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OH 658/2

Full transcript of an interview with

SID AYLIFFE

on 14 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 658/2

Interview with Mr Sid Ayliffe by Chris Woodman at Peterborough, South Australia, on the 14th November 2002 for The State Library of South Australia's Peterborough Oral History Project 'Relaying Our Tracks'. (Interviewer is distant from microphone and his speech not always clear as a result.)

TAPE 1 SIDE A

– – – on the 14th November the year 2002. Okay, Sid, what's your full name?

Sidney Hamilton Ayliffe.

Okay, and your date of birth, please?

Seventeen-one-twenty-four.

Okay. And where were you born, Sid?

Peterborough.

Okay. Have you lived here all your life?

Yes, all my life bar – oh, I did spend some time in Gladstone.

Okay, how long for?

Oh, probably six months. But most of the time I lived in Peterborough.

And when you lived in Gladstone – what, as a boy, was it, when you were – – –?

Yes, my father was down there selling suit links – he was a tailor by trade – and he was selling suit links at that stage in and around the Gladstone area.

Right. What type of education did you get?

I went to school in my first year when I was five, I went to the primary school, and I spent a year there and then I went down to St Joseph's Convent.

Right, okay. So why did you go from the primary school to the Convent?

Why?

Yes.

Well, (laughs) I was a Catholic and I suppose I wanted to go to the Catholic school.

That's .... (laughs) ....

Yes.

Good start. And you lived in Victoria Street?

Yes.

What number?

Ninety-seven.

Ninety-seven? Okay. So what was it like growing up as a boy in Peterborough?

Oh, it was good as far as I was concerned. We made our own fun. Probably broke a few globes in my time throwing stones at them, but other than that I don't think we caused much trouble.

Just normal boys.

Yes, just normal boys.

Right, okay. And your parents' occupations, what were they?

My mother came from Clare and she worked in a drapery shop here. My father, he was a tailor by trade, he learnt his trade with Philips, I think, were the first one, and then he joined with Barclay and they had Barclay and Ayliffe, and they made suits and done repairs. And then the Depression came and I think my father joined a gang and went up to the Cockburn line, he worked on the gang there, and also he worked on the cottages when they were built here in 1927 –

Oh, okay.

– down at Peterborough West.

So what did he did with the cottages, what actually did he do? (sound of distant truck engine)

Oh, he was a labourer and a pipe fitter. You name it.

Oh, right. Okay.

And I think it was 1938, when the War started he went down to Islington and he worked for the – building Beaufort bombers. And he worked there, oh, until 1941, I think, and he came back and joined the railways the year after I started.

Your Dad – you said he was a tailor – did he work in Peterborough as a tailor?

Yes.

Yes? Whereabouts was his shop?

In the main street.

Whereabouts in the main street?

I think it was next door to where Cave's furniture shop is now, it was Barclay and Ayliffe. (coughs)

Did you have any brothers and sisters?

Yes, one brother and one sister died, had one brother.

Oh, right, okay. So where are they now?

My brother lives in Adelaide. He worked in the railway – started in Peterborough, I suppose in 1937, and he worked here until he joined the Air Force in 1941, I reckon, then he moved overseas in the – what they call the – oh, I don't know what they call it, Air Training Scheme, I think – he went to Canada, and he trained as a pilot there. He was in Coast Command flying ..... fighters.

He won a medal too.

He won the DFC.

Yes, Distinguished Flying Cross, yes. Did your parents do any war service?

No, my father was in the Light Horse in the First World War, but he never went overseas really.

I believe you said he was too young to join –

Yes.

– the First World War and too old to go to the Second.

Too old to go to the Second, yes.

He was pretty lucky, I suppose, when you think about it.

Yes, yes.

Yes. You joined the War, didn't you?

Yes, I went in the Air Force in 1943. I had to get permission to join because the Manpower, and they gave me permission provided I passed the medical. If I didn't pass the medical I had to come back and stop in the railways.

But you passed the medical.

I passed the medical.

Yes, okay. So where did you go?

I went to Shepparton and did my rookies, done my rookies there, and in August '43 I went to Darwin, and my first posting was at fifty-seven behind the bull shed castle [?????] was the headquarters of the RAF in Darwin area, and I was a general hand. My father wouldn't sign – I wanted to go in the Navy, but he wouldn't sign it because he said, 'I want you to learn a trade and learn something out of it.' But actually I started as a general hand, it was cleaning out toilets and I blew up the Air Marshall Cole's toilet for a start. You used to throw kerosene or whatever down there and then wait for a while and then throw a match down and up she went. That was Air Vice-Marshall Cole. Anyway, then I remustered to a cipher assistant, which is in Signals, and you had to put messages into code and then break them out as they come in. And that's where I finished up, in cipher.

So what did you think of the War at the time?

Oh, a great experience. Loving it.

What about now?

Oh, I think you're lucky to come out, but I wouldn't want to be in it now.

No.

Bad news, I think.

Second World War we were probably a little bit lucky, weren't we, then?

Oh yes, when you knew who you were fighting and they were just shooting guns at you and all that, but what they're doing now you wouldn't know.

Yes. But the Americans ...., didn't they?

Yes. Oh, they saved Australia.

Yes. So why did you come back to Peterborough after the War?

Why did I come back? Well, my parents were still here, my home was here. So I came back and my job was still open, and I came back as a – I think my first job was a fitter's mate. Boilermaker's mate. And I worked on shift work.

So you said your job was open.

Oh yes, my job was guaranteed when I came back.

Because you went to the Service, is that right?

Yes.

So there was a lot of work in the railways –

Plenty of work, yes.

– when you came back?

Yes.

And why was that?

Well, I suppose there was a shortage of men and there was plenty of money in those days. You could change your job if you wanted to, and still come back to the railways.

Oh, okay. So you weren't putting any other blokes out of work.

No, I don't think.

Fair enough. So when everyone was away fighting the War, who was actually working the railways back then? Were there females working?

Not that I know – only in the offices.

Oh, right. So what about the workforce?

Oh, well, they must have had them somewhere.

Would have been probably young people, I suppose.

I suppose, yes.

Have you always lived here?

Yes.

Oh, except for that small period of time –

Yes.

– when you lived in Gladstone. Fair enough. So you lived in a house up in Victoria Street. So when you got married where did you live?

I lived with my parents for – oh, I suppose three or four months, waiting for a house. When I got married in 1948 I lived with my parents, and eventually we got a house out at Peterborough West in 1952 or something, and we moved into a cottage there which we were in there for seventeen years.

So where did you meet Myrtle?

Oh, probably at a dance here or something, she was working as the telegraphist in the Post Office.

Right, okay. And how many children do you have?

Two, a boy and a girl.

Right, and their names were?

John and Lesley.

So when you came back to work on the railways, can you explain what your jobs were? Just one by one?

Well, I think the first job was a fitter's mate, used to help the fitters, you were a mate, and then another one was a boilermaker's mate, and that was where – and you worked shift work on that one.

Doing what?

Oh, that was just the fitter, if he was changing brake blocks, or if you were with the boilermaker you might have been in the boiler of the engine, belting up rivets or whatever.

Right. What did you do after that?

Well, then they started the Post-War Reconstruction Scheme, where you could go and do a course as a bricklayer or electrician, but I chose carpentry. And I went to Adelaide and boarded out at Prospect, and I used to go to Finsbury to like a big building out there where they taught carpentry. And we were – the Commonwealth Government paid my wages so much – well, they did *all* the time until I came back to the railways, and then it was on a sliding scale. And as you worked your way up

the railways paid more money and the Commonwealth railways [*sic*] paid less, until you reached a hundred per cent. And then you were given a certificate to say that you had done a course, say, three years of carpentry, and it gave you the right to be a carpenter.

Right. So then you came back to Peterborough?

Yes, I came back to Peterborough halfway through that, and then I did the rest of my course here.

So as a carpenter, what did you do?

Mainly buildings. Mainly some cottages, stockyards, bridges, all those things.

Just a range of things.

Yes.

So you were a carpenter. What was your next step after a carpenter.

Well – – –.

How long were you a carpenter for?

Oh, I suppose – oh, it might have been '55, '56, I got a leading hand's job. The other fellow retired, a bloke called – Harris was his second name – and then they started standardisation and I was interested in that and I knew the boss of standardisation, Les McLean, and I said I was interested in getting a job on standardisation when it started, and I think it started in 1962, '64 or something. And I was the what they called the Foreman of Works. And my job was looking after the buildings, cooks, bridges, anything to do with buildings or carpentry work or anything like that. Not on the track itself. There was – Jim Plummer was Foreman of Gauge Widening or Foreman of Track Works and I was Foreman of Works. We were the first two foremen on the – – –.

Job. And so you worked from here all the way up towards Cockburn?

Yes.

And so were you away – – –?

Oh, most of the time, yes.

So you were based at, what, camps, or were you based – – –?

Well, yes, camps. I suppose the first one was – well, Cutana, I suppose, and then – well, (laughs) while I was still in the SAR[1] we had to put a ballast hopper at Radium Hill. We had to go out there and put the foundations in for this big hopper, and that's where they used to drive the trucks underneath and take all the rubbish from Radium Hill and all the metal and put it in this hopper, and then the trucks go underneath it, load it into the trucks and the train would bring it down and that's how they – – –. But first of all they put a dump at Cutana. That was my first job, was to build a loading ramp at Cutana, a big ramp where they'd back up and tip the stuff over, and they stockpiled so many thousands of tons there. And that was the start, they had to use that, from Cutana to Cockburn, ballast for the line. And once they got down they'd go from – and then once they got the line to Cockburn they used the ballast train, and that tipped all the ballast onto the – you know, the line was just laying on the formation, and this ballast train would go along and tip all the – and then a ..... would come along and lift the track and dump all the stuff and compact it. And they used Radium Hill ballast from, I think, Cockburn to Mannahill, and then they had to find another source for the ballast.

Okay, and where did that come from, do you know?

Well, they got some out at that goldfield out from Yunta –

Waukaringa.

– Waukaringa, they took some from there. And then they started one up at Nackara, and then they carted that down from Mannahill down to Paratoo.

So how many men were you in charge of?

Oh, hell, I suppose twenty or thirty for a start. Biggest problem was the cooks.

Why, you couldn't get them or they weren't any good?

Well, they were either on the slops or they were doing everything else. But that'd be their – I had to cook the meal one morning. The cook took off and so I just had to cook bacon and eggs. You know, one gang was at Olary, but we had camps at Mannahill, Mingary, there was a small one at Cockburn, then Olary was another big

[1] South Australian Railways.

one, then Yunta, Oodlawirra, Peterborough, then they went from there to Gladstone and Jamestown, right through.

So were you working long hours, or was it just a normal – – –.

Oh, not long, it's only if there was a derailment or anything like that that it was long hours.

When you were with the standardisation, you'd work from – what? – half past seven in the morning till half past four in the afternoon?

Yes.

Yes.

Five o'clock.

And near the end there, was there still plenty of work near the end of it? .....?

Yes, but I suppose I was on it until 1968, and then Jack Sweeney – I think you know him – he retired and I took his job. But then standardisation hadn't finished at that stage, you know, still going. It didn't finish until 1970, of course.

How long did you work for the railways in total?

Forty-two years. '83 I finished, started in 1940.

Right, and when you retired – nowadays you get a golden handshake and you get all sorts of things – what did you get when you retired?

No, I left too early for that. I was a bit, I suppose, lucky in one way that I could retire at fifty-eight, fifty-nine, and at sixty I could get a service pension. So I didn't have to wait till I was sixty-five. So they got that golden handshake after '83, I think.

So just taking a step backwards, how old were you when you joined the railways?

Sixteen.

Sixteen. And what was your first wage, can you remember?

Oh, I suppose it would be three pound a week or something.

With that three pound a week, what did you pay – you had to pay board and all that, I suppose, did you?

Yes. Oh, well, I wouldn't know how much – I wouldn't have much to spend, anyway.

No, there wasn't much left at the end of it.

No.

You told me that to earn a bit more money you used to throw coal – could you explain what that is?

Well, in the Depression days, when there was – before the Second World War – there was no jobs around and you had to go down to the police station and have a ballot to draw your name or number to throw coal. And they used to have a coal heap behind the old oil store in loco yard. And there were big lines of coal all heaped up. I think there were two tracks here, and 'X' and 'Y' trucks they used to call them, they were drop sides, and they'd shunt you down this line, drop the sides and you had to throw the coal out of the truck onto the heap and build a wall so it wouldn't spill back on the line, and we used to get tenpence a ton for that. I didn't have to do it because I always had a job, but for extra money I took it on once. And a mate of mine, Heckey Woods, we threw all the truck and immediately went down the pub and spent it, so we didn't make much out of it.

Okay. When you first started at the railways, what was your first job?

In the machine shop, in the office.

What did you do there?

Well, I used to write out requisitions. If they wanted, say, a bottle of oxygen or a bottle of acetylene gas, you know, in the big containers that the welders used to have. We used to have an old bloke in the stores, old Lundey Inn, and if you couldn't spell properly he'd send the order form back until you'd spell it right. But anyway, soon learnt.

So that was your first job.

Yes.

How long did you do that for?

Oh, I reckon I was on that for twelve months. Then I went over to the carriage and wagon shop, and I was rivet boy. And I used to work – you know, you'd work long

hours on that, you'd be at work till seven o'clock at night. And you had a brazier and you'd put the rivets into the brazier and when they were sort of red hot you'd get a pair of tongs and you'd grab them and hand them up to the boilermaker and he'd put them between the steel, you know, each side of the timber. Then they'd get an air hammer and dolly them up. That's how they done it – rivet boy.

That was on what, the carriages, was it?

No, that was on trucks.

On the trucks.

Yes.

As in railway trucks.

Yes. And if you got them too hot they'd melt. You just had to get them right.

Just right, yes. So do you have any interesting – any interesting times there? Yes?

Yes, yes, you burnt a few, won a few.

(laughs) Right. So how long did you do that for?

Oh, I don't know, might have been a couple of years. Then I went on the saw bench like tailing out, you'd pull the timber through as the – old Perce Pope, he was the machinist at that time. And you had to put full logs through, you had to – if the timber was a bit green you had to put a wedge in between it to open it up as it comes through the saw. And I dropped my thumb on the saw one day and threw it back over my shoulder and I lost a bit of meat off it. I landed – I was on that for a while and then I went on shift work blowing tubes.

Tubes, what's blowing tubes?

Well, if you had an old steam engine you opened the front up, there's all tubes in there over the – it's something to do with the making steam. And they used to block up, and you used to get compressed air from the old steam thing over the – you know where the big funnel is?

Boiler house?

Boiler house, that we used to produce the steam that run all around loco through the pipes, and you'd connect it up and the air, and you had this long rod and you'd poke it in there and turn the pressure on, and if there was a block in there it would all come back at you. You'd have it all over you. And if it was *really* blocked you had to get a big reamer and turn it and ream it out. But if they were a little bit ..... it was all right, it would just blow it into the smoke box. But if it was a bit blocked you wore it.

That'd be interesting on a hot day.

Oh! (laughs) It wasn't nice any time.

No, I suppose not. So after that what would you be going to?

Well, that's where I went – I went from there down to Adelaide to do the Reconstruction.

Oh, okay, so the carpenter, then you came back, is that right? (pause) So you ended up as – what was your last job when you finished up?

Works Superintendent, Port Augusta.

At Port Augusta. So you actually lived up there?

Yes, I was there for twelve months.

Twelve months. So both you and your wife were up there?

No, I was on my own.

So what, you only went up there Monday to Friday, or – – –?

Yes, in the week I'd go out to Cooke and up to Leigh Creek and all those places.

Right, so how many people did you have under your control then?

Oh, would have been eighty, I suppose, plumbers, carpenters, masons.

So when you were working back here in the workshops, down the railway roud house and the loco, could you explain how it was all set up? Like they had the turntable down there, had the round house – how did it all work?

Well, the engines had to go in there for repairs into the round house. There were certain sections for different repairs. Might have been the brake shoes or the eccentrics or whatever. The most interesting part, I reckon, was when the diesels

came and we had to build the high level platforms for diesels. And it was – at the time Jack Sweeney was Works Foreman and he had an operation and he was off, and I was in charge of that job. And it meant that you had to dig out the existing bays and then put railway irons up and you'd haul metal and then run concrete on top of those for the platforms, so you could walk straight into the diesels. And that was about – oh, I think there were four or five bays for those.

So they were decided so you could work underneath as well –

Yes.

– underneath the train, on top of the train, in the train.

Yes.

Yes. Can you tell me, why didn't they put barriers at the other end? When you'd pushed a train in there was no barriers to stop it keep on going, was there?

Well, (laughs) it was either touch and go, as the bloke up the top there was – if he'd too much steam coming in and he never shut it down it'd just go straight over the end of the concrete through the –

Through the round house.

– through the end of the round house. And that was done on the turntable – if it wasn't set right and the train come in – it wiped that cabin out twice, to my knowledge.

Yes? Really?

It had to be rebuilt.

The cabin on the turntable itself?

Yes, yes. Not wiped it out completely, but damaged it.

Yes, coming –

So it wasn't – – –.

– going onto the turntable.

Yes.

Oh, okay.

Wasn't set properly.

Yes, I can understand that, yes.

You'd pull that lever and you're supposed to go into a block.

That's right, yes.

And if they didn't put it in the block, train would come on and – bang.

Anyone injured as a result of that?

No, not to my knowledge, no.

Not that you know of? But you know it happened at least twice, you reckon?

I reckon.

But getting back to the round house, so why didn't they ever put blocks on the end of the – – –?

Well, would it stop it? It would have to be pretty bloody strong.

Yes. I know you'd see them all – – –.

How many roads are there?

There's twenty-two bays or something.

Is it?

Yes. And not all of them had glass behind it, only fifteen had glass behind it. But you can see in the concrete a train has obviously gone over the concrete.

Well, I've seen a couple go over there. There was one – Dave Lilywhite, he was on a ..... that rolled by the subway, you know, by the refresh there?

Yes, yes. The old refresh.

The old refresh.

Okay, ... subway, the western side of the subway.

I think Dave was on that one.

How did he manage to roll that?

I don't know.

Happened.

Yes.

Okay.

You can't stop an engine once there's full throttle.

Once it's got the momentum going that's it.

(laughs) You can't throw it in reverse!

No. (pause) There were stories of men not letting their wives know how much they earnt. Did you hear of that?

Oh yes, I mean to say – there's a great saying: you've got to sort out the sheep from the – or the goats from the whatever, so you had to take what you felt was a fair thing and give the wife the rest. But a lot of them – well, those on big wages sort of could do it a bit better than the average worker.

Okay, but it was pretty – – –.

Well, it was done. Wasn't many that handed over the whole lot.

There have been stories that men have been sick and they've been a bit concerned that their wives were going to pick their pay packet up and they'd find out exactly what they earnt! (laughs)

Well, it happened to me once. It got into my wife's hands, I think. (laughter)

Did you explain what was going on?

No, couldn't – 'I don't think that's right, I'll check that out.'

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE A: TAPE 1 SIDE B

When you were laying the standard gauge track you must have come – or involved with standardisation, you must have come across some very difficult situations where you had to design something to fit in?

One comes to mind where there was a bridge up near Mingary. We had to push the narrow gauge over so they could continue on building the standard gauge. And one of my engineers came up with an idea we'll lay all pipes and then put a deck on top of the pipes. We had to shift the whole thing over, but it had to be done between the last train going to Broken Hill of a Saturday morning, and then the Broken Hill express coming out of Broken Hill, I suppose. Which way did they go, up? Used to come out or go up. Anyway, it had to be done between trains. And anyway, we laid

all these pipes – I think they were five foot pipes – along the bed and then we had to stack those on top of those and then put this track on the top. Anyway, it started to rain and I had to go out to Radium Hill and get some old cables. And we had anchor – like, when we put the pipes in we had U-frames made up of railway iron, just frames, and we had to put them in, lash them all together and sort of put galvanised iron in and put the ballast in there and then put the track on top?

Yes, right.

Anyway, we had to tie the whole show to the standard gauge – most of the standard gauge bridge was built. All the beams were on there and all that, and we had to tie it there to stabilise it. Well, the rain just came down and washed all the ballast out, like all the – – –. But anyway, we got away with it, we got the train over the next – the first one Sunday night, so – – –. We called it '..... Wonder' after the engineer. Hello, we lost that? We're back on.

We're back on. So – – –.

Oh, we had the different things. We had to blow wingwalls[?] off the narrow gauge to fit the broad gauge in there.

Sorry, what did you have to do? You'd – – –?

Blow the wingwalls off.

Which are?

On the narrow gauges, wingwalls go out from the end of the abutments –

Yes, okay, yes.

– and the wingwall was – where the narrow gauge was going to go was go too far, so we had the drill all holes down through that on that side of the – plug it up with geli and then load it up with what we called 'cordex' – it's a white strip and it burns at thirteen thousand feet a second. And you put a det on a safety fuse at the end –

A detonator you're talking about?

– a detonator that sets the cordex off, and you'd light that – all depends how far you had to run, might be we put three feet in that'd take about three minutes, you know, before it hit the detonator. And I used to do that.

Okay. Still alive to tell it.

Oh, I never went to a school for it, old Jim Plummer, he was the bloke on the gauge widening on the track itself, and he did a bit down the – he was in charge of the gauge widening down the South-East. And we used to do it between us. We blew a – there was a stump in the road in the Olary Creek, so we tried to blow it up. We were putting a few charges in there, it wasn't making any difference, so we put a whole box in there. (laughs) She landed up on the bridge! Anyway, we got rid of it. But that was one experience. I never learned anything about it, and I wouldn't like to try it now. But you had to crimp the detonator onto the safety fuse, and if you went too far it only takes eighty pounds set the whole show off. Anyway, we got away with it.

Still alive to tell the tale. Just going back, what was it like your first day at work?

Well, I suppose I thought it was a great experience. I went straight from school into work and I didn't know what I was letting myself in for, but I got out of it all right. It was a bit hard sometimes when, as I say, with these medals, you had to pick the medals up if the whistle blew. You went out, picked the medals up, put them in the office. And the fellows that come along who were late, they had to pick their medal up, you had to dock them. And some of them would swear black and blue that they were there, forgot to pick the medal up and all that jazz, you know. But I had some good bosses, they were all right.

Just going back to those medals, because you talked about that before we went on the tape, so when people booked on they had a medal they picked up.

Yes.

And what did they do with that medal?

Well, they kept it all the time. They had a number on it. If you were eighty-one, that was your medal. So you picked it up and dinner time, at twelve o'clock, you hung it on the board. When you come back from dinner you took the medal off. When you knocked off at night time you hung the medal on.

So what did they do with that medal, they put it on their body?

Oh, they put it in a locker or whatever.

Oh, okay.

It was only a bit of round copper with a number stamped on it.

So it was an early type of time clock, basically.

Yes.

Okay, so that was your responsibility when you first– – –.

Yes.

And you made some good friends there, did you? (laughter)

Oh, well, made some enemies, too.

When you first started work did they try and trick you to do different things – you know, how they have induction ceremonies and all sorts of things.

Oh, yes, send a bloke up to the tool store for a 'long weight' or something like that, or – – –. I've had different things – send them up to the paint store for a can of 'striped paint', something like that.

Did they catch you?

No, I don't think I fell for it.

Were there any such things as apprenticeships when you first started?

Did I what?

Was there any such things as apprenticeships when you first started?

Yes, I put my name down for apprentice fitter, and had to go to Adelaide. And I think it was four hundred sat for the apprenticeship and they only wanted eighteen or something, so I wasn't very qualified.

Weren't qualified.

No.

In total, how many people were in your section when you first started?

Well, in the whole railways? That's traffic, loco and gang and buildings, I suppose it would be seven hundred. But my brother, he was a few years ahead of me, but he always said there was a thousand in Peterborough prior to the War.

Prior to the War. They tell me it was built in the 1950s – would there be a lot of workers there then? That was after the War – – –.

Well, I suppose it was busy when they were bringing coal down from Leigh Creek, you know, down to Adelaide and they used to transfer it at Terowie at the tippler plant, but they reckoned it was so many trains a day go through here. But I don't know.

The story is that it was over a hundred trains a week[?] go through over a long period of time.

Yes.

And you could understand why, when you look at the way the ..... was set up.

Yes, well, we used to call it the produce, that used to go to Cockburn every day, leave at half past seven in the morning, and then there was – I think the produce used to come up from Adelaide, and that would get to Cockburn, that was taking stuff to Broken Hill, you know, all the vegies and all that. I remember when I was working in Cockburn, we never had refrigeration or anything in those days in the sleeping vans, and anyway we used to – produce would come in to Cockburn at about, oh, ten o'clock at night. They used to load these produce things up with ice at Terowie. We'd get up in the racks and take the ice out and put it in – we had an old cooler or something in the van, we put it in that. That was one way of doing it. But when I left the railways in the latter part, the sleeping vans were equipped with gas refrigerators, gas stoves. They were good. But in my days, I know I was in a sleeping van at Cutana once and an old bloke I'll call Rudi Timus, and they had army wood stoves in them then, and they must have shunted or something – we stopped at Cutana and they must have had to put a van off there and they shunted us – and the bloody stove took off from the other end of the thing and finished up between our beds. But they were rough, some of them, blokes in the early days, they roughed it.

Yes?

Yes.

So you – when you finished in the railways how many railway workers were left here then? Of course you finished in Port Augusta, I suppose, but – – –.

I wouldn't know offhand, no. Wouldn't know.

So you obviously enjoyed working here –

Yes.

– in the railways?

Yes.

Why?

Well, I didn't know any better, I suppose. But I made a lot of good friends and I don't think made any enemies.

Right, that's good. Was there plenty of room for promotion in your job?

Not in my job, no, no. You could be a leading hand, but that's about as far as you could go. There weren't many superintendents, weren't many works foremen. There was only one on this division, works foreman.

Right, okay. Do you reckon the railways were over-employed at that time?

Well, (laughs) from what it is now they must have been, because they're running the trains with a lot less workers. Yes, I think they were over-employed.

What was the calibre of the men like? They were good workers?

Oh, I think mainly they were good workers. You had the usual bloke that didn't want to do too much, but yes, it was a hard job for the leading hands and all that to – – –. It's like being in the Army: the corporals, they copped all the brunt of it. Leading hand, you'd do anything bar ....., a leading hand, I reckon. (laughter)

What did you think when they went from steam to diesel?

Well, they made the railways, the diesel, because they could pull extra tonnage. The old steam, you could pull a thousand ton out of Paratoo – *to* Paratoo, but he'd drop his half load there and then come in with half and then pick it up, the rest.

Okay. But it put all the men out of work, didn't it, going from steam to diesel?

Oh yes, yes. Yes, it – well, I don't know whether it put them out, but it reduced their hours and then they started to lay men off, you know. When it came to the end of the show they didn't need so many.

When you think about it, they needed water at all the places between here and Cockburn, Broken Hill.

Oh, in the steam days?

In the steam days, yes.

Oh, yes. I remember we used to look after the dams between here and Cockburn and they used to cart water, say, to Paratoo. That was out – like, Oodlawirra they used to pump it up into the overhead tanks and all that, but if they ran out of water they'd have to cart it out and pump it up. And we had to supply portable pumps to hook onto the tanks, pump it up into the overhead tank and then they were right. But if you didn't have a portable pump, or that broke down, you'd have trains lined up everywhere because they couldn't move. They relied on water.

Yes. And sometimes the quality of the water wasn't very good, either.

Well, then they brought out some additive they had to put to it, but I think most of the water up the Cockburn line, they were all out of the dams so they should have been all right.

All right. Now, the accident which killed Max Russell and Ted Meske in 1965, it was a nasty accident, wasn't it?[2]

Yes. I was up there. I come home on that day and I come past that particular bridge, and there was a real dust storm on. And I didn't hear about the accident until I got back here to Peterborough, that – – –. It actually wasn't – I don't think it was the fault of the driver or anything, it was just one of those things. I think he could have gone down through the creek or there was water in the creek, but he took the option of going onto the bridge, and he must have just been, you know, too close to the edge of the pipe and he's come in the gutter[???].

Okay. Because you were actually involved with Max with that bridge, weren't you, before – – –?

I don't know whether it was two years before, but I got sent up there with a gang – well, there was only Max Russell and myself, Horrie Lively, there was another bloke, I think – we had to underpin some piers in the bridge. And we were there for,

oh, months, I think. And we were based in Mannahill, I think. It was between Yunta and Mannahill. Might have been basesd at Yunta and we used to travel out there in an old Ford that Horrie Lively had and do the work out there and come in. As a matter of fact, we had a concrete mixer, we left it there one weekend and when we come back they'd jacked it up and pinched the wheels. I don't know whether one of the workers was involved in that or not, I didn't know about that. But anyway, that's what happened, and poor old Max, that's where he met his end.

He was killed there. Did you – – –?

He was a good bloke, Max.

A bit of a shock to the community, I suppose, when that happened.

Oh yes, well, it was two people that everyone knew. And Peter Angel, he was in it. And he's since died. And another fellow was in it and he's since died. So there's only the ..... now left, I think, who was driving it.

So when something like that happens it must cast a shadow over everyone.

Oh yes. Well, it vibrated back through – you know, the union[3] took it up that bosses weren't allowed to drive, and all that. Caused a bit of a stir for a while.

So what came out of it? Anything, in the end? Did they – – –?

Oh, I don't think – I think they – – –.

Because it was such a nasty accident, I suppose, they just felt as if they had to do something.

Yes.

So what did the community do to help the wives of the men left behind?

Well, I don't know whether anyone was in strife about that, but I've known of cases where there's people been out of luck, you know, and required assistance, and the railway people have got together and taken up a collection and supplied food for those cases. They all sort of banded together and helped them out.

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[2] [If this part is to be retained, perhaps include a footnote containing brief description of the accident, as the circumstances are not clear from the words spoken.]

[3] which union?

It's obviously very hot and very cold working here. How did everyone cope with it?

(laughs) Well, it was a matter of having to, I suppose. I've been – especially one derailment, up near Cockburn, was on a bridge, and it sort of stuffed up the bridge a bit and they had to build a deviation through the creek, at Bullen[?] Creek, it was. Very hot, hundred degrees. You had nowhere to go, you were in the bed of a creek.

So did they try to work in the cool of the night or early in the morning, rather than – – –?

Well, they start early of a morning, but it just kept going, you know, it had to be done.

Yes. That was the hot, what about the cold?

No, well – – –.

They reckon Peterborough's a very cold place.

The coldest place I reckon is Terowie. Oh no, it's – no, you just took it as it comes. If you're young you're all right, but as you get old it's a bit of a problem.

I remember you telling a story about a bloke by the name Bob Wilson, he was a boilermaker.

Oh, yes.

Could you tell that story for me?

Yes, we were on night shift this night, and of course everyone realises that the cleaners used to do the same and the boilermakers, the fitters. If you had a bit of a slack time you'd get up in the warm engine, nice and warm there, and you'd sit there and talk. Anyway, Bobbie, he got in the firebox and he got up on the brick arch, which is just right at the front of the locomotive and you can get up there. Well, he was a fairly small bloke and a bit nimble. Anyway, he must have went to sleep, and they decided they wanted this engine to go out into traffic. So they brought the lighter-uppers in and they threw in necks of mallee, you know, they used to throw that in, and put swabs and kerosene and they lit it up. And of course the smoke – (laughs) good job he woke up. And he sort of came out through the firebox and he was blowing everyone up. (laughter) He couldn't make any formal complaint because he wasn't supposed to be up there.

Wasn't supposed to be there!

Anyway, he was lucky to get out of it.

Did you do any shift work?

Yes. That time, that was on shift work.

That was shift work, was it? How did you cope with it?

Oh, all right. You know, afternoon shift, you'd go in at four o'clock and off at twelve, and you had next day off, you could get a sleep-in. Midnight shift was a bit – you never knocked off till half past seven the next morning and you'd have some breakfast and then you'd go to sleep and probably get up, and sometimes you'd have a bit of a camp of a night time before you went in again at twelve o'clock. It's like the engine drivers, they used to get used to it, you know. They'd go to work at four o'clock in the morning, five o'clock.

Yes. It was good money.

It's something you get used to.

Good money though, wasn't it?

Oh, yes.

Yes. What type of relationship did you have with your bosses?

Oh, I had a – oh, it was all right, yes. I had a good – – –. It was only one bloke that upset me once. What happened? Oh, someone made a mess on top of – when I was a fitter's mate – made a mess on one of the work benches. He told me to clean it up, I said, 'I'm not cleaning everyone else's mess up,' I said, 'you get someone else to do it.' He said, 'I'll book you,' I said, 'Go ahead.' Anyway, I had to get booked off. I did get sent home once. When I was boxboy – that was when I was blowing the tubes, they used to call them boxboys – and I had to go out to tell a crew that he wasn't to book on until such and such a time. Anyway, I must have got waylaid. I went down the street and got into the fish shop or something, and I didn't make it out to tell him, and (laughter) made a train late or something and I got into trouble over that.

So you said you were called boxboys. Why did they call you boxboys?

I don't know. That was the name of the fellow that cleaned the tubes. Whether the tubes were in the box, the smoke box – – –.

Oh, okay.

So it might have been boxboy. But he was supposed to deliver advices and all that.

Yes, I see.

So it was the name of boxboy.

So when you became a boss did you have any problems with your mates?

No. Oh yes, sometimes. If they were on expenses and they were supposed to be home and they'd be claiming expenses and you sorted them out. 'Oh no, you're a bastard,' and all this, but you had to play it by the rules and that's how it goes. You win some, you lose some. But if you were – I think if you were fair with them the majority of them were fair with you.

Did work on the railways have any pluses?

Any what?

Pluses, or bonuses?

Oh yes, I think you got cheaper travel. They used to have what they call a 'priv' system. You could go to Adelaide for six-and-fourpence return.

And what was it normally?

Oh, it would be two or three pounds or something like that for the average. But we could get so many privileges a month and go to Adelaide for six-and-fourpence.

So just you, or your family, or – – –?

No, it'd be each, I suppose.

Really?

Yes.

Each for the family. What about any negative side of things?

Any what?

Because you worked in the railways, did it sometimes hinder you?

(laughs) Well, what do you call it, about if you wanted something done or –

Yes.

– 'foreignies', or – – –?

Yes.

Yes, oh, well, that went on. Half the town wouldn't know how to live unless they had 'foreignies'.

There was a high turnover of railway workers going through the town. Why did that happen?

Well, jobs were easy to get, I suppose. You could work here and go away and probably come back and apply for a job and still get it.

Because a lot of blokes would come up here and work and then they went somewhere else and worked, didn't they?

Yes, yes. I don't know why, but if they married, well, they sort of settled down, but if you were single they could afford to do it.

There's a lot of work done around the town – for instance, the West Playground and the Slattery Oval and the Golf Club, the Football Club, and if you took the railways away half the stuff wouldn't have happened, would it?

No, they wouldn't exist. No. The railways helped them out a lot, especially with these – you know, the railway carnivals and all that. They used to run them.

And were there any buildings built around the town as a result of the railways? Or the schools or – – –?

No, not – might have been a few fences and things like that. I don't say any buildings, no, I wouldn't know.

So how did it all occur? Like someone just said, 'Oh, we need to help – – –'?

Well, it all depends – I suppose if the bosses were in the game, well, that sort of helped. Turned a blind eye.

They were heavily involved with the football or whatever, there'd be a grant – – –.

Or the Golf Club or whatever.

Or the Golf Club, yes. Have something built, yes. And so the materials that were used, they came from the railways and it didn't matter. (laughter)

It's all taxpayers' money.

Yes. Still made it go around.

Yes.

The lack of coal in 1948 caused some problems, didn't it?

Lack of what?

The coal from Leigh Creek.

Yes, I believe it –

There was a lack of coal.

– yes, they had trouble firing the engines with it, keeping up the steam. It was inferior coal. Wasn't as good as Muswellbrook and all that.

Right. So what did they do to get around that?

Well, I think they went to oil burners.

Which were the Garretts, was it? ....?

Yes, Garretts, and the T-class.

Yes. And that was a lot better – was that better than coal?

Oh, yes.

Yes. And so the railway workers got to like it, I suppose, or the drivers in particular?

Yes, drivers, yes. But they had trouble with that Leigh Creek coal. It wouldn't burn, and dumped the fire all the time and you could never – it wasn't good.

Wasn't good. So where did the oil come from?

Oh, I don't know. (laughter) The oil company, I suppose.

That's fair enough. Unions. Did you have a choice to join a union?

Yes. Had to join the carpenters' union[4], especially in the building side. Engine drivers, they had to join their AFULE[5], I think they call them. The gang had the

[4] Name in full?

AWU[6]. I think some parts of the railway weren't as strong as others, you know. Engine drivers, they were strong, and the guards, they had to join the union.

So what if they refused to join?

I don't know. I never heard of anyone getting the sack through it. (laughs)

Not much you could do about it, I suppose. Just make it hard for them. So how strong were they, the unions?

Oh, the engine drivers were very strong. But the others, I don't know. They were .... strong .... They could never cause a strike or anything. The only ones were the engine drivers and that.

Right. Was there a pecking order in the workforce?

A what?

A pecking order in the workforce?

Pecking?

Yes, as in who was the boss, who was the main boss?

Well, the Superintendent, I suppose.

Yes. And what, you'd work your way down?

Oh, well, there was different categories, you see. There was a loco foreman, loco superintendent, traffic superintendent, and the – we come under the – I don't know what they call him, the fellows on the line, I don't know what they call him.

So you work your way down.

Yes.

Where did the Station Master fit into all this?

The traffic.

Into traffic. He was the boss of everyone?

Station staff and the guards, I think he was the boss of them.

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[5] Name in full?

[6] Australian Workers' Union.

Yes. What about the drivers?

They come under loco foreman.

Okay, so different again. So it must have been a pretty complicated system.

Oh yes, different – the traffic had their part and the loco had their part and the buildings had their part.

Have to stop it here.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE B: TAPE 2 SIDE A

How did you get on with the migrants?

Oh, very good. Yes, there were some good tradesmen amongst them. You know, specially the German. They were good, good tradesmen. The Dutch were good. Yes, we had a mixture – Latvians and Germans, Dutch. A lot of them went in the hostel, then they built that little area over there in Cyanide Street – the 'dogboxes', we used to call them. They used to house a lot of them, married couples. The single blokes used to go down the hostel.

So did you build those hostels and the dogboxes?

Yes. Yes.

So the hostel, that was – they were Nissan huts, weren't they? That was ....?

No, there was – to my knowledge there was only one Nissan hut there. All the rest were –

And that's the one that's left?

– yes.

All right, and the rest were what?

Sort of steel frame things. They were come from Adelaide, I reckon, and they were all in sections, we built them in sections. First of all they were for single men, and then we made some into married quarters. And there was a communal kitchen there that everyone – like they had a contractor and he cooked the meals and supplied the meals, and they deduct so much out of their wages for the meals.

Oh, okay. So how many people lived there?

Oh, I suppose – at the most it would be a hundred, I suppose. That was in its heyday.

So that area, from the Nissan hut down to the Slattery Oval, that was just full of those buildings, was it?

Yes.

So how many buildings were there, roughly?

I reckon two long huts, yes. There might have been more, I can't visualise it now.

Over in Cyanide Street, those little dogboxes –

Yes, the dogboxes.

– how many of them were there?

I suppose there would be ten, a dozen.

I'm led to believe in that vacant block, alongside – virtually opposite the railway round house there, that there was a lot of tents in there in the early days.

Yes, well, I reckon they were put up to – when they built the timber-framed cottages out there. They came up from Adelaide to do those, they were a crew from Adelaide. And I think they had a few tents down there and there was one of them burnt down. There was a bloke that I know, Wally Barlecke, he was in there, he lost everything. Other than that I don't know much about it.

Right. So all those houses that were built – because originally the stone homes right out in the west, they were built in the '20s, I believe.

Yes, 1927.

Right. An then it wasn't till the '50s and '60s that they put those –

'50s, yes.

– they were English pre-fabs, weren't they?

Yes. They call them English pre-fabs, but I don't know where they come from. They called them English pre-fabs but they didn't come from England.

No. They built a lot of them, though.

Oh, yes. Yes. There was eighty or so, more. Might have been more.

So they must have employed a lot of men.

Yes. Yes.

Had nothing to do with the Peterborough gang?

Oh, they might have assisted. But it was a gang from Adelaide that built them. A bloke called Eckerman was the boss of them.

Right. Because they would have had electricians and plumbers and carpenters all over the place.

Yes.

It certainly filled the town, didn't it, because there was –

Oh yes, yes.

– two distinct parts of the town after that.

Yes.

All right, so getting back to the migrants, did they fit in really well?

Yes. Yes, they came in pretty well. There was a smattering of Italians with them, too.

And you learned a lot from them?

Oh, yes. Yes, there were different cultures and different types of food and – yes.

And did they learn a lot off you?

I suppose they did. Swearing and – – –. (laughter)

.... So you got on all right with them. But was there a problem with the language?

Well, I think it would be worse for them than it was for us. We knew what *we* were talking about, but they didn't.

No hope.

No.

So did they bring in new work practices that you could learn from?

Yes. Yes, different methods. And you'd learn a lot of things from them. They had a custom that – I don't know whether it's when the house was built or was nearly built, they always put a palm, a tree on the top of it, which meant that it was – some

sort of custom, I don't know. But they had different ways. But I found them all good tradesmen and they worked in – I liked the Germans, I reckon they were good.

They were all actually fully-qualified tradesmen, weren't they?

Yes, yes.

So they came into Australia, directly into Australia, and then they got jobs up here, obviously.

Well, I know of two carpenters that I worked with. Their first job was at ..... North, in the gang. And the other one, he was in the gang at Olary. And they found out that they were carpenters so they transferred them into the building section. But when they come here, they must have just come as ordinary labourers. But they were top bloody tradesmen.

And the reason they were coming to Australia was – – –?

Well, after the War they sent a bloke over to Europe to get workers to come for the railways, and he was the one that brought them out. I don't know, Black was his name, I think. But anyway, they were brought out on a two year contract, I think, and once they'd done their two years, well, they could seek other employment if they wanted.

So was that – what did they call them? Was it – – –?

Well, assisted immigrants, some of them.

It was ten pounds, wasn't it?

Yes, but that was England, I think. I think Europeans, they were – I don't think they paid anything to come out.

Oh, right. So you said something about the different types of food. Did you experience any of the different types of culture?

Well, food one time I went to one place and, you know, you serve up biscuits and you put cheese on them or gherkins or something like that, they used to put raw meat on them, mince meat.

That would be interesting.

Oh, I don't mind that, I can eat raw sausages, don't really mind.

You can now, but what about back then? (laughter)

Well, it was learning.

And what about your wives? Your wives went with you, I suppose?

Yes.

And did they learn a lot from the – – –?

Oh, I don't know whether they did. I don't think – whether they took on any different ways of cooking, I don't know.

Don't think so? Like, for instance, Myrtle, did she learn anything from the wives?

I don't know, you'd have to ask her, I think.

That's fine. A lot of social activities evolved from the railways, didn't they, such as the railway carnival – – –?

Yes, the railway carnival and the Institute.

It must have been a pretty lively place.

Oh yes, they used to have shows down the old Institute there once a month or something like that. And, you know, they used to have shows out at Peterborough West for the kids, have Father Christmas and all that. And all the immigrants, they sort of fitted into that too.

So did you pay so much out of your wage per fortnight?

In the Institute, they used to deduct so much for the Institute.

And you had so many shows, or you had one show per month, did you, or – – –?

Oh, sometimes they did, yes.

Of course then the .... came into it, with the railway ....

Yes. That was – as I said before, they used to run a train from Cockburn there, leave there early in the morning and then they'd get back the next morning, I think.

It'd be very early they'd leave –

Yes.

– Cockburn to come down, yes.

But I believe that's what happened.

So they would have had a lot of people there.

Yes. It went defunct there – oh, good time after the War, and then it was revived again and they used to have that ocean wave, you know.

I remember that.

And then in the end they barred that, they reckoned it was a liability and they had to shut that down. And anyway, it finished up, it sold out, it was finished.

So sport played an important part in the town too, didn't it? A lot of – – –.

Oh yes, there was football. Railways had a team and town had a team and the saints had a team. Used to play on Sundays. That was more popular, I think. They played Saturdays for a while and then Sunday was the most popular day. And they'd have bike races and all down there, at half-time and quarter-time.

In the football.

Yes.

Was there a 'them' and 'us' mentality with regards to the railway workers and all the other workers in the town?

Fatalities?

Mentality. Was there a 'them' and 'us' mentality, like 'They're the railway workers and we're the town workers'?

Oh, no, I never found that. No, I thought that they mixed pretty well.

Everyone mixed in pretty right, yes.

Yes.

What about the hotels? Did they play a big, important part (laughter) of the workers' lives?

Especially paydays. Six o'clock closing. And everyone went down paydays. Well, nearly everyone, anyway. Used to line up and get your pay at the pay office – they'd have a pay office down at the old station and pay office at loco. Half past four Thursdays they'd all – get your pay medal, which was a silver one like a – oh, it was

a white coloured thing, anyway. Different from your booking-on one, but it was the same number. And you had to put that in to get your pay.

Oh, okay. Did drinking cause a lot of trouble with drunks?

With what?

Did it cause a lot of problems in the workforce, drinking?

Oh, yes. There was – I don't know about a – wasn't that much, but odd occasions you'd have fellows come to work a bit worse for wear, and you had to book them on or book them off and say, 'You'd better get home, you,' you know, 'you look sick.' That's the easiest way out of it, and if they went home it was all right, but if they decided they wanted to stop on, well, you had to sort of say, 'Well, you either go home or you go further.'

So what was it like during the last day, last day at work?

Well, I didn't know how I was going to take it, but – you know, I did miss it. And lucky I could do things – you know, I used to go down, I had a bit of a workshop here and I'd go down and do a bit of work, and I played bowls and played golf, and I sort of got through it all right. But a lot of the blokes, they couldn't hack it, they'd sit down and watch TV or something. I reckon if you turn your mind to something else, well, you're –

Pretty right.

– you're all right.

So were you a little bit sad that you had to retire –

Yes.

– or that you did retire?

Yes.

And what made your mind up that you were going to retire?

Well, I could see the way things were going and it wasn't going to last very much longer, and I knew they'd – well, I went to a seminar, a retirement seminar, and was advised that I could get a service pension at sixty and I'd have the super, so I didn't have to wait till sixty-five. So that sort of swayed me.

Swayed you a bit, yes. When you look back on the railways now, what do you think?

Oh, I wouldn't mind being back there. (laughs)

You wouldn't?

No. If I was young enough.

And why is that?

Well, I suppose you miss it. But you know that you can't do it.

How important was the railways to the town?

Oh, very important, *I* think. It made a bit of money in the town and the shopkeeper got a living, and I suppose – well, industry makes the town, I suppose. You know, if you lose some industry, well, it makes a difference to the town. You lose your schools and you lose your – well, I can't say you lose your doctors; they go anyway.

When you worked in the railways and not only that, before that, money was often tight, wasn't it, it was pretty hard to get hold of money. Did you struggle to keep a family?

Oh, I never struggled because my wife sort of looked after the money and she budgeted, and we never got into strife.

Did you ever contemplate doing additional jobs, like – – –?

Oh, I done a few odd jobs to supplement my money.

Men were often sacked for misdemeanours, weren't they, if they did something wrong –

Yes.

– in that respect. Can you remember any of the things?

Oh, no. (laughs) Not really. No, I've never had to sack anyone or do anything like that.

But have you worked – in the early days did you work with people who have been given the boot because – – –?

Oh yes, because they haven't turned up or absentee from work, and they were told that they weren't required. But you had to do something very wrong to get the sack.

You were telling me before that sometimes there would be stuff gone missing, like materials, would be gone missing from the workshops and strangely appear somewhere.

Well, I remember one occasion that – they used to bring their railway D's[7] up, you know, there was something missing from the workshops and the word got around they're going to go through the houses, so a lot of stuff would appear up at the rubbish dump, you know? Clothes hoists and shovels and picks and – – –. But yes, they heard the railway D's were coming up, everything disappeared.

So did they ever catch any people for doing – – –?

Oh yes, I think there was the odd occasion where they did find some stuff with a broad arrow[8] on it. I don't think they got the sack, really, but they were warned about it.

The standardisation of the railways, that would have been a very interesting time.

Yes. Yes, well, it was for me because a lot of the contractors went broke at the time – or one I can remember was a bloke called Tom Egan – for poor work, and they finished up his contract and the railways took over the completion of the bridges from Mannahill to Paratoo.

Oh, okay.

And of course we landed the job of completing them. And it was interesting work, it was reinforced concrete, they used to – you had to test all the, you know, when you put the concrete in you had to take moulds and they had to go to Islington and be tested to make sure that the concrete was up to strength and all that. And I had a gang working on the bridges, doing the decks and the wingwalls.

You must have learned a lot from it.

Oh, yes.

When they were constructing the railway line, when they put it through the lagoon, that was an interesting story, wasn't it?

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[7] Detectives.

[8] South Australian Railways insignia[?].

Yes, well, (laughs) I don't know, it was all right until the reservoir was filled up, and then the wind came along and it caused a wave action, and of course lapped the formation and sort of ate it away, and it was sort of dragging back into the lagoon. And I don't know, there was a big panic on. We had to lay concrete, that mesh stuff in there, lined with black fabric, lay it against the bank to stop the wave action. But I always maintain it was – well, and the eingineers say it was faulty material that was put into it, and it just – never consolidated it enough and it just washed away. But when they put another roadway alongside of it that fixed the business.

Fixed it up. Because there was no water in there when they put it in there, was there?

No.

No. Then there were floods – floods or heavy rains or something happened.

Yes. But they knew that it fills with water because it's been there for years. It was a lagoon, they used to take water there once for engines. So they knew it was going to fill, and they put equalising pipes in there so that the water would go through and be on the other side. They build railways through water.

So how did they find out it was faulty – was there an accident?

No.

They just checked it one day?

No, we just – this day it filled up and the waves kept washing it and they could see it was going to – I think they deviated around it for a while, didn't they?

I'm not quite certain. They might have. What caused the demarcation in 1970? When they officially opened up the standard gauge –

Oh, right.

– or were going to open up the standard gauge?

Well, I believe that the Minister for Transport – Mr Hill, I think it was – he was going to drive the first diesel into Peterborough, and the AFULE objected to him driving it in there, you know, safety reasons and all that. I couldn't understand it. But anyway, there was invitations issued, they were going to have a grand show in the Town Hall, and anyway the AFULE stopped it and that was it. There was a

plaque to be put on the station building on the grand opening, but it just didn't happen.

Didn't happen, no. Did they – – –?

So they held it down at the Mill Street crossing, I think, down by the Federal Hotel, and a fellow called George Bryce opened it. ..... Hands was the Mayor at the time.

So why did this George Bryce open it up? What was his – – –?

Oh, he was an old ex-railwayman, he was an old – been here for years.

Right. Did religion cause friction amongst the workers and families?

Did it?

Yes.

Oh, I don't think anyone worried that much.

There wasn't a .... –

No, no.

– against the Protestants or anything like that?

I think most railway people thought the AFULE was wrong in doing what they did, that they should have let them, you know, come in with the diesel, you know, 'What's the hassle?'

Yes. But amongst the – getting back to a general thing now – the religion amongst the workers, you know, say you're Catholic, for instances, was there a 'them' and 'us' mentality with religion?

Oh, I would say back in 1930 there was a – whatever religion was, I think it – who was ever in charge of the hiring and firing I think you had the right ally you were in the game.

Right, so – – –.

(laughs) It all depends who was the strongest.

So if you had an interview if you weren't his denomination bad luck!

So you had to hide your thoughts, really.

Just one last question: did you think the railways had a lot of influence on the way the town operated?

Yes, very much so.

Yes?

Yes. Yes, I think that – well, I think if the railways were going all right the town was going all right, because you could see once they started – once they brought in the diesels and we amalgamated, it was a different show altogether.

Did you notice any difference when they went from South Australian Railways to Commonwealth Railways?

Yes.

In what way?

Well, they worked different to us. When I went up there relieving, in the South Australian Railways I could jump in the vehicle, load it up with nails, bolts or whatever and take a bloke out to do a job. When I went up there I wasn't allowed to do it, because they had to have a driver to take the fellow out, show him the job, bring him back, pick up his tools and drive him out. I caused a strike up there once because I was taking fellows out to a job.

That was at Port Augusta, you're talking about?

Yes.

Yes?

Different way of working. They had a driver for every bloke that was around the place. They had different rules.

So once again we're getting back to they're over-employed – specific jobs for specific people.

Yes. They had a different method of running the railways.

It was costing a lot of money too, wasn't it?

Yes.

Do you reckon that might have been the demise in the end, too many – – –?

I don't know about the Commonwealth Railways, but that's the way they worked. But in the end they came around our way a little bit, I think. But they were very

strong union-wise that way, you weren't allowed to carry out a box or nails or a box of screws, you had to have a driver to do that. (laughs)

Okay. So you learnt a bit and they learnt a bit as you went along.

Yes.

So you were pretty glad to get out of it and come back to – – –?

Oh, well, I had a – well, the bosses, they said, 'If you do it you're on your own. Don't look for us.'

Okay. Well, that's good, Sid. Thanks very much for your time.

Right.

All right.

END OF INTERVIEW.