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OH 692/176

Full transcript of an interview with

GRAHAM WILLIAMS

on 11 July 2002

by Rob Linn

Recording available on CD

OH 692/176 **GRAHAM WILLIAMS**

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OH 692/176 TAPE 1 - SIDE A

NATIONAL WINE CENTRE, WOLF BLASS FOUNDATION ORAL HISTORY PROJECT.
Interview with Graham Williams on 11th July, 2002.
Interviewer: Rob Linn.

Graham, just with some personal background first. Where and when were you born?

GW: I was born on 11th October, 1933, at Port Pirie, South Australia.

Who were your parents, Graham?

GW: My parents were Bill and Jean Williams. My father was born at Roseworthy College. He was the son of John Llewellyn Williams, who was a blacksmith and mechanical instructor at Roseworthy from, I think, 1897 to 1918. His elder brother, John Llewellyn—or Jock Williams—was a student. He was born there as well—was a student and then was a cadet. He was instrumental in starting up the oenology course with Alan Hickinbotham—the formal oenology course in 1936. And then he left in 1946 to plant the Modbury vineyards for S Wynn & Co. He unfortunately died of peritonitis at the age sixty, so it was a bit sad.

I think he also replanted out quite a bit of the Coonawarra Estate.

GW: Yes, did a lot of work at Coonawarra. He did some work for the government when he was still at the College, and then he did some plantings for Wynns when he was working for them. I remember he said that he planted up one patch and they hand-augered holes right through the limestone in the vineyard and put a small charge of dynamite in each hole to fracture the limestone. They didn't have the proper equipment in those days. He said that was a fairly big job. (*Laughs)*

Yes. It would have been pretty effective too.

GW: Yes. After I did my Leaving I started at Berri in '51.

Just going back a bit, Graham. What was your father's occupation?

GW: He was National Bank. He started off in the 1920's, and then we moved to Pirie where I was born, then Kadina, and across to Angaston, and then to Berri. And he was manager at Angaston and also Berri. And then he came to Adelaide and went on the relieving staff after he had some illness.

So do you remember much about Angaston yourself?

GW: Yes. We were there for six years, so yes.

So that would have been in—what?—your primary years pretty much?

GW: Yes. I was primary school then, and also high school. Angaston was my first association with the wine industry because Pirie and Kadina, one was industrial and the other was farming, I guess were mainly beer drinking.

At Angaston the first winery I went to was Salters, and the chap in charge there was a big jolly man called Fred Ludlow. I remember Rudi Kronberger—they were friends of my parents—and also Max Hackett from Tarac, and so it went on.

And then we went to Berri in '49 and I finished my high school there. Then this job came up at the winery and my father rang my Uncle Jock and said, 'Well, what's the future of the wine industry?'. And he said, 'Oh looks pretty good. Graham should have a go'. So I did the course. So that was three vintages at Berri—'51, '52, '53—and then Roseworthy. The '54 vintage I did with Alec Kelly at Loxton.

So you were studying during your time at Berri, were you? Or did you do vintages with them first? Did you work all the time?

GW: You had a choice with the oenology course that if you did two years at a winery, and you had the scholastic qualifications, you could just go to

Roseworthy and do two years oenology. The other way was that you could do two years agriculture and then do two years oenology. So I chose to do it that way, and it was a bit of a help with finance and all that rigmarole.

How did you find the Berri Winery when you first went there?

GW: Well, it was a big place. *(Laughs)* It was spread all over the place. I started off—they had a little crusher to test the Baume of the grapes. The trucks would pull up and you'd get the sample. They'd go on to the weighbridge and then you'd record it and that would be put against the grower's load.
So then I progressed into the laboratory. Doug Collett was in charge then. He'd arrived there in mid 1950. I did learn to do what I had to do in the laboratory. He then used to get me to go out in the cellar and do different things. I had a week with Les Kassebaum at Murray Cask Company in Berri. And I did waxing inside 500 gallon vats and all those jobs.
Of course the big learning curve was in the laboratory where we had to do all these various analyses. That was interesting.

Had you studied chemistry at school, Graham?

GW: I did chemistry and physics, yes. But the odd thing there was—I was only thinking yesterday—that chemistry was metric and when I got into the winery it was ounces and gallons and all that stuff. So you had to do all your conversions and work it all out.

Incredible.

GW: But it was very interesting. And it was a big place in those days. There was the winemaking practice, and all these concrete tanks with the waxing. I can remember the calcium carbide generators -

For lighting?

GW: - for lighting. Oh, for waxing. And, you know, the acetylene odour would go right through the place. And of course, in those days, we had the

effluent ponds out the back, so there was this pervading odour that was in the district forever.

Was it open fermenters?

GW: Yes. They had three cellars, and they were all open top tanks. And then there were tanks that we used to use for fermenting. They were cylindrical—enclosed. In those times the table wine production was fairly minimal. We had very little refrigeration. The bulk of it I guess was fortified wine, and also brandy. And of course you had to make the spirit to make your fortified wine. But I was talking to Graham Buller—early this year I went up to Berri to have a look at the old minutes of the winery—and we were having lunch and I said to him, 'I suppose these days it's 90% table wine and 10% fortified'. And he said, 'Yes'. And I said, 'Well, when I started it was 90% fortified and 10% table'. So in fifty years that's the big turnaround. And that's had a real impact on the whole industry. Then of course later on, in the late 70's, they had the big increase in duty on brandy spirit, and that really put a stop to that.

So in your early days there, Graham, those first vintages, what varieties of grapes would growers have been bringing in? Doradillos?

GW: We had quite a big mix really. There was Sultanas, Pedro Ximinez, Palomino, Gordo, Malaga, White Hermitage (or Trebbiano), Doradillo, Grenache, Mataro and Shiraz.

So they were really the plantings from the soldier settlement days by the sounds of the varieties. They go back a fair way.

GW: Well, when you look at the plantings prior to the First World War, the bulk of it was Doradillos then. But then when the Co-op was formally formed, which was in 1922 for the 1923 vintage, there must have been quite a bit of table wine varieties then. And that kept going. Then as time went by we encouraged people to plant Cabernet and Rhine Riesling and Malbec and whatever.

Graham, before I talk to you about Roseworthy, I'd like to hear a little bit about some of the people who worked at the Berri Co-op when you first went there. Could you describe the personalities as you saw them?

GW: Well, I guess my first boss was Doug Collett. He was a character. He was very keen about what he was doing, and he kept me on the straight and narrow I suppose. But the other thing, he was keen to show me as many facets of the place as he could.
Who else? There was also Alec Kelly. When I was there he was Assistant Manager. They'd just had a management change from a chap called Warrington Garnett who was replaced by Lyle Mann as General Manager. And Alec Kelly was Assistant Manager. And he had a very good working knowledge of the industry, being the son of JG Kelly. Do you know much about him?

No, I don't. Not Alec.

GW: So he was the eldest son, and his younger brother, Charlie—do you know Charlie?

I know that he went over to Western Australia and worked at Houghtons over there.

GW: Yes, that's right. Well, he was a graduate with Noel Burge—Charlie. Alec came to Berri in '38 after his father had sold up Lyndale to Gramps at Lyndoch. So he was there, say, '38 and then he went off to war and came back. He and the head distiller called Ray Harrip had just installed the new Blair continuous still, Blair being from Scotland. So that was operating in '51 vintage. And I remember Alec giving me a tour through there and explaining all this stuff.
Then there was a chap Bonnie Maitland, who was cellar foreman. He was a tower of strength. Had been there for a long time. And there was another chap who was a cost accountant—Howard Penrhyn. He was a great chap to work with. There was another chap who worked in the office in the laboratory block, a chap called Roy Wilden. He used to keep all the

records, and we used to have all the tanks varieties and the analyses. So he and Howard Penrhyn were in one office and there was Alec Kelly in the other office, and Doug Collett in the laboratory.
So then in '52 I was called up in the second National Service intake. Just before I went Brian Barry was appointed as Assistant Winemaker.

Yes, instead of Doug. (Rob, not sure about this comment, no sense!)

GW: Well, Brian joined the company from Hamilton's.
When I came back from Roseworthy I think I started –(Rob, not sure about this comment. Relates to grape sampling below perhaps))

In '52, did you go away anywhere at all with your National Service?

GW: Just Woodside.

So you did the basic training, in other words.

GW: Just three months, yes. I was opting to go into the RAAF but Doug said, 'No, you can't be away for six months. You're going in the Army'. *(Laughter)* So that was that.
And then when I came back from there Doug got me started on this block selection for checking on ripening of grapes. So we had this, you know, Upper Murray as it was called then, or Riverland today, and I've always called it a Jacob's coat of soils because you had that many soils from Winkie sand to Nookamka clay, and you had all sorts of aspects, slopes and mixtures of grapes and citrus and apricots and whatever. So I pegged out all these different areas for varieties, and then we used that as a grid. Because we crushed large quantities we eventually got around to saying, well, let's take three or four hundred tons of a variety from this mix of soils, and we'd be pretty well spot on then.

This was after Roseworthy, Graham, was it?

GW: No. This was before I went to Roseworthy.

So you were doing trials. That type of trial would have been few and far between I would reckon in its day.

GW: Well, I don't know. I can't recollect what other people were doing.

So what was Doug looking for? Just a much higher quality crush, was he?

GW: We were looking for—well, it was sugar and pH—acidity. And of course one of the big problems with the irrigated vineyards in those days was that they tended to over-water because it was essentially all furrow irrigation. And of course we had Pedro—soft skin Pedro Ximinez. Twenty-two tons to the acre some people used to crop, and they were just big bags of water. And of course, taken in today's context, it was pretty hopeless.

You couldn't sell them today I guess.

GW: No, that's right.
So we wanted the maximum Baume but with the right pH and titratable balance. You could get a fortified sweet white Gordo; you could have a pH of 4.1. You know, just far too high.

So you were looking for the right grapes to make fortifieds primarily?

GW: Yes, and also table wine. We were expanding the table wine.

And I think a lot of Berri sales in those years were moving into bulk table wine sales, which were going to the Barossa of all places.

GW: Well, they were going all over. Well, that's another thing I suppose. Do you want me to keep going with Berri?

Please, Graham.

GW: I finished Roseworthy and—well, I'd done the vintage at Loxton. Doug had said that, well, we won't have a job for you after you've finished Roseworthy. So after the '54 vintage at Loxton, Alec Kelly said, 'Well, what about coming back here when you've finished? Would you be interested?' I said, 'Yes'. Because, you know, I'd lived in the Riverland for a number of years.

Were your parents still at Berri at this stage?

GW: Yes. They moved to Adelaide in '55.
So I then went to Loxton from '55 to '59, and then Doug Collett rang and said, 'Hey, we've got a job'. So I decided to go back to Berri.
When I got back there, that was after the '59 vintage, they decided to put in a table wine cellar at the west end of the property, called number four cellar, and that consisted of a batch of two groups of tanks to make red wine and two Willmes presses to use for both white and red. That was the start of the table wine production.

I'm just trying to think. Brian was still there then, wasn't he?

GW: Oh, yes. He was there until '76 .
So that started off. The other interesting thing was that at that stage they'd just produced high density black polythene piping. So the main cellar and I guess most of the distribution lines, were three inch OD copper piping. So we decided to pull out some of that and put in polythene. And Ian McKenzie remembered it. He said, when we were talking about it a couple of months ago, 'The next thing we knew is that we had hydrogen sulphide everywhere'. And you could smell it. *(Laughter)* Course, you know, the old copper's a good reducer. So we were then faced with getting the wines cleaned up pretty quick.
And after the '60 vintage Doug went to France for six months. He managed to win a scholarship to go over there to study. So when he came back he said that he had this dream for using Gordo, for making a Moselle style. So he managed to con the Board into letting them—well, it's a SAM self desludging centrifuge, and we used to call it the Big Sam because it was the biggest one Bell Bryant had brought out I think.
Any rate, we put that in, and that worked. We then started making the Gordo Moselle. So what we did there was to ferment down to a few grams of residual sugar and then we'd just centrifuge it off, and filter it, and away she goes.

So then of course that was a great boon for our red production as well. We could centrifuge it, and in those days we used to pad filter it. And we also had just put in the Thompson & Carroll auto jet filter, which was only a baby of fifty square feet. Not a very big filter at all. That was the start with the earth filtration and, of course, we followed on with the normal pad filtration. So that really changed the thinking. We had another piece of equipment.

So then we soldiered on and we built a lot of underground tanks using Hume pipes, which were very easy. You just put a floor in it and a roof on it.

The other thing that we did in those days was that we used a layer of paraffin oil on the top of the wine to stop mycoderma and all that happening. We then built a lot of—oh, we built them all over the place. We put in these underground tanks with the Hume pipes. That was that. Then we built a 10,000 gallon cylindrical tank. And we built a number in the main cellar. And then we started a new area west of the main building. The first one they built out there was poured above ground, and then they excavated the soil and sunk this tank down, but it was a hell of a job, so we gave that away.

So we then built a series of above ground tanks. And then we excavated a huge hole and put in another batch of underground tanks there. So that really gave us a good working area for all these different wines.

So after that, it must have been '62 or 3, we decided to put in four more air-bags, which were built by Gray & Donaldson. It was Whitehill, then Gradon Whitehill—*(sounds like, grade on)* Whitehill—Graham Donaldson. So Gray & Donaldson was run by a chap called Toby Crafter, who gradually took over as it progressed from—well, there was Arthur Hoare was Whitehill I think. I think he carried on to be Gradon Whitehill. I don't know how that all came out.

So then we had six air-bag presses, so that gave us a bit of extra capacity. That took us up until Doug left. They had a management trio of the Chairman, Joe Brown, and *(sounds like, Sep)* Leaver was secretary, so he

was commercial manager and Doug was Technical Manager. So eventually they made a decision to appoint "Cec" Lever as General Manager and that triggered Doug's resignation.
On the same day, within minutes as it turned out, Ian McKenzie had been offered a job by Mario Lubiano at Moorook. So they both resigned within minutes of each other on the same day. *(Laughs)* So Doug disappeared, and Ian went off to Lubiano, so Brian and I had to do the '67 vintage by ourselves, which was a big job.

So what was the crush in those days?

GW: I'd have to look it up. (22393 tonnes)

It was in the many thousands of tonnes, isn't it?

GW: Oh, yes.

So in terms of Australian production it's the biggest probably of the time.

GW: Yes, we were the biggest.
Fortunately, Ian came back in July. Brian had kept pestering him, and we'd been looking at all sorts of various people and saying who can we get? So he came back and that fixed that up.
Our tonnage was going up, and our quality was improving, particularly of table wines, and we just had to do something.

That fruity Gordo Moselle must have been a bit of a cash cow for a while.

GW: Oh, yes. That was a bit of a start, yes.

Had Berri been bottling a lot of its own product prior to that?

GW: No.

That would be one of the first then, would it?

GW: Yes. The old labels were Mine Host and Karooma. And then we really didn't do much until—we put in a small bottling line in the late 60's

but then we felt that we had to do something more, and that was being built when I left. So that would have been operating '74. That's when they really got things going a bit.
It was very small when "Cec" Lever retired and Jack Hill was appointed General Manager. Have you ever heard of him?

No.

TAPE 1 - SIDE B

So we were talking about Jack Hill I think, Graham.

GW: Jack Hill, yes. His father was shed manager at the Barmera Cooperative packing shed, and Jack was a student at Glossop High. He went to Roseworthy and did the agricultural course and then majored in the fourth year in dairying. So he went off to the dairy industry. That was way back in the 50's. And he did a big job with Bega, and also with Norco. He had a wealth of commercial knowledge. He had developed methods to promote products and whatever. So he came up with the idea of the five litre cask. I only caught up with him recently, but he pointed out that they launched that in this particular year, and then he said, 'We had orders for twenty-seven truckloads'. *(Laughs)*

Really?

GW: Yes. For the Christmas order, you see. He said, 'We put everything on and worked around the clock, filling and packaging and all that stuff'. But he said that when he got there the bottle products were not very big at all. And he said, 'If we don't do something we're going to be left behind because we'll only be bulk suppliers to the trade all the time. We may be cutting off our nose to spite our face but we have to have a go'. And of course that took off and away they went.

So what era is this, roughly? 1970?

GW: No, no. This would have been late 70's. He joined there in '77, so it would have been '78 or '79 I suppose.

Yes, that's right. Angoves had a cask out in the late 60's/early 70's, if I remember. They were one of the first.

GW: Yes, well, reputedly they're the first I think—Angoves.

Yes, that's the start of the cask.

GW: Yes.

Just to backtrack a bit, Graham. Your time at Roseworthy, how did you find that?

GW: Oh, that was good fun really. Well, we had our lecturers. There was Rex Kuchel. He taught winemaking. Sam Twartz, he was the chemistry man. Graham Chappell was the micro man. Milton Spurling—Spike Spurling—was the viticulturist.

How did you find Rex as a teacher?

GW: I didn't have any trouble with him.

Was he enthusiastic about table wines, or not so much?

GW: Well, I don't know. I think he was enthusiastic about everything, yes.

So it was a pretty good course to be a part of?

GW: Yes. There was John Vickery, Harry Tulloch, Richard—we used to call him Dick Morris—there was another Dick Morris in the industry—and Harry Davoren.

Harry Davoren. Is that John's father?

GW: No. That's his nephew. Harry's father was Harry, who managed Penfolds Griffith.

And then in the senior year there was Bill Chambers, Jim Jenkins and Karl Seppelt. So there were the five of us there. And in the second year Bailey Carrodus came over from New Zealand. He'd just done his Masters over there. He came and spent a year, and they let him come in for one year to get his degree.
But then we had the dairy students Jack Hill from Barmera, Robin Steed from Berri and Bill Sands from South Africa.

I know Robin.

GW: Do you?

Yes, very well.

GW: Bill Sands is living in Australia. I've just found out. But that was a good fun time. We were ensconced in these three—they had three huts about five or six rooms, and you double bunked to a room. It was pretty basic accommodation but, you know, we used to get three feeds a day and go about our business.
Well, it was interesting, Jack Hill's first job was at Meningie, and it was a grand uncle of mine called Finlayson who had the business. That was his first job.

Really?

GW: Yes.

So you met Jack Hill again in latter years at Berri, did you?

GW: No, no. I'd gone of course. No, I've only seen him twice I think in the last twenty years I suppose.

What things did Roseworthy equip you with? You'd already had time in the wine -

GW: Well, you did the course. You had tastings—weekly tastings. George Fairbrother used to come up occasionally. What else did I see the other day? We had a full day's lecture from Tom Conway, the Senior Inspector of

Excise. And then of course we had trips. We did trips to various wineries in the State. We did a fortnight's trip around the industry, which was very interesting. And we went to Victoria, down to Geelong, and up through Tabilk, and Wangaratta, and then down the river. That was good. You met all these—in those days they were senior members of the wine industry. We used to go to Coopers Brewery where I fell in love with Coopers sparkling ale. *(Laughter)* They even named a drink after me, so there you go.

Did they?

GW: Yes. It's called an Orgy Williams Special. And it's in a large brandy glass full of iceblocks, and you fill it up with sparkling ale. *(Laughter)* And also went to West End. That was a good day there with Milton Cousins. I don't know if he's still alive.

No, I don't know.

GW: I found a record of him. He was working for Tarac at Nuriootpa and he came up to Berri when they started in 1938. I only found that out recently. He was a character.

So, Graham, you got a breadth of experience at Roseworthy that you wouldn't otherwise have got then.

GW: Yes. You saw all these different people. And then of course at Berri one of the things that Doug did was—in those days we were trying to sell bulk table wine. After vintage, it was always an after vintage trip, we'd go to the Barossa, to Clare and also go to Griffith. We never went to the Hunter, or perhaps down into Victoria, because there wasn't much of a market there for our big volumes. We used to go to Corowa sometimes to see Ron Prince of Lindemans. They used to buy a lot of fortified wine—sherry, dry sherry and what not.
So that used to go on every year. And that was a great thing. And I continued that—well, after I left Berri of course with Mauri Brothers and Thomson Ltd I was travelling all over the place. And there was a chance to

go to some areas that I hadn't been to for years and years and years. And even when I was at Karadoc we'd take away the winemakers and go and do the visits. That way you kept up with—I used to see quite a lot of the McWilliams brothers, the three of them. And we'd go up to Clare to see Tim Knappstein and Mick, and Jim Barry, and all that stuff.
I still remember—this is before Larry Sobels died—we'd go to Quelltaler and have a look around there. And you remember Granfiesta?

Yes.

GW: Larry used to keep some bottled for two or three years, and we'd always have one of those, and it had gone into a reduced condition. It was totally different from the normal Granfiesta. But it was interesting drink. Of course, it's not made any more today.

No, it's not.

GW: And I guess one of the things that I can always remember when starting off in the 50's, Australia made a huge range of different wines. I mean all over the country, but we I guess copied Europe and Spain and all that. And now, of course, a lot of those are gone. They're not produced as such any more.

You wouldn't see too many show(?) fino sherries, would you?

GW: No. But thank God, Seppelts are still making them.

Yes. There's one or two that still are, aren't there?

GW: Yes.

So Graham, that short time that you spent at Loxton, was there anything significant about that before we come back to Berri again?

GW: Oh, no. I guess it was only a small—we were only crushing a few thousand tons. It was a learning curve I suppose. That was again concrete tanks, but also Alec Kelly had put in vitrenite tanks.

What's vitrenite?

GW: Vitrenite is an epoxy lining, which is baked on to mild steel. But they weren't a success because the baking process was apparently not up to scratch, and we had rust and all those associated problems.
The other thing was that you had these tanks that were outside, and we used to have devil of a trouble with mycoderma growing on the top and it was a real problem.
One thing I noticed on your list—environment. I can talk about both Berri and Loxton. All the effluent used to run into the Berri evaporation basin and it wouldn't be until the—I can't recollect what flow of the Murray, but each year when you'd had the October flush come down the river they'd empty out the irrigation basin. Loxton, all our effluent went straight into the river, which was three kilometres upstream from the township. *(Laughs)*

So it's another era altogether, isn't it?

GW: Yes. I know when I went to California, I worked for a winery there for three months, and they used to run their hot still effluent out to an adjacent vineyard. That worked quite well. Tom Angove introduced that at Renmark ages ago.
Then, of course, before I left Berri—I think it was going to cost $30,000 to put a pipeline out to run the effluent out to land, and they didn't go ahead with that. But of course they have one today—big wood lot. And that happened also when Lindemans built Karadoc, they had to establish a big wood lot.

Graham, just tell me a little bit about California. When did that come?

GW: That was 1964.

And did Berri send you over there?

GW: Yes. We were looking at—well, I guess handling larger quantities. Also looking at increasing our distillation capacity. I worked a vintage at

East Side winery, Lodi. They were a co-operative. And they probably crushed about the same tonnage as Berri.
But that was interesting. I had two months working so I earned some money. And then I had a Greyhound $99 for ninety-nine days. And some days I used to trip around the place. They were making table wines and fortified, and of course brandy. I do remember one thing, particularly with the brandy. That was a totally different procedure to us. While I was there they were building a new brandy bond store, and that was built using the Italian slab principle where you pour slabs on the ground and then you erect them. You know, you've seen them put up the walls with supports.

Yes.

GW: While I was there they threw up this huge bond store. And they had barrels everywhere. So they brought this old cooper in with his big bag of reeds and what not. He redid all these barrels and they just filled the whole building up with brandy in barrels and they shut the door for two years. They said, 'If we have a leak, bad luck'. And that was that. So it was a bit different to what we did here.
They were trialling different grape varieties, and I guess the Livermore Valley—that was interesting. Then I went up to the Napa. They had some quite interesting wines there. And of course later on you had people like Robert Mondavi who really progressed. That was an interesting three months. And I had the last month touring around the industry, and that was a bit mind-boggling. One place I went to they had two weighbridges, one for in and one for out. *(Laughs)* They were busy. You know, a thousand or two thousand tons a day, back in those days. It was a big industry then.

Were they hospitable to you?

GW: Yes. They were all very friendly. Yes, it was good. It doesn't matter where you go in the wine industry, everyone's the same. We're a breed alone really.

Coming back to Berri after Doug Collett left, does Brian take over Doug's place in effect?

GW: I was just looking through the Minutes the other day. I'll have to clarify it with Brian. After Doug left Brian was appointed winemaker, so it meant he was officially as far as the organisation—he'd been assistant winemaker. And I'd been the chemist. So I became assistant winemaker. And Ian McKenzie was there, and I've marked him in as a junior winemaker but the three of us will probably argue about that. *(Laughs)*

You worked as a team though.

GW: Oh, yes. So when all that settled down we then had to—we'd seen the result of cleaning up the wines earlier. The next step we got into was that we had to do something about capacity. So then we decided to put in a Mac press. Prior to that we'd put in three drainers, and F. Miller Co. built the three drainers. And then we used to drain that and then we'd pump that to the six presses. So then we said that this was not good enough, so we thought we'd put in a Mac press itself. We managed to sell off the air-bag presses and put in the Mac press.
And then the next step was—Brian was keen to do something about trying fermentation with filtered juice. We then got Pinnacle Engineering Company to put in a 150 square foot earth filter. So we did that. We were cold fermenting in those days. We had been cold fermenting but we continued with that, and our quality really improved. And of course we then said that, well, we've just got to have more capacity. So for the next season we put in a 450 square foot earth filter and that really did the trick. You know, we had 'boggins' of capacity.

So you were working with filtered juice from that time on, were you?

GW: Yes. All the whites we tried to filter as much as we could. So that was a very big improvement. And we'd convert as much material as we could through that cellar into—well, we were doing the dry reds. But the

whites, we produced as much as we could handle in whites through there, and the material that we said wasn't perhaps up to what we'd like, we'd convert that into dry sherry. But it meant that we then had a much cleaner dry sherry. So that was very good.
And then we decided to put in—we'd gone into stainless steel. We built two tanks in '68—50,000 gallons. And then we built another ten for the '69 vintage. So then in '71 we put in another reds crusher, and in '72 I think it was (we're still arguing about this) we decided to pump fifty tons of red grapes into a stainless steel tank—the 50,000 gallon tanks you see. So we'd take the juice out and cool it and put it back again. With our other two red blocks, we couldn't leave it there long enough. So we could let this thing ferment and produce four or five percent of alcohol. So that's how we made the '73 Jimmy Watson.

You had it in stainless? For quite a time?

GW: Well, it did its fermentation in stainless. And then of course Brian had bought—Mick Auld had said he had these well cured German oak hogsheads, so we bought a hundred of those and we used that for the Jimmy Watson. And also we fermented some Trebbiano in it. Why I mention that is that it was wood fermented, and then we actually put a quality cork in it, plus a Stelvin.

Did you?

GW: And in '82 I was at Karadoc, but I used to come down to judge at the Riverland Wine Show-

So what date was the Trebbiano?

GW: That was '72.
And this bottle of wine came along in a brown paper bag, and I said, 'That's a '72 Berri Trebbiano', and it was. It hadn't altered.

Really?

GW: And I said, 'Where's the cork?' And the cork was completely saturated.

As though it was shot, in other words.

GW: Yes, it would have been shot without the Stelvin. And of course in the last two or three years the Stelvin has been a bit of a conundrum for the industry, but thankfully they're going to go ahead and see what happens. I don't know what's going to happen with the reds and the aged whites, but that's another thing for the industry, isn't it?

I remember Peter Wall was using the Stelvin in the late 60's on the Pewsey Vale Riesling.

GW: Yes.

And that's held up now. I mean it's just terrific.
So you were pretty pleased with the outcome then?

GW: I've often said to Brian, 'Remember that '72 Trebbiano. That lasted ten years, and that was only a river wine'. *(Laughs)*

Were you all surprised about the success of the table wines at this point or had you been anticipating it?

GW: Well, we just kept on trying to improve and do the best we could. We had heaps of people that were just wanting to buy our product. We'd really improved it.

So had the bulk wine improved as well as the table wine?

GW: Bulk table wine?

Yes.

GW: The whole lot, yes. We were just making very good quality wine. And of course we were picking at the right Baume. We were using heaps of tartaric to adjust the acidity. So we did everything right. The big thing was, particularly with the whites, the clean fermentation. And of course that's gone on from here. Many people have, you know, centrifuged. And then of course I went back to Karadoc for the 25th anniversary and they'd

put in a flotation system that came out of the mining industry to get rid of the flock so they had a clear liquid. So that was a big improvement for general winemaking, whether it was river or anywhere—the technique.

Did that mean higher returns to Berri at the time?

GW: Yes. We were getting quicker returns because we would sell off the vintage wine pretty soon after we had it all stabilised. It was gone and there'd be income coming in. Whereas with your fortifieds, your return wouldn't be as quick. And brandy, that had to be minimum of two years, so you didn't get any money for that. So it was a whole new ball game.

Are there other factors that were formative in your experience at Berri before you left, Graham, at this time? Was there more work in the vineyard, for instance?

GW: Well, that had changed. People had started to put in sprinklers. They didn't really get into drippers until the late 70's. But there were quite a few people that had realised that. And of course we'd been encouraging the growers to minimise their water, or make it so we could get a better grade of fruit.

OH 692/176 TAPE 2 - SIDE A

NATIONAL WINE CENTRE ORAL HISTORY PROJECT.
Interview with Graham Williams on 11th July, 2002.
Interviewer: Rob Linn.

On the other side of the industry, Graham, in the administrative side, was there a fair bit of pushing and pulling on the Boards of co-ops at this time?

GW: Well, they had a responsibility to their shareholders, and I think they liked to keep their section of the world under control. Loxton hadn't started but Alec Kelly was apparently working with Bill Lucas of Lucas & Parker in designing the Loxton Cooperative Winery and Distillery in '49. And of course, at that time, you had Fred Cox who was Chairman of Berri, who was Chairman of the inaugural Loxton committee, plus Joe Brown who became a chairman, and also a Mr F G H Garrett. I can't remember what his first name was. And there was I think two people from the Renmark Growers Distillery. Noel Burge said he thought that perhaps Berri could see Loxton was going to be a real competitor, so they disappeared from the Board. But that's guessing I suppose.
Then the next thing that happened, Alec Kelly went to California in '51 in place of Noel Burge who'd resigned to go back to his father's winery at Lyndoch. And Noel said, 'If I went to California I would have to stay five years. I had to go back to help my father'.
Alec went over in '51, and then of course at the end of '52 he was appointed manager at Loxton. So that would have been pretty unpopular. *(Laughs)*
I can remember we used to sell wine to the Grape Growers Cooperative at Nuriootpa. That was when I was still at Berri before I went to Roseworthy—I met Ian Hickinbotham, and he was manager there.

At Kaiser Stuhl?

GW: That was Grapegrowers then. But I think they tried to liaise together but they, as I said, they wanted to be in control of their patch. So I guess the other thing was, to me, they were a little bit insular. I mean instead of really getting together—nothing really happened until Cooperative Wines was formed. And of course they all had their different markets. There was just a gradual change I think.

But we just kept ploughing on at Berri, and we were increasing tonnages to table wine, and we were getting the results. But as I said with Jack Hill, he could see the writing on the wall. You just couldn't go on like this forever. Because when they increased the duty on the brandy, he said instead of us having two years supply of brandy, all of a sudden—Bang, like that—we had three years supply. So we said that we'll just cut off a years supply, so that meant so many thousands of tons of grapes. Just like that, you know, which was a bit unfair by the government. They made a few hiccups like that. They did a duty increase a couple of times on brandy, and of course it's now applied it to the wine as well. So that was a big hurdle for the industry to get over I think.

How did those crises hit the Riverland? Did that mean that there were many growers who just couldn't sell their grapes?

GW: I don't know what happened after '73 when I left, but I do know that they had a very small tonnage in '74, and then it came back again. If you look at the tonnages that gives you an idea of what was happening.

Graham, why did you move on in '73?

GW: I'd asked a number of times for an assistant. At that stage Brian and Ian were looking after the table wines. I was making all the fortified wines, plus looking after the distillation, the Brandy bond Store and the plant. I had asked two or three times for an assistant and nothing was forthcoming. And then we'd been doing a lot of dealing with Pinnacle Engineering Company, which was an engineering division of Mauri Bros and Thomson Ltd, and the manager, Val Solly there—well, we'd been dealing

with them since we put in the first stainless steel still. That was in '66. We bought two continuous stills from them. Another one in '71. We bought quite a few pad filters. Then the earth filter, plus quite a few centrifugal stainless steel pumps. And he said, 'Well, why don't you come and join us. We're looking for someone like you'. So I asked again and "Cec" Lever knocked me back. I said, 'Alright. OK', so I went and bought a house in Berri and agreed with Pinnacle to join them. Then on my last day, I was asked by "Cec", 'If I give you an assistant will you stay?' I said, 'Well, I can't. I've made all these arrangements'. So that was that. *(Laughs)* So that was interesting.

I had four years with Mauri Brothers and Thomson Ltd as Company Oenologist and that was the other side of the world. Instead of some joker trying to sell you something, you were trying to sell a winemaker something. That was quite different. They were into all sorts of foods, and dairying, and brewing, etc, etc. And then we had the '77 crash, and the wine industry stopped momentarily.

The '77 crash that you're referring to, what do you mean?

GW: That's the shares and all that. All the messing around they the Government did and everything ground to a halt for a while. I was talking to Brian Falkenberg, and he said, 'Do you know anyone that we could get to go to manage Karadoc?' And I said, 'Oh, well, I could'. So I had a chat with Phil Laffer, and I saddled up there from '77 to '86.

So Phil Laffer was working with Lindemans at that point?

GW: Yes. He was technical director then. He was instrumental in putting—well, the whole Karadoc project. He'd actually asked "Cec" Lever in '67 if Berri would be interested in supplying greater volumes for them, and apparently they said no. And Brian and I didn't know anything about that until years later. Any rate, you mightn't like to put that in.

That's alright.

GW: That was built in '73 for the '74 vintage. So that was quite a big project.

This is Karadoc?

GW: Karadoc, yes.

Now how did you find Karadoc when you first went there? This would be about '78?

GW: No, it was '77. Well, I had most of the '74 vintage there so I knew the place. Well, it was growing. It was a very good concept in that you would take the days crush in, and you would process it, and you'd be ready for the next day. Your juice was separated from your marc, and it was all over in a flash.
But it took a while to get there. The first few years, vintage was bedlam really. There were delays and problems. But I can always remember the first vintage, the amount of debris that came in with the grapes. And we had all sorts of grapes. They'd been fermenting two days in bins and, oh, it was a real big nightmare. It took two or three years to educate the growers as to what we want. And once we did that, which sorted it out. And then we went into one metre diameter presses. And we had I think four 800's. And then they ended up with three one metre presses, and that used to handle about 1700 tons a day, which was pretty good in those days. But that was a very efficient plant. And it used to produce good wine.

So at that time was Karadoc a very young vine growing area?

GW: Oh, no, no. Phil Laffer put it there because it was the biggest patch of grapes in Australia. You know, Sunraysia. And it had Sultanas and Gordos. So that was it.

So that was used for what? Mainly for fortifieds at that point or for table wine?

GW: No, that was table wine. They'd planted up varieties like Ruby Red and Canada Muscat. Ruby Red for colour and Canada Muscat for flavour.

This is in the days that Ben Ean Moselle was such a big seller.

GW: Ben Ean, yes. That was interesting wine. Some years you could have twenty-five to thirty different wines go into that blend, to make it, but it just used to be so consistent. Next year you might only use ten/fifteen wines. But it was quite an achievement really.

So were you chief winemaker there?

GW: No, I was just manager.

Of the plant?

GW: Yes. When I went there Philip Shaw was the first manager.

Philip Shaw's Rosemount, isn't he?

GW: Yes. So then he became production manager. Philip Shaw, Ian Cowell and Doug Buchanan, they were all there then. Then of course we had a great pack of them that came after.

Was that a fairly big place in terms of volume?

GW: Yes. Their first vintage was 14,000 tons, and then gradually grew. I think some years they might have been bigger than Berri. You know, the 80's.

Was it always difficult dealing with growers along the river? I mean was there always that tussle between the wineries and the growers with pricing and that type of thing?

GW: Having my formative days in a cooperative situation, I've always felt that—you know, you were there working for the shareholders. That was your job. So it really didn't fuss me too much then but, of course, when you stand back and look at the rise and fall of grape prices, I've always felt that the growers and the winemakers should have been a lot closer and, you know, with a plan to say that we can't drop the price of a variety by 50% or 60% in one year because the grower's going to suffer. But then you say that big business says that, well, supply and demand. I guess it

happens everywhere, doesn't it? It's the same with wheat or wool or meat or whatever—vegies. But we're going to have I think in a couple of year's time when all these vines come in to—well, they're still planting them of course. It's going to be interesting to see where the prices go then.

Yes, it will be indeed.
So Graham, how many years were you at Karadoc for?

GW: About nine and a half.

So you spent a good time there then.

GW: Yes.

And is that the last stage of your contact with the industry proper?

GW: Yes. I got out of that then and, as I said, Ricky and I had a restaurant at Goodwood for three years, and then that's that.

So in the total experience, what are some of the biggest significant events that you've seen over your lifetime in the industry?

GW: Well, I would say refrigeration. That's certainly been the one. The other thing that I haven't mentioned is the effect of the Wine Research Institute. We are a very fortunate country to have that. And those people that instigated that institution, they should be revered. You have a chap like Fornachon, he did so much work. If he hadn't have been around we might have missed out there. Of course, Bryce Rankine carried on, but Fornachon did a remarkable job, I think.

Did you have a lot to do with them, Graham?

GW: No. We would only see them when they came through. I think the last time that I saw Fornachon was in about '60, and I said to him—I said to both of them—'I'm having some real trouble with free and total sulphur analyses on whites and reds'. The problem being that, with white wines, if you add too much sulphur at crushing, you get a combination with sugar. And that remains bound. But with the reds, it apparently associates with the anthocyanins and it's not bound.

Anthocyanins. What's that?

GW: That's the colours—the colouring matter.
I think that's the last time I saw Fornachon. I forget when he died now.

So that's been one major impact, and you said the other one that you remember was refrigeration.

GW: Refrigeration. And of course, cold fermentation, temperature fermentation, and filtration, or the fermenting of clear liquor. If you look at today's red fermentation, I mean they have long contact. You know, it's like Brian said to me recently, 'I've just finished fermenting the Rhine Riesling'. I mean we ferment whites for months now. And of course the reds have a much longer contact time. So I think that's been the big thing. Of course, not so much on the packaging side, but we were I guess saved by the bag-in-the-box, weren't we?

Yes. Exactly.

GW: We were saved by that. The other saviour has been the export. It's very good to see that so many winemakers, who are exporting, have been able to get up to the quality and then start exporting.

So when you and Brian and Ian in the 70's were beginning to use your filtration, and anything you can get your hand on to increase quality, that was taken on then by others? Was there a lot of sharing in the industry, is what I'm getting at.

GW: Well, we never had any secrets. I guess some people did but we were always quite happy to say what we were doing. We had to deal with the people we were trying to sell to, and we would say, 'This is how we made that'. I've got some old notes, and one about Ray Kidd coming through and making a comment, and he said, 'Well, that is a great improvement'. And Ray would have said, 'Well, how did you do that?' And we would have said, 'Well, this is how we did it'. We never had any secrets.

This is when Ray was at Lindemans?

GW: Yes.

He would have been boss(?) there.

GW: Yes. He and the winemakers, a group of the senior winemakers, would go right through the country after vintage each year. That was par for the course for them. And they'd go around and look at all the wines and then say, 'OK. We want a sample of that', and so on. And they would go to all the winemaking areas in Australia to do that. That was a very good thing. And then you had four or five jokers, that were winemakers, they'd come into your tasting room and they'd say what they thought. And you could either accept that, or you'd learn by it, or you'd talk about it, and it was just a good experience.

Increasingly, Graham, had the impact been on the table wines rather than the fortified? Were people looking more to improving that side?

GW: Oh, yes. That's what we were about. We were wanting to make the best possible product from all of our table wine grapes. I mean the fortifieds were there, they were pretty standard material. Well, you didn't wood mature Gordo sweet white, and any bulk sweet white you didn't do, but if you had dry sherry or if you had Port styles, well, you would give that some oak. There wasn't very much you could do about the fortified wine apart from the spirit quality I guess. As long as you had a good quality spirit, that would be it.

So looking back, Graham, is there anything else that you feel is really important that you'd like to add to what you've told me about this morning?

GW: Well, I guess the other thing I didn't talk about very much was grape varieties, and also machine harvesting, or machine pruning. I mean that's all been a big thing. You know, you have Richard Smart and Peter Dry, they did a lot of formative work, and that's really paid off. And we've

proved that you can mechanically prune and mechanically harvest and still produce a good product.

I guess the other one, just thinking about that, that was one of the big things we started at Karadoc, was that we had big volumes of red grapes that we used to haul from Coonawarra/Padthaway to Karadoc, because we had the capacity. These grapes would arrive in early afternoon, and they're hot and, oh, dear!

Any rate, we had a big brain-storm after vintage and said, 'Well, what if we start picking at three o'clock in the morning?' So we said, 'Alright, we'll try it'. So we did, and the first loads were up there by nine o'clock, nice and cool, and saved us a fortune in refrigeration, and also improved the quality. We had 1,000 tons of refrigeration up there. *(Laughs)*

I guess the other one I hadn't thought of was cool rooms. That was another big saviour. Instead of insulating the whole batch of tanks you'd just do it with a group of tanks.

I won't comment about the sulphur process. I don't think much of that. I won't say anything about that. You can cut that out. *(Laughs)*