ..... and take it off, and it was his job to make sure that everybody was out of the way before you start moving trucks around. Very often it was done in that area, it was done at lunchtime when the blokes were away at lunch, so they'd pull stuff out to be done in the morning and put stuff back ready for the afternoon, and that was really the most efficient way to do that. It was always a bit of a pain in the bum because just when you felt like lunch you'd have to go out and get stuck into it.

You could have lunch when they were back, though!

Yes, exactly. But shunting was sort of a particularly – well, a reasonably hazardous occupation, I suppose, because oftentimes it was done in the pitch dark or very dark. I mean, you had big floodlights at one end of the yard there, probably if you're used to working in amongst them it wasn't so bad, you virtually had an idea of where you were going, but the lights the shunters used to use often were kerosene lamps with the different-coloured shades – white one you could wave you back or wave you ahead, or green one was to ease you up or slow you down, a red one was to stop you, and it was his job to try and judge which one to give you and make sure he was in a position to see you so that you could actually get the signal, and you'd be working on the engine at the other end of the string of trucks and you'd have to be manipulating the thing accordingly. Sometimes they had air in the trucks and you could stop a bit quicker, and other times they might be loose-shunted, which meant that there was no air in the trucks and they'd take longer to stop. And you'd be pushing one minute and then next thing you'd have to be stopping, so they'd be bunched up one minute then they'd all stretch out with a fair amount of racket in the

next instant. But in the narrow gauge time they used to do a lot of free, or loose, shunting.

That used to be – occasionally you'd have a carriage go from one end of the yard to the other by itself.

Yes, well, sometimes you used to kick stuff around – they called it a 'kick-off' manoeuvre, but it always meant that somebody had to ride the vehicle until it was stopped, and you'd use the handbrake on the vehicle itself once it was through, but if you had to put several trucks down half a dozen different roads or various roads, you could take a string of trucks back to the top end of the yard and then the driver or the shunter would give you a kick-off signal, which was – you know, with a light was a shaking light like that, so you'd – (whispers, demonstrating rapid motion of shaking lamp) tooh tooh tooh tooh – give it a kick and then he'd give you a red light and you'd stop so that it – – –. (break in recording)

So what did you think of the Garretts?

Oh, Garretts were a beautiful engine, they were a masterpiece of engineering, if you like, the 400-class Garretts. (sound of passing engine) They were beautiful to ride on, easy to operate, easy to work, probably one of the few engines that you could work flat-out or to full capacity and still had both injectors on pumping water in flat out into the boiler at the same time. They were a magic engine. They were oil burners, but they rode very well, principally because the boiler and cab unit was literally suspended between two different engines. You had a front engine and a rear engine, and as a result they sat on turntables on each of those engines, and as a result they rode very well. They were very smooth to ride on, probably smoother than some of the diesels.

So how did they exactly work?

Well, the Garrett, because it had two engines, it meant that it had virtually twice as much power as anything else we had, and the steam virtually worked the same as an ordinary engine, except instead of having just the one set of wheels being driven under the engine you had two sets, one under the front one and one under the back. And the tanks on either end of the engines had water. The front tank had all water, the rear tank had some water, and another portion was the oil. (tape ends)

END OF TAPE 2 SIDE A: TAPE 2 SIDE B

And the wheels on the one engine were slightly smaller than the wheels on the other engine, so that they used to get off beat a little bit sometimes, and there was a good reason for that, because if you had both engines working perfectly in time they used to get quite jerky when you had the thing – especially at low speed, when you had all four cylinders, if you like, just popping at the same time. But because the engines were slightly smaller – the wheels were slightly smaller on one engine than the other, they used to – the beat used to vary, and they had a sound of their own. You could hear – they tell me that, on a frosty night, you could hear them leave Terowie on the way to Peterborough. But, you know, if you were working heavily (sound of engine) coming around the ash bank there at Gumbowie and through the cutting, the noise that made, you can understand how some of these people get nostalgic about them, you know. They were certainly a good engine. And they were a lot more comfortable because they were enclosed – you could actually shut the doors on the thing and windows and keep out of the weather if it was that inclement. But they were certainly quite a large engine, as far as narrow gauge was concerned, and they never worked on the Quorn line because the curves were too tight and the rails were too light and they would have just spread the track if they worked up there. So they were restricted to working between Peterborough-Terowie, Peterborough-Cockburn and Port Pirie. But they used to pull quite heavy loads, and I think in fact a Garrett used to pull slightly more than a single 830-class loco. But yes, it was always a pleasure if you were working a train down to Pirie and you'd been battling away with a T-class going down there and you'd cross another train coming up and you'd have to get on the other one and you'd got a Garrett on it. It would probably take you half an hour to straighten it out after the other crew had been working it, but you'd get it all nice and clean and running lovely and then it was a dream from there home. But for their size and their design they were a very efficient engine. They did have some – they were the 400-class Garretts, and they had ten of those, starting from 400 to 409 [pronounced 'four-oh-nine']. But they had a few 300-class Garretts, they were made in Western Australia and I never ever saw them, but apparently they were very unreliable. They used to bend connecting rods and that sort of stuff, and

they used to have heaps of breakdowns with them – they were more trouble than what they were worth. But they were gone before I started.

Right. The retraining – blokes who were running steam trains obviously had to be retrained to run diesels.

Yes.

How did the older blokes cope?

Well, most of them made the transition without a great deal of drama, but they probably accepted the technology without actually knowing how it worked or much about it. And so some of the older fellows with the more modern air brake systems and that, they just knew that if you put the brake around that way it made a noise and they came on, and if it went the other way they came off, although they would have been schooled in it and that. But with the introduction of the new systems they probably didn't feel the need to go that deeply into it, but they got by. There was always the younger breed sort of coming through, if you like, that were dealing – like in their overall education process they were going through these newer systems, and so they were more educated in that respect on the diesels and probably made the transition a bit easier. I think the old blokes liked the diesels – like there was no question that anybody didn't like them, because they certainly made the job easier.

I was more thinking of if it broke down. Did they make a concerted effort to have a younger bloke on with an older bloke?

Not necessarily.

No?

No. Like I said to you, most of the breakdowns that they had – particularly when the engines were new there weren't that many, and it wasn't until they started trying to squeeze a few more horsepower out of the 830-class that they started to get a few mechanical failures of turbos and that and occasionally used to get engine failures like that. You'd have to reduce load, and sometimes they only had enough power to pull the engine and the brake van home, you know, if they were damaged to that extent. But that wasn't a common problem, it didn't happen a lot of times.

Drivers and firemen were on good money, weren't they? How was their wages worked out? Was it an hourly rate or tonnage, or – – –?

The basic rate for an engine driver was usually tied to the metal trades. For instance, an engine driver's hourly rate was probably similar to that of a fitter, or fitter and turner. But obviously the fitters and turners used to work either mostly day shift or they'd work regular shift work, as in day, morning and afternoon. But with engine crews there was a lot of overtime involved, a lot of weekend work and a lot of broken shifts – or not so much broken shift, but staggered shift. You could easily start the week on day shift and work your way through your night shift and afternoon shift and finish up back on day shift again if it was tight. And because it was all so busy and there was quite a bit of overtime around, there were other allowances as well. Not in the first instance, but once the diesel started to come they started to compensate for the improved productivity a bit by paying tonnage allowances, so that once you're over a certain tonnage then you got a, say, about a three dollar a shift allowance to compensate for the extra tonnage. And then later on they did away with the tonnage because every train qualified for tonnage because they all got up over the thousand or eleven hundred ton[ne? – depending on date] or whatever it was that qualified you to attract the tonnage payment, and so they introduced a horsepower allowance which was based on the amount of horsepower you had that was actually under your control on the train, so it depended how much horsepower you had how much you got, so that was also divided up into stages.

And then you also, as trains started to make better time, you used to get mileage allowance. So, for instance, a trip to Broken Hill you used to get eight hours' mileage payment, which meant that – I think there was about forty minutes' allowance either end of the shift, that if you were within those forty minute blocks plus your travelling times it never come up to eight hours, the shift would get paid up to eight hours because you'd made the distance. Particularly if you're working a passenger train you might only – it might only take you three and a half to four hours, or say five hours on the job, but you'd get paid eight hours because the job was – you know, you'd covered the distance. So that was a mileage payment.

And then of course you had shift penalties as well, different rates for afternoon shift and night shift.

But the basic wage itself for an engine driver, you were guaranteed eighty hours in a fortnight, providing you came to work for all of them. And that was in

the first ten shifts. If it happened that you worked excess shifts, like eleventh shift or twelfth, or even thirteenth shift, those shifts would attract a penalty. An eleventh shift on an ordinary day of the week was time and a half, but on a Saturday it was double time. The twelfth shift, I think from memory, was double time anyway, and the thirteenth shift definitely was. But a thirteenth shift never fell on a Saturday anyway unless you were particularly busy. But there was a limit to the number of shifts you could actually work. But then they could also travel you somewhere to work another job back, or you could work somewhere and travel back, and they were classed as 'passive shifts' so they weren't counted in the number of shifts, so it was quite conceivable you could work fifteen shifts or more, but two or three of them might be passive and so they wouldn't be counted as far as the actual limit of shifts were concerned. I can remember once when it was just so busy, there was so much work, and there was a shortage of people that you forever seemed to be going to work. And I remember the box boy coming around one night with a note that I had to go to Broken Hill – oh, I'm not sure whether it was Broken Hill or Cockburn. But I'm sitting there sort of half asleep in the early hours of the morning trying to – you know, I didn't want to do it, I'd just been flat out for months and I couldn't – I didn't have an excuse not to go, and then it suddenly dawned on me that I'd already had twelve shifts, and I thought, 'Well, if I just turn up there and then work back again that'd be fourteen. You're not allowed to do that because you're only allowed to work thirteen.' Because they never used to do – never had telephone contact with the time checker's office down there at that time, the fellow that used to issue the advice notes. So I had to get dressed and go down there and tell him I couldn't accept the job because I'd have too many shifts on the way back. So back I go, get back into bed and dozed off again, then next thing they're round again. And I said, 'I told them I can't do it.' He said, 'No, no, you're going to work up and travel home passenger, and we've got John Doherty who is in the same boat, so he's going to travel up with you and then work home the next day,' so they get out of it that way. So they still got the job done, I still had to go. But it just meant that the passive shift – I mean, it never attracted overtime or anything, there was a limit to how much they'd pay you in one particular stint of travelling

passenger, it was nine hours. If you were twelve hours on the train you'd only get paid for nine.

So passive shift was just sitting there, basically, doing nothing.

So a passive shift was basically travelling, yes. Where you didn't actually perform any actual work, yes. And if they wanted to maintain it as a passive shift you couldn't do any actual work. For instance, if you arrived to travel passenger on a train to Cockburn, for instance, you were on a passive shift, and if you got up, say, to Mingary or somewhere and they wanted you to relieve the driver at the front, suddenly it became an active shift. The problem was there you're on nearly the same time as the crew that were up the front anyway. (laughs) But because you only sort of got paid from the time you set foot on the brake van, there was a bit of difference there. If the other crew had booked on an hour before you there was some saving.

So the job was obviously very varied, you'd go all over the place.

Yes. Well, I mean, in any week you'd probably do just about every line. Some of your shorter shifts you'd do Terowie or Port Pirie, and probably – Quorn not so much, maybe you'd probably have a fortnightly trip to Quorn, towards the end of the time when the Quorn line actually finished. But the trains would work there several times a week, but in your roster you'd only strike perhaps one a week or one a fortnight. But most of your work was to Cockburn and Broken Hill. That's where you'd get most of your away trips. But you do have some home jobs as well, like you had jobs on the shunter and you had pilot or standby jobs, where you actually worked just around the depot. Or you're on standby, you might be doing marshalling or what not inside the depot, and if someone needed relief and then they'd run you out or you'd catch another train out to cross another one, relieve a crew, or go out on a breakdown or something like that, so that's what pilot crews did.

Right.

So there were a few home jobs, yes.

And what did train inspectors do?

Well, there were various train inspectors. The Train Examiner was a fellow, generally in the yard, that used to check all the safety aspects of the trucks that went on the train and the operation of the air brake and all that sort of stuff, and he'd be generally monitoring all trains that came and went on his shift, and testing air brakes and checking to make sure that the vehicles were within their required maintenance schedules and that sort of stuff. That was a Train Examiner. And they generally had one or two of those on each shift, depends on how busy it was. You also had a Traffic Inspector, and a Traffic Inspector's job primarily was an office job. But he used to supervise and oversee the traffic side of the staff – by traffic side I mean guards and shunters and porters, and that sort of thing. And then you had the Locomotive Inspectors, and Locotomotive Inspectors were similar. Their job was primarily as an office job, but their job was to supervise and occasionally examine or check on the way people did their job on the locos. They were responsible for the – virtually they were the go-between, if you like, between the loco crews and other aspects of the administration of the railway.

Were they respected?

Yes, some of them were. Yes. Some of them had – I mean, Lionel Noble was probably one of the most respected people ever to be a Locomotive Inspector. He was a bit of a card along with it, but he was very respected. He had the ability to throw his voice and he was a bit of a ventriloquist, and occasionally he'd pull a stunt on you while you were on an engine and you'd hear somebody say, 'What about looking out?' And you'd look out and you'd swear it was somebody out on the ground, but it was him, you know, standing alongside of you. And Archie Williams, before him, he was very well respected as a Loco Inspector. And yes, Archie Williams was one of the real old school with Loco Inspectors. He, so far as I know, he didn't have anything to do with the diesel engines, he wasn't involved at the stage when they – he might have been, just, when they came in, but by then Lionel Noble had taken over as Loco Inspector. And then you also had Loco Instructors, you had people like Bill Girdler who used to teach people in the air brake and also the fireman's and engine exams, he used to go through the – they used to be under the Railways Institute used to be, it was the education side of the system, they used to handle all the safe working rules and they used to do garage rules and fireman's and

engineman's rules. And then you had Loco Instructors were fellows that went out on – often went out instructing people in driving techniques and that sort of stuff on the trains themselves.

Communications have improved immensely since steam train days.

Yes. Well, of course, as I mentioned earlier about the bell system with the staff, then of course the party line system with the railways and then direct telephone contact with all the stations, with train controls that evolved over the years. And then of course lately the introduction of radio on the trains. In the first instance, it was only end-to-end communication. You had a fixed radio system on the locomotive and the guard used to carry a portable hand piece, and he had a bit of a charging module in the brake van that sometimes worked and sometimes didn't. But that gave you end-to-end communication with the train so it made the operation a bit more efficient. But as well as that, I think it's spelt the death knell for the guards in the long term, because a lot of the operations that the guards were effectively in charge of the train as such, they could give instructions about changing staffs and taking train orders and all that sort of stuff, and they'd sit back in the back there and give it to you over the radio. So more and more they weren't required, and eventually they decided to try working some trains without guards. And I think I can recall working a train out of Broken Hill, it was an ore train, with no brake van, I think it was the first one, and didn't really have a problem with it because it was a daytime job and there wasn't much going on, there was no shunting to do, it was a through train.

But it was the thin edge of the wedge as far as the guards were concerned, because then train crews started doing their own shunts and that sort of stuff. I mean, you get a great long train and, okay, the guard was up the back with his radio, but it took him a long time to walk up to the front if he had to do the shunt, so the engine crew would have to do the shunt up the front and then let him know what was going on. And when you'd get back on and get your air pressure up he'd tell you to put the brakes on to make sure the air was continuous and the brakes worked on the back of the train, and went in and it was off you went again. So he'd be doing the paperwork about what time you stopped and what time you left and what trucks were taken off and put back on and that sort of thing. And then sometimes you had take-outs to do. You might have goods in a

truck, one truck would have several consignments in it. You'd pull up at a station somewhere and that truck would be up near the engine. So you'd stop it near the platform and unload the stuff and then seal the truck up again, tell the guard what you'd done and off you go. So, as I said, I think the radio was sort of the death knell for the guards. Eventually they took them off altogether, and a lot of those blokes, some blokes finished up, you know, took packages, and other fellows moved over to the locomotive side and came onto the engines.

Were there such things as apprenticeships?

Not apprenticeships as such, not as you'd say – I wouldn't describe it as apprenticeship, although it was a life-long apprenticeship, if you like, because the transition from a cleaner with all the correspondence and rules and instruction and everything you had to do, but it was all – I suppose it was all work-related, so in effect it could be an apprenticeship. But because it wasn't really a recognized trade it was no good to you anywhere else. An apprentice mechanic, for instance, could get a job just about anywhere, but an apprentice locomotive driver would get –

Pretty restricted!

– fairly restricted as to what you could do. Quite possibly you could get another job with another system somewhere, and one or two blokes did go and work in Hammersley Iron and places like that, and the qualifications and the training they had here were of use to them up there. But outside of the railways there was no real scope for your job, so it wasn't really recognized as a trade, I don't think.

Getting back to your private life, (tapping sound) where were your priorities for your family, like children?

Well, the main thing was to try and provide for your family, that was the main thing. And because the money was good in the railways you're sort of obliged to get in as much work as you could get and get as much money. Providing you made good use of what you earned by providing for your family and building a house and all those sorts of things, you could probably say that you succeeded with what you were trying to do with that respect. As far as your immediate family's concerned, with your kids, it was a fairly difficult sort of a period, because – especially when the kids were young – because your wife was left home to deal with all the issues

surrounding raising children and schooling and all that sort of stuff, and most of the time you're off at work or away somewhere. And when you came home, if there was an issue or a problem, you had to speak to somebody or 'You wait till Dad gets home', so Dad was sort of – sometimes was the instrument of justice, and that was a bit hard to take sometimes. Although you couldn't not do it, otherwise you'd be leaving the raising of your family completely to your wife. And it was a big strain on some of the young wives, I think.

But I can recall once when I was working fairly consistently, and just the nature of the shifts and jobs I was working, I think the only time I saw the kids was when you went in and gave them a kiss on the cheek in the middle of the night. You were either coming to work or going to work, or when they got home you were in bed asleep to go somewhere else. One day I think I was sitting at the table, I'd just got out of bed after working night shift, the kids came home from school and just ran past. They said, 'Hi, Dad,' and that was it. No sort of jumping up on your lap or anything because they haven't seen you for a week and a half or a fortnight. But for them they didn't know any different, see? Dad was always on shift work, he wasn't often home. And so yes, that was sort of hard.

The other side was you earned good money so that provided for them.

Yes, that's right. Good money and provide for them. And a lot of people had kids that were able to get good educations and get into good employment as a result. And both of our kids got all their education, their full education, in Peterborough and did very well, although Vicki went on to do university study and qualified as an accountant. But all their primary and secondary education was done in Peterborough, so it was a credit to the system at the time that they were able to do that. Some kids – a lot of farmers' kids went away to college for various reasons, but whether that was a boarding issue or whether that was just what their family had done or whether they actually thought they were going to get a better education or not, I'm not sure.

Still goes on.

Yes. Well, it sure does.

When you look at it, some have ended up exactly the same as some of the locals do.

Yes, exactly.

All right. (sound of passing car) The railways in Peterborough employed a lot of people. How many people were working in your section?

Well, in our section, just in locomotive crews, when I started I've a feeling there was about seventy to seventy-five engine crews working, so that was just in the locomotive crew area. But then of course, virtually for every engine crew, you had a guard as well – well, he was in the Traffic section. You also had probably eight to a dozen cleaners working on the three shifts, so I suppose just in our particular section there were probably, when I started there was eighty. But the numbers diminished year by year, until eventually, when I finished, there was literally nobody left.

Did you enjoy working?

Yes, I did, I used to enjoy it. It seemed to be always a challenge – I mean, you were always learning, there was always things to study, and some of that used to get a bit of a drag sometimes but there was always a fair bit of satisfaction in what you did. A lot of times you were responsible for a lot of – you know, millions and millions of dollars' worth of equipment, you were responsible for a lot of people's safekeeping, a lot of people's lives, on passenger trains and things like that. So there was always a pretty fair degree of job satisfaction in our section, yes. So that made it reasonably enjoyable. It was very tiring sometimes, I don't know how you can say you enjoyed it much when at the end of the fortnight you're propping your eyes open with matchsticks, just about, to make the next shift, you know?

So railways over-employed, do you reckon? Too many men for the amount of work?

Well, I don't know. I suppose if you looked at any industry, over the years the changes in technology have meant reduction in personnel all over the place. But there were so many areas around the operation of the railway it would be hard to say they employed too many people for what they were doing. I mean, everyone was – particularly in the Traffic grades and Locomotive grades – just about everyone was working overtime all the time, so you could just about say they were under –

Under-employed.

– you know, they never had enough people employed. But it was obviously cheaper to pay overtime than to employ extra people. But I know in the workshops areas and that they had a lot of people working there, but as, I suppose, as vehicles became more modern they may, from time to time, had more people working there than what they actually needed, and it depended on the amount of work that was available as well. So it was a bit hard to say, 'Oh, we'll get rid of half a dozen wagon maintenance people,' and then next thing you've got six months' solid work in front of you. So I don't think so. There were a lot of people employed, but there was also a very labour-intensive industry. On track maintenance, as I said earlier, they had virtually gangs at just about every little siding, and they were responsible for their section of tracks between point A and point B, and it was a labour-intensive thing as well. It might only have been, say, four or five blokes in the gang, but there's a limit to how much four or five blokes can do, especially when you consider manhandling sleepers and big lengths of rail and that sort of stuff. And it was all very physical.

In our previous interview you said that during standardisation there was probably too much work.

Yes. Because we were literally working two systems at once, once the standardisation started to get going, started to work, and the were phasing out of the narrow gauge and the introduction of the standard gauge meant that there *was* a lot of work and there was a lot of retraining and things like that to do. And there was a tremendous amount of work for loco crews and guards, and you just seemed to be always coming and going from work during that period. But once the standard gauge actually got up and running and the narrow gauge was finished – the narrow gauge from Port Pirie to Cockburn – once that was finished and wasn't used any more, the only narrow gauge you had left then was working to Quorn. And there was a lot less work around. And although you were probably still gainfully employed, not to be getting eleven, twelve and thirteen shifts all of a sudden meant a fairly big drop in pay.

Yes. So when did that Quorn line stop?

I couldn't say exactly, because it was still operating once they brought the broad gauge through from Terowie to Peterborough, I think.

So the early '70s, then.

Well, see, the standard gauge got going –

That time.

– in the early '70s.

....

No, that worked quite a while after that.

Did it?

Yes.

Because that would have made a hell of a difference to Quorn when they stopped that too, wouldn't it?

Oh, well, it did. I mean, Quorn was – they stopped working to Hawker long before they stopped working trains to Quorn. But the main thing was the wheat traffic and the barytes traffic. They used to get barytes from Quorn and also wheat. And then little places along the way used to have shunts and pick-ups with wool and that sort of stuff, like at Carrieton, and even sometimes you had a shunt at Moockra, you know – there's nothing there except a tin shed but there'd be a truck loaded with wool there. And then Orroroo, of course, they had the silos there at Orroroo as well, so there was quite a lot of wheat going into those silos at Orroroo well after the standard gauge had started here, and that would come through here to Peterborough and then be manually trans-shipped with a bucket loader, like a – do you remember that one, on the back of a truck? Phil Ferguson used to do it. It was like a grab bucket, used to go into the open trucks and pick the stuff up and drop it into a standard gauge truck, and then it would go off down to Pirie to the silos and ultimately into the boats at Pirie.

What were barytes? You said it was either wheat or barytes?

Oh, barytes? Barytes is – I think it's something they use in the manufacture of aluminium, and also hardening steel – you know, they add to iron to make steel – I *think*.

So that was being mined up there, was it?

Yes, it was mined up there near – well, it must have been out near Hawker somewhere, because there was quite a big – it used to be – – –. Some of it was

bagged as a powder, and some of it was in rock form, and you used to get quite a bit of that coming out of Quorn. There'd be a – in terms of tonnage I don't know, but there'd be several hundred tons come out on every train that came out of Quorn. And they – – –. (tape ends)

END OF TAPE 2 SIDE B: TAPE 3 SIDE A

[There'd be a – in terms of tonnage I don't know, but there'd be several hundred tons come out on every train that came out of Quorn. And they] – I think the last trains to work to Quorn, they would have probably been working about three trains a week to Quorn.

With the work, was there plenty of room for promotion.

Well, you had to move a lot of the time to get promotion, and that was the drama. Often there was room for promotion, but once you were qualified to act in a particular capacity, to get rated in that position – which is what you classed as promotion – they really needed to advertise the position and call for it first. And it could well have been that you could have been acting in a position for a fair while, doing, say, a fireman's job as an acting fireman, and then they'd call for the job and then someone from somewhere else puts in for it that happens to be senior to you in terms of length of service and would get the job ahead of you. And oftentimes people used to move around for promotion, and between Tailem Bend and Adelaide, Peterborough and the West Coast and Pirie and that, there used to be quite a lot of transfers in between those areas where people would be moving around for promotion.

With so many men there'd be a lot of personality clashes.

Yes, there were a few, yes. There were some – quite a lot of the blokes just got on, but everybody has a personality and more often than not you were teamed up as regular mates, which meant you'd sign up to work regularly with another bloke as a driver and fireman, and you wouldn't do that unless you got on with each other. But then invariably there'd be personality clashes between certain people. You had people that were just out-and-out bullies and just used to pick on other people for the sake of asserting themselves. But there were quite a few, yes. Sometimes it seemed like (laughs) there was never any end to it, and then other times you couldn't

understand why things were going so smoothly. But it was just the nature of the job, you know. Because there was sort of a competition for overtime, if you like, sometimes – I mean, sometimes it was all you could get, you know, more than what you needed. But other times there was almost a bit of competition for overtime. So personalities often came into it then. You'd get some fellows that would rather have a bit of time off and spend with their family, and you might have another bloke that would come in at the drop of a hat for *any* job, and then you'd get the ones that would pick and choose what they wanted because some job was worth more than another job.

Another job, yes.

If you get somebody – trying to get someone to come in to do a job to Quorn, for instance, which wasn't a particularly attractive job if you had to slug it up there and back on a steam train, or someone calls someone in to go to Broken Hill, it was an entirely different set of circumstances.

How did you cope with shift work?

I didn't mind it. Shift work enables a lot of flexibility with the things you can get involved in, the things you can do, and it restricts you in a lot of ways, too. It restricts your ability to participate in team sports and regularly get involved in community activities because you never knew when you were going to be there. But shift work as such allowed you – like on night shift you'd have some time during the day although you spent some of it in bed, but you also had some time during the day or in the evening where you could spend with your family or do what you wanted. I used to prefer the afternoon shift, because generally you'd had a reasonable night in bed, you could do most of what you wanted during the day providing you were reasonably fresh to go to work in the afternoon and work an eight hour shift and then be back home in bed at night if you were lucky. So it sort of enabled you to do a lot and also work at the same time. But it wasn't a good thing for family life, because most of your interaction with your young children was afternoon when they got home from school, and evenings and that while they were doing homework or watching a bit of TV. So afternoon shift wasn't good for that, but it was good in other respects. But the night shift wasn't good for anybody. It was a hard – night shift. The harder shift I found was the early morning shift starting at three or four in

the morning, and if you had your string of four or five of them together in a week, by the end of the week you'd absolutely had it because you never got enough asleep. You know, you'd get home, say you'd knock off at midday or one o'clock in the afternoon, it was too early to go to bed, and when you did go to bed you were only going to get a few hours' sleep before you went back to work again. You do that every day and then start work at three or four in the morning for a week and you knew about it by the end of the week. Bit hard to speak to by the end of the week! (laughs)

Quite often you see drivers walking around with those big heavy iron boxes on their back, and they're called 'tucker boxes'.

Yes.

What was actually in them?

Oh, there's pretty nearly everything. I know in the small one, they were used for home jobs, if you like, if they were on the shunter or the pilot or something like that. They'd have their lunch and perhaps tea bags and a bottle of water and a thermos under their arm, and a couple of – rule book and what not, maybe a novel to read if there was a bit of a slack time or something. The bigger ones were used on what they called 'box jobs', where you actually had to pack enough food and toiletries and all that sort of stuff to go away for two or three days, and so that's what was in them. You might have your towel and soap and knives and forks and plates and cups and spoons and tea and sugar, and a few cans of this and some meat wrapped up in newspaper, which hopefully you could keep cool enough to make it last until you could get up there and put it in the 'fridge.

And a sore back.

And a sore back, yes. Well, I don't think there's too many people could carry their tucker boxes on either shoulder. It was just a knack you got into, you know. I always carried mine over my right shoulder, and even now if I carry a golf bag or anything like that it's on the right shoulder. It's very difficult to carry something on the left shoulder; it's just –

Just the way you'd go.

– just a kind of acquired knack, yes.

And some places you'd see the older blokes who used to ride a bike –

Yes.

– and they'd have it slung over their shoulder.

They had a tucker box slung over their shoulder, yes.

It would have been pretty interesting trying to balance the bike!

If you got it in the right place it was all right. It was a bit of a balance – if you had something packed wrong in your tucker box you knew about it when it was hanging on your back. For instance, if you had decided you'd take a couple of cans of food or dessert with you in the box and you put them at the wrong end of the box or the front of the box instead of the back of the box, and you put it on your shoulder, the thing seemed to be dragging on your shoulder all the time. And there was always another unusual aspect about tucker boxes. Most of them had a sound about them. When somebody walked – because there was a bit of a swaying of the tucker box and it sort of rested against your ....., if you like, and some of the boxes you'd get this popping sound as you walked along – and if you came home late or early hours of the morning from the box job and you're walking home, you'd guarantee you'd get every dog on the street barking as you're walking along because your tucker box would be making this popping noise. But they never all did it.

How did you get on with your bosses?

Well, we didn't have a lot of contact with bosses as such. You had a lot of bosses. If you were working within the loco depot your boss was the running shift foreman or the loco foreman. If you're out on the track your boss was probably the Train Controller or you were your own boss, if you weren't within contact with anybody, and particularly if something went wrong you were your own boss. You had to deal with things the best way you could. But the only time that you really had much contact with a boss of any sort was if you ran foul of something, something went wrong, where you'd be in an inquiry or you'd be up explaining or something, but that would be the only time you'd have any contact with them. So invariably you didn't have a lot of contact with them.

The structure of the railways was pretty complicated, wasn't it, it was a very big structure –

Yes.

– start with the Commission and then you worked your way through a whole – – – .

Yes, well, that's right. Like in our division here, the Peterborough Division it was called – that stretched from Port Pirie, Terowie, Cockburn up to Quorn, and with the main administrative centre in Peterborough – the head of this division was your superintendent. And then you had, say, the loco superintendent and traffic superintendents. Sometimes you had assistant superintendents in various areas. And down at loco, you had the loco foreman – he was virtually in charge of all the loco area. Out in traffic, you had station masters or yard masters that were in charge of that area, so eventually down through to porters and shunters. The loco crews, because they were mobile all the time, most of the time they sort of – nobody was particularly breathing down their neck, providing they were meeting the schedules and the deadlines and there was never a problem. But the only time you had much to do with them, as I said, if something went wrong or you did something wrong.

So was there friction between the different gangs? The gangs of drivers? They all had to work with each other, I suppose.

Well, I mean, we've spoken already about the personality clashes and that sort of stuff within the – – –. And there was always probably a general impression of loco crews by everybody else, and the loco crews probably had their perceptions about what guards were like. But I can't say that there was honestly any real friction between – I mean, there was always sort of a 'them and us' mentality, if you like. You had the loco crews then you had the traffic, which were the station masters, shunters, porters, guards and all that sort of stuff, but you all had to work together in order to get the job done, so I wouldn't say there was any real friction. I mean, you might have had one or two individuals that just had friction with anybody, didn't matter who it was. I mean, there was no helping them anyway, and for some reason they seemed to make it difficult for everybody else. But apart from that I wouldn't say, as a general body of men working, I don't think there was any particular friction in any area.

And the unions were fairly strong. Did you have a choice of joining a union?

No, you didn't have any choice at all. I think I remember when I was asked to join the union as a cleaner I said, 'What if I don't want to?' And I can't remember who it was that asked me but he said, 'Well, you won't have a job for long.' But it was generally thought that once you'd been in the job a little while if you wanted the benefits of the wages and conditions and that sort of stuff that the union were working for, well then you had a responsibility to belong.

So they were very strong, weren't they?

Well, they were probably quite strong because they were a dedicated union, if you like. The AFULE was the union with which I was involved as a fireman and driver – that was the Amalgamated Federated Union of Locomotive Enginemen, Firemen and Cleaners was the full name of it, but the AFULE was the easiest way – and in fact I think I was Secretary of that for some years. But it was principally involved in any issues relating to engine crews and firemen and cleaners – drivers, firemen and cleaners. And a lot of the issues that we dealt with locally were to do with either the work environment or safety issues or working conditions. But to say that the unions were powerful, I suppose if you decided you were going to have a stop work meeting, well then the whole system would – I mean, no trains would run, so whether you call that powerful enough I don't know. But I can tell you now that you needed a fairly powerful reason to call a stop work meeting because it had to be justified. And you weren't out on your own here anyway. The AFULE in Peterborough was affiliated with the AFULE in South Australia, which in turn was a national body, so any stoppages or any issues regarding wages and that sort of stuff was usually instigated nationally and were pretty much out of the control of the local depots. Our principal concern was to do with safety and the work environment for our members.

So hearing was a big issue, wasn't it?

Hearing was certainly a big issue, yes. There was a time when they started to recognize that a lot of people were suffering from hearing loss in various aspects of the railway – not just in our area. Then pretty much they had just about everybody go for hearing tests to determine the level of hearing loss, and there was some small compensation made for various levels of hearing loss, but some of the blokes had quite significant hearing loss, and as a result ultimately of these tests they were put

into other areas of work or demoted because their hearing wasn't good enough for what they were doing, for the job they were doing.

So could they make a claim – log a big claim? Because they'd lost their hearing they'd therefore lose their driver's job?

They would have got a lump sum, but then they would have got alternative employment that retained their rate of pay. But, as I explained to you earlier, your rate of pay on a flat rate was entirely different to your rate of pay when you're actually actively working in the job where you'd get all these other allowances and that sort of stuff, so it was still a significant loss of pay and wages as a result of any injury like that.

So were you involved with any strikes?

Oh, I think probably were involved in like the national strikes with wages and that sort of stuff that might have been called for twenty-four or forty-eight hours. Those things were instigated nationally and you were involved in it whether you liked it or not. But locally, we may have had a few issues here where – I can't say that would have necessarily involved strikes; it might have perhaps resulted in work bans for particular types of locomotives if they didn't comply with noise levels and things like that, but all those things in order to press a point and get something done about them.

So you wouldn't consider the strikes you were in frivolous?

No. No. I mean, (laughs) I wouldn't have been involved, I suppose, if you thought they were frivolous. And as I said, I was Secretary of the union for a time and probably held other positions there too. Like I remember the Secretary's was always the most arduous. There were often issues where the blokes would like you to have a stoppage or go on strike, but I can't say that we were ever particularly involved in anything frivolous.

The demarcation of 1970 when they opened the standard gauge.

You're talking about the – was it the Minister –

Yes.

– of something or other wanted to drive a train into Peterborough? Yes, well, I'd prefer not to refer to that as a demarcation because I don't think it is. I mean, a demarcation is an issue where you've got, say, somebody belonging to one union and someone belonging to a different union wanting to dip into someone else's work, that's demarcation.

Right.

What was at issue in this particular case was a safety issue. I've spent the best part of all my working life in the railways training and retraining and dealing with all aspects of safety to get to a level where you could actually do your job, and here for the sake of publicity a politician wanted to sit his bum on the seat of a locomotive and drive it while the train was full of round about three hundred passengers on it driving into the station at Peterborough, just for the sake of publicity, and we just said no. The bloke's not qualified, that's the end of the story.

Because they were going to unveil a plaque on the station, weren't they?

Yes, apparently they were going to unveil a plaque.

That didn't happen.

No.

That plaque's down in Port Dock Museum, I think.

Is it? Right.

Yes. Never unveiled, though.

Yes.

And they put another one at the ....

Well, it already had the Minister's name on it, I suppose, did it?

Yes – oh, I don't know.

Yes, I don't know.

Yes, would have.

Yes.

Yes.

But I don't even know who the bloke was, but various politicians and what not, and prime ministers, have got their name plastered on the side of locomotives for one reason or another, usually the start of a new class of engine or something. But to have somebody physically drive a train, even if someone's there sitting behind him, I mean, it's – (sighs in exasperation) – it was just bloody absurd to even suggest it.

Anyway, it didn't happen, did it?

Didn't happen.

No.

No.

And then it still caused a few problems because there was supposed to be a ball in the Town Hall that night and it was all cancelled, wasn't it?

That had all sort of – I'm not sure about that; I mean, you mention it and I have to say that you've probably researched it and you know that that was the case, but I don't really remember much about that. Our involvement in the issue was to make sure that our safety conditions and what not weren't breached and that was that, that was our issue. And because that didn't happen, if a ball was cancelled or if a plaque didn't get unveiled, well, so be it.

Well, it did unveil another plaque, though, didn't it – down by the Federal Hotel.

Yes, there was one down by the Federal there, I think, it was to commemorate the opening of the standard gauge, wasn't it?

Yes, and they used an old railway worker to officially unveil it.

Did they? Yes.

Yes, and it's still there.

Yes.

There was a high turnover of railway workers going through the town. Do you know any reason why there were so many?

Primarily probably because of people just changing work location for promotional purposes, or changes in working systems and that meant that there might have been a high turnover in gangs and that sort of stuff as things got more mechanised and people would transfer to different areas. I mean, the railways, South Australian

Railways, covered a pretty broad area from Mount Gambier up to Port Pirie and up to Cockburn, so they were all working within the same system. So through that there was a pretty high turnover in traffic employees, like people advancing up to station masters and things like that, so they'd transfer around to get those promotions. And even in the loco ranks quite a few people would shift around. And, of course, as the demand changed in certain areas – they had a lot of immigrants come and work in Peterborough because there was a demand for them just after the War.

We used to have a reputation as a very cold place to work too, didn't we? That wouldn't have helped!

Yes, well I suppose – I mean, Peterborough's still a cold place to live. It's something that you get used to. I think you have to – the cold has to get right through to the middle of your bones before you'll actually become acclimatised to it. But you've only got to go away to Queensland or somewhere for a couple of weeks and come back to Peterborough and step out of the train or out of the car in the nice bright sunshine in your shirtsleeves to find out that it's (laughs) –

Cold.

– it's cold. And even on a sunny day in the winter you might be running for a jumper. That may have had something to do with it, I don't know. But work was work in the heydays of those things. A lot of the times, whether it was daylight or dark, work was work and cold was only one of the things you put up with.

But of course the family were first too. It's one thing to say it was good work here if the wives and the kids weren't happy here.

Probably. Probably, yes.

That might –

It might, yes.

– cause a transfer.

And people might have moved, say, to Adelaide or closer to Adelaide to access better education for their kids if they thought that that's what they needed. But I know that a lot of people did move to the metropolitan area to get advancement, and particularly as some blokes got older on the loco ranks went down to Adelaide and worked on the railcars in Adelaide, in the suburban railcars, because that was sort of

– yes, it was traditionally populated by older blokes who'd been through the steam system and the early railway system and went into semi-retirement if you like working red hens around Adelaide suburbs.

Of course the other thing is, too, there's a lot of work for men but probably not a great deal of work in the town for the women who want to get into the workforce. And I know that quite – – –.

Well, that could have been. A lot of them might not have even had an opportunity to get into work either if they were raising families here.

But I'm referring to older –

Yes.

– once the kids had left, a lot of them who wanted to get work couldn't get work here, and I suppose it was easier to move to where –

Oh yes, yes.

– you'd both get work.

The same thing's happening now, isn't it? You've got people – kids haven't got the opportunity to get employment here and often they're moving, you lose them because of that. But with the change to the nature of the town it's different sort of people moving in now, haven't you?

....

Some good and some bad. Eh? (laughter) Doesn't matter if there's no work, that's right. Some people retiring to the town, that's what I was alluding to.

Yes, we might edit this out later on! (laughter) How did you get on with the migrant workers? You alluded to that just a minute ago.

Well, most of them were pretty good. They'd all – *all* of them had been through sort of – I mean, there was a good reason for them migrating to Australia because it was just after the War. But most of them were pretty good to work with. They were people the same as everybody else, except that they had a bit of an accent and probably ate some different sorts of food. But there was a lot to be learnt from them. Some of the – you have a look at some of the foods you eat now and some of the things that we ate, you know, you probably would have never dreamt of taking a stick of Polish sausage in your tucker box until you worked with somebody that did

it and they'd open the tucker box and this glorious smell of Polish sausage came out. And some of the things their wives used to prepare for them and take along in steamers and that to eat. So they probably learnt a bit from us, but we probably learnt a fair bit from them as well, as far as that was concerned. And it was often interesting to listen to some of their stories, too. Like they all had stories to tell from home, but it was very interesting listening to a lot of that.

Because you married into a migrant family, didn't you?

Yes. My wife's Polish, yes, her parents are Polish and they came out here just after the War.

I think you referred – it was actually – that your father-in-law was actually instrumental in getting you a job in the railways.

Yes. Well, he was, yes. I was going steady, if you like, with Janina, and I probably found out more about the railways and about the loco side of the railways, the fact that I was going with Janina and used to go round there and have meals and talk to them quite a lot. And he was probably instrumental in me thinking along the lines of going into that area of the railways more than if I hadn't had that contact, I guess. But I mean there were obviously people, young lads that joined the railways, that wouldn't have had that same influence. But for me, I knew where I wanted to go; when I joined the railways I knew what I wanted to be. It wasn't a matter of just joining the railways for a job. And, as I said to you earlier, I only asked to join as a porter because they told me, 'You won't get in.' (laughs) But then, when they said they didn't want any porters, they wanted some cleaners, I said, 'Beauty, that's what's I wanted after all!'

You were in.

Yes, 'I'm in!'

So you got on really well with the migrants, then? Looking back?

Yes. Oh, yes.

Within the town was there a 'them and us' mentality, with say the railway workers compared to the rest of the town?

I can't say that – I've heard it but I can't say that I've noticed it, I had noticed it, myself, because most of the people that you were relating with or dealing with were

in the railways anyway. But I do believe that there was – you know, between the rural community and the established townspeople – there was an attitude towards people that worked in the railways, and they were often referred to as 'sooties', I think. But the town benefited enormously from the railways over the years, so nobody really took any offence.

Well, if it hadn't been for the railways the town wouldn't have been here.

Exactly.

It's as simple as that.

Yes.

What about the hotels? Did they play a big part in the workers' lives?

Well, it certainly didn't play any part in mine at all because I was too busy working and raising a family, but the – I know that the four-thirty rush was always a bit of a spectacle to watch, when they blew the whistle at half past four and all the day workers from round the workshops and everything used to dart down the pub. And of course in those days it would have been six o'clock closing as well so there wasn't a lot of time and they'd make the most of it. Oh, a few of the single blokes – even with the running staff and loco staff there was – there were certainly people that used to have a drink, no question about that, but a lot of them, you just didn't have time, you know. All the time that I was involved in the job it was just too damn busy.

So were there drivers and firemen who did have a drinking problem?

Yes, oh yes. You had one or two individuals over the time – or maybe more than that – over the time that would have had a drinking problem, but in our area of operation it was fairly critical that (laughs) you worked properly together, and if you – it was unlikely you ever had two blokes on an engine that were afflicted with the same disease. But if you did have somebody like that, well maybe his mate would cover for him for a while, but then eventually it would get intolerable and he'd bring himself undone anyway. And most of those blokes that did have a problem with that, they either rectified the problem or they eventually finished up out of it.

Because they introduced the breathalysers, didn't they, at one stage?

Yes, they did. They introduced breathalysers right through the operating grades in our system, but that wasn't just in Peterborough, that was right through the system. And I think you had to be under point oh-two. And if you went out for a few beers at night and then went to work an early in the morning, well, you wouldn't pass. So it just meant that you couldn't have the few beers at night, or if you went out you'd restrict yourself to one or two beers and then drink soft drink. It was just – it probably helped to sort of clean up a little bit of the act of the fellows that pushed the limits a bit.

But it wasn't a great problem.

No, no, it wasn't a problem. I can't say I knew of anybody that got sent home as a result of the breathalysers that wasn't able to work.

What about gambling? Was that a problem?

Oh, well, there was always the odd game of cards in the pilot room and in the barracks and things like that, but – I'm not a gambler and I certainly wouldn't put too much money on myself playing cards, but I know that in the hostel, when the hostel was in full swing, there used to be a bit of it goes on over there. But some of the nationalities that came out it was in their blood, they loved to gamble and take a punt. They'd have a game of cards for, you know, for fifty cents or for two bob or whatever it was any time. But I wouldn't have thought there'd be a big issue with gambling. I can't see that anybody – I mean, perhaps, once we started working at Broken Hill, some of the blokes were making a bit of a habit of playing poker machines up in Broken Hill, and it may have been an issue there with a few people, but I can't say that I know too many that would have lost all their (laughs) wages.

So what was it like for you on your last day?

My last day as an employee I think I was on holidays because I had some leave to cut out, but I know my last physical day I spent on the railways I was on pilot duty, pilot duty down at the station, and it wasn't anything nostalgic or celebratory about it except for the fact that I wasn't coming back next day, I was going on holidays, and then after my holidays were finished I still wasn't coming back. But there was a little bit of apprehension about it perhaps, because at that time, with the redundancy package and arrangement that was being negotiated, there was still – I mean, I was

ninety-nine point nine nine per cent sure that everything was all right, but until the money actually went in the bank you didn't really know. And it was only that little bit of apprehension around that that sort of took the shine off the last day. But otherwise it was much like any other – a bit mundane, not much to do because there was only a few of us left at that time. I know that in the earlier years when some of the older fellows like Paddy Harding and Max Swindon and those blokes retired, they got to work the Indian Pacific into Peterborough and they rolled out a bit of carpet for them, the Superintendent was there with a certificate and a gold watch for them, and you'd take up a collection with your various workmates and buy them a gift and that sort of stuff. There was a bit of a celebration of the last day, but – – –. (tape ends)

END OF TAPE 3 SIDE A: TAPE 3 SIDE B

[missing speech] – – – way or another, whether it was redundancies or, you know, packages or just out and out resigning, but the glory didn't seem to be there any more, you know, the shine had gone right off it. The morale had got to the point where – well, at one stage it got very low, when the future of Peterborough was starting to look pretty ordinary as far as the work depot was concerned. Unfortunately the morale improved immensely (laughs) when we found out that we actually did have a redundancy agreement with the railways, which nobody sort of was really aware of and nobody made us aware of it. But I think the railways made a point of leaning on the redundancy agreement a bit to accelerate the process of shedding employees. And where they might not have made it public knowledge before they were encouraging people to look at it. And the terms of being redundant was that you were surplus to the requirements and you couldn't be utilised anywhere else. I mean, quite possibly if you decided you wanted to take a transfer to Port Augusta or to Adelaide or to Broken Hill or wherever they wanted you to go you may well have been able to stay in the job – there's still a few blokes in the job like that – but it really wasn't for me. We'd established our home in Peterborough and our family and the kids had grown up, and we're still quite happy here.

Quite happy, yes.

Yes.

When you look back on them now, on the railways now, what do you think?

About the railways generally?

Yes.

Well, things have certainly changed a *hell* of a lot. As we were talking about before, it was a very labour-intensive industry and now it's different altogether. You've got different companies owning trains, for instance, and different operators operating over the same section of track. The only thing you see about a train, you know, it whizzes through the town and blocks both the crossings for a while, but apart from that there's no benefit at all to the town. But it concerns me a bit that I think there's probably safe working issues with the length of hours that they work nowadays, and fellows are on either casual or contract, and you know where that can lead. And I believe there's been a few serious incidents in the last five or six years with trains probably the result of fatigue and that sort of stuff that no-one really wants to admit to. But I'm sure that that's got a lot to do with it.

As far as the town was concerned, though, with the railways, looking back?

As far as the town, well, it was certainly a very bustling place when the railways was in full swing. When I first came here in the Post Office and even before that, when I came up here as a kid to stay with my relations, it always seemed to be a big, very bustling, very busy place. There was always something going on. But now, now that the railways has finished, still a nice town, I still like living here, it's still got very good facilities. And the nature of the population has certainly changed. I mean, where before there might have been, say, ten per cent unemployment if you were lucky, now it's probably more like ninety-five per cent. But there's a very high population of old people which the town has to deal with, you know, with aged care and that sort of stuff, and there's also a very high population of people that are unemployed and there's no prospect of them getting employment in Peterborough. But it's the way the economy of the country is and the way things are developing. It's unlikely that you're going to be able to develop an industry perhaps beyond tourism that's going to generate any employment, any significant employment, in the town. But I think the town's still got a good future for people, because the cheaper

housing means that people are more likely to move here for retirement or use it as a base to travel around on, and quite a few people doing that, I believe.

Yes, that's right, yes. All right.

But the town's certainly got a very rich railway history, and I think it's worth exploiting.

Precisely. That's how this project's come about.

Yes.

Anyway, that's it. Thanks for your time, Ashley.

Good.

Okay.

END OF INTERVIEW.