Government of South Australia

STATE LIBRARY

STATE LIBRARY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA

J. D. SOMERVILLE ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

OH 692/97

Full transcript of an interview with

BROTHER JOHN MAY

on 27 August 2002

by Rob Linn

Recording available on CD

NOTES TO THE TRANSCRIPT

This transcript was donated to the State Library. It was not created by the J.D. Somerville Oral History Collection and does not necessarily conform to the Somerville Collection's policies for transcription.

Readers of this oral history transcript should bear in mind that it is a record of the spoken word and reflects the informal, conversational style that is inherent in such historical sources. The State Library is not responsible for the factual accuracy of the interview, nor for the views expressed therein. As with any historical source, these are for the reader to judge.

This transcript had not been proofread prior to donation to the State Library and has not yet been proofread since. Researchers are cautioned not to accept the spelling of proper names and unusual words and can expect to find typographical errors as well.

TAPE 1 - SIDE A

NATIONAL WINE CENTRE, WOLF BLASS FOUNDATION ORAL HISTORY PROJECT.
Interview with Brother John May at Sevenhill on 27th August, 2002.
Interviewer: Rob Linn.

John, just to begin, where and when were you born?

JM: I was born in Sydney on 10th August, 1929. My full name is John Lawrence May. My dad was a fitter and turner, who lost his job during the depression through various situations, so I was brought up during the depression when things were fairly tight. Probably that got me a love and appreciation of things of value I suppose.
I was educated in the Catholic school system, and I went to Christian Brothers' at Chatswood. My parents wanted to give me the best education possible. They didn't realise that I was no good at Latin and French. So I transferred my last two years and went to Christian Brothers' in Paddington and did a tech course. So I did woodwork, metalwork, and then tech drawing.

What were your parents' names, John?

JM: Margaret May and John Raymond May. And my mother is Irish descent and my father is German descent. And they actually met in Sydney, of course, and got married. So it's a combination German/Irish. I always say that makes a person a little bit pig-headed I suppose, or with a tenacity to hang on. Looking back on my history, it could be that way.
And then in 1945 I became an apprentice carpenter and joiner in the building trade in Sydney. I mainly worked on big projects, four or five storey buildings plus. In those years, in '45, there wasn't many buildings that high. Things have changed.

I had no involvement whatsoever in the winery industry at that particular point in my life, and when I joined the Jesuits -

Was there ever any wine in your home, John?

JM: Yes, there was a sweet sherry and a dry sherry. Might have even been a dash of whisky, which was only used as hospitality at Christmas and Easter. Don't forget those years you weren't allowed to vote until you were twenty-one, and you weren't allowed into a pub under twenty-one, so wine or anything of that nature was completely foreign to me.

Did your father drink beer at all?

JM: No. And that's probably due to the depression situation when they just didn't have the money for those sort of things. Actually I introduced my parents to wine after joining the wine industry.

We'll come to that in a minute. ***(Laughter)***

JM: So it sort of gets back there.

So when did you come to the Jesuits?

JM: I joined the Jesuits in 1949. That was in Melbourne. So I've been a Jesuit now for fifty-three years. And I spent most of my time at Watsonia, which is a retreat house and a scholastic I.A.T. A training house for Jesuits.

During that period I made use of my trade because I'm better off using my hands. That's one of my fortes and one of my gifts, that I use my hands. And I've done that in regarding my early days at Watsonia where I've been involved in building. We did a lot of building and restoration of kitchens and various things like that. A lot of plumbing. I've got a boiler attendant's certificate, so I've done plumbing, boiler, brickwork, woodwork, metalwork. You could classify me as a general handyman.

And then in 1963 I was transferred to Sevenhill, where my predecessor, Brother John Hanlon, had a coronary roundabout 1962 and they thought that, well, they'd better have a second string to their bow here, and I was

chosen to come to Sevenhill. I wasn't altogether happy with it because Sevenhill those years was classified as the boneyard of the society, they used to call it, because it was mainly senior citizens and men of older generation. And being so far from Adelaide in those years it was really out in the country. Still is out in the country, of course, but communications are much easier. So that was the sort of the reputation that the place had, so I wasn't sort of looking forward to coming to Sevenhill.
Anyway, I arrived here. I arrived in February 1963 and my first visit I went to see Phil Tummel, TST in Stepney, looking at a spectrometer regarding colours of brandy.

Had you had any background in the wine industry prior to this?

JM: None whatsoever. Only I was here because I was a practical person, I could use my hands, and my predecessor was much the same, although he was a furrier—John Hanlon—before he joined the Jesuits. And he spent a lot of time doing cooking and various things, as I did. I cooked for seven years straight at Watsonia for 114 people every day, six days a week.

And they survived, John?

JM: They did. And I'm still here. *(Laughter)*
So, you know, my background's rather interesting. From that point of view I've done a lot of things. It actually suited me very, very well for Sevenhill. Because one has to be pretty flexible, especially the early days of the wine industry when you did everything. That was my first experience of wine, which I knew nothing about.

So you went to see Phil?

JM: Yes, with John Hanlon. Obviously he knew him from somewhere or other. And then probably the next sort of experience was, in the same year, going to Yalumba. And of course Peter Wall was at Yalumba, and Peter Wall's an old Riverview boy taught by the Jesuits. Ray Ward was at Yalumba also.

Yes, Wardy.

JM: Yes. And Norm Hanckel. Rudi Kronberger. Alf Wark. And they're the people that I remember. I saw Peter Wall on and off for quite some time, especially in relation to Wine and Brandy Association. Because he was a president there for a number of years.

Do you remember anything about Yalumba in that visit?

JM: Yes. They lined up a series of white wines. I think they were white wines, or white juice. I'm not too certain. But all I know was that when it was all over, they said, 'How did you like the apple juice in the middle?' And then we went to lunch into Angaston. And that was my first experience to being inside a pub ever in my life.

Was it Frank Nicholls pub? The Angaston Hotel?

JM: Yes, Frank Nicholls, Angaston Hotel. And we had wine for lunch, and I'd never experienced anything like that. That was my first introduction to the industry or anything of that nature, because in Sydney as an apprentice carpenter, one didn't have much in the way of money. We didn't move in those sort of—I mean, wine was pretty rare in 1929. Well, even 1940. People were beer drinkers. And during the war everything was hard to get. So when you're brought up in the depression, plus the war, and you classify yourself as a poor family—because I remember buying my tools. If I bought a saw or a plane, there was no dancing that week. You know, you couldn't get to go. You bought things on layby. That type of thing. So the Yalumba experience was really quite fascinating.
Before I came to Sevenhill I was actually taking the pledge not to drink. It was from a religious conviction. You know, as reparation for the abuse of alcohol in Ireland was sort of a spiritual motive, and when I arrived here I was a non drinker. Not that I drank much before in any case. It just wasn't around. And I think I had my first glass of wine with Jim and Nancy Barry at their table. I realised that no way in the world could I stay in this

job and not—I felt a hypocrite tasting and spitting it out, which you had to do in any case. I thought well, this is being hypocritical.

At this stage Jim would have been at Clarevale Co-op?

JM: Yes, Jim was at Clarevale Co-op then. Bill McBride who was the secretary—he's dead and buried now.

Was Brian Barry up here then?

JM: No. Actually I met Brian Barry with Jim Barry in the early 60's. Robert Baker, who's dead now. Wolf Blass. Mick Knappstein. Larry Sobels and Roly Birks. And then I met Brian Barry at Renmark in the 60's.

Of course.

JM: He was at Renmark. So he was working there. They're names that sort of jump up at you in that particular period.

John, was the nature of these people in the industry—was there a lot of friendship and camaraderie?

JM: Oh, yes. Tremendous amount. For arguments sake, when we were ready to start vintage—things have changed—John Hanlon would go into Clarevale with a couple of twenty-five litre containers and get some fermenting wine and tip it into our juice, and that's the way we started. Started the fermentation. There was no such thing as selective yeasts or doing one particular yeast for one particular group of wines. In looking back it's quite amazing. There was no trouble. No-one had any secrets or anything of that nature. They would help one another.

Could we just stop for a minute, and could I ask you about Sevenhill as such. What was it producing when you came here, and for what purpose?

JM: For the most part it was producing altar wine. That was its main thing. Brother Downey, winemaker before John Hanlon, he was making some Claret that he used to sell I believe to the Myer family in Melbourne.

Used to go across in little ten gallon kegs. Cellar door was in existence. It was mainly the fortified wines. We were known in those years for the liqueur Tokay. I think a Verdelho and a Port. And there would have been, I presume, the sweet sherry style, which was the altar wine.

So the altar wine was a sherry in effect?

JM: Yes, it's a sherry. Mainly sweet. That would have been a combination of Grenache, Frontignac, Verdelho, Tokay. Anything you like. It was all that.
Downey was making reds, and when John Hanlon came along he decided to follow on making reds as well. Roundabout 1968 we made our first dry white, which was made from Crouchen. Tokay and Crouchen were made in bulk—that was in the 60's—and John Hanlon sold those to Romalo.

That's Walkers.

JM: Walkers, yes. Hurtle Walker.
Romalo as a base for sparkling. Roly Birks did the same. Clarevale did the same. There was virtually no cellar door and no market. And then John Hanlon built up a reputation with Cabernet Shiraz.

Were you sourced from your own vineyards?

JM: Yes. We never bought anything. It's all from our vineyards, and the vineyards were only about 97 acres those years. Now it's 135. But a lot of vines have been pulled out and there have been new plantings and new clones.

I'll ask you more about that later.

JM: John Hanlon died 12th February 1972. I was here from '63 to '70, and then I was transferred to Melbourne to another office, which was being the manager of the Retreat House, and also what's called a Prefect of Discipline to the Master of Novices. So I was involved with the formation team, or the training team. That was a good period for me because I

learnt all about administration and people and various things like that. And then John Hanlon died, as I said on 12th February '72, and I was sent back here. They said, 'What are we going to do with Sevenhill?' I said, 'Well, send me back there and you can work out what you're going to do with Sevenhill'.

How did you feel about the place? Was it still the bone yard?

JM: No. Oh, no. *(Laughs)* They called it that, but what happened in the 50's, they changed Sevenhill. For ten years it became a training house also for our younger priests. After they do all their training they have what they call a spiritual year, and that spiritual year was here at Sevenhill. Quite strict. It was almost getting back to the beginnings. And being here at Sevenhill, being isolated—no-one had cars or anything like that. The trains used to run—motor train and the goods train—and that was the only sort of communication between here and Adelaide. Or a ute.
When I arrived here there seemed to be so much work to be done I hopped in and I learnt how to prune, and plough, and cut wood, and split wood, and split strainers and all that sort of thing, but also in the meantime I started to build. Because I could weld. I did a course in Melbourne in welding. So I came here and I built a three tonne tip trailer, six by four trailer, a back-hand scoop for a tractor, and various things like that. And then by about 1965 I built a new fermenting cellar with an overhead crane on it—overhead gantry. So I got interested in the building side of it and started to do that sort of work.

John, the fermenters that you built, they were concrete open fermenters?

JM: I put a new roof over the top. They were actually the lees tanks, which were used for leaching tanks that we used to use for the skins to extract the fluid from them, which we ran through the distillery. We had a distillery here, so that was another job. You knew how to distil.

Potts still?

JM: Potts still, yes. That was put in in 1934, and stopped operating about 1968/69. And that's when the first bit of transport started to happen. You know, Frank Sheppard with his wine tanker.

I'm going to talk to Frank this afternoon.

JM: Good on you.

Now there's a man with innovation.

JM: That's what I'm saying. He was the first man to actually have a mobile wine tanker business. And I've known Frank Sheppard since the 60's—Frank and Barbara. They had their own business of course. He's here in Clare and still associated. So Jim Barry, Frank Sheppard.

Your old mates.

JM: Yes, the old mates. Mick Knappstein and people like that.

It must have been a lovely community.

JM: Oh, yes, it was. We had wonderful social evenings and things like that. Go to various places for a meal. John Hanlon would always drive out—we only had the Chev truck, which was our only means of transport—and I'd drive home. *(Laughter)* This is in the 60's.
So when I returned to Sevenhill in February '72, as I say, I became winemaker overnight. In those early years the people that helped me most were Jim Barry, Mick Knappstein, and Tim Knappstein, because I didn't know much about sulphurs or free sulphurs. Although I was with John Hanlon for all those years I wasn't really sort of involved. I shovelled skins, and fed the crusher, and racked lees, or racked wine and lees, and all that sort of thing. So I knew nothing about those sort of things. I used to actually get wine samples, take them into Tim, and he'd ring me up and tell me how much sulphur I had to put in it. And then I bought the Rankine apparatus for sulphurs and slowly began my laboratory work, or laboratory training.

Was any of that foreign to you or was it just a great challenge -

JM: It was just a great challenge. *(Laughter)* It was foreign alright, but I did know enough about fortification, and I kept my ears and eyes open. I used to have a little book and I used to write these figures down and things like that, and I actually knew the formulas and all the rest of it regarding fortification because all our wines were fortified for the most part. So in that particular time the Taylors were just beginning.

That was Jim again, wasn't it?

JM: Yes. Jim set Taylors up. Taylors were starting up and Jim Barry was there. And then came along Morgan Yeatman and Nick Holmes, and Andrew Tolley. And in those particular times Roly Birks was still operating at Wendouree. There was a great exchange. We didn't seem to be so busy those years. We always had time to do things and say hello to people. I know in the mid 60's when a car came up the drive, John Hanlon and I knocked off to talk to the person. We hadn't seen a person all day, only ourselves. And we had George Bulla there as cellar hand. Johnnie Smith and Peter Koslowski, who worked here for something like thirty-four years.

Was he Polish?

JM: Yes. His father worked here before him. Used to milk the cows and things like that. Sevenhill has always been a place of employment. Mr Nobel used to milk the cows and his daughter was the dairymaid, and her other sisters, or two of them, became school teachers in Clare. They just lived across the road here all their life. Nobeltown, as they call it. You know, just over here in the back road—the quarry road. You had people like that, you know, who just went on forever.

So was it a bit like time had stood still? I'm not meaning archaic but people were slower in the way they -

JM: Oh, yes. They were slower. If there was a—not so much a field day, but auctions were a great place for getting together of people, and they didn't turn up in their trucks and trailers and that sort of thing as you see now. You'd go into Clarevale, for arguments sake, or Stanley—either—and if you wanted something they would always tell you or share with you. Everyone would exchange wines with one another. Well, Clarevale those years, they had to clamp down on things because every time someone brought a load of grapes in, the bloke that helped unload it with the forks—fork unloading—he would have a drink with the bloke that brought it in. It was alright for the grower, he only came in once or twice a day, but the fellow unloading was unloading people all day. *(Laughs)* It's a wonder someone didn't fall through the crusher, when you consider this day and age the occupational health and safety.

It's a different scenario now.

JM: Oh, it is.

There was obviously friendship there, John.

JM: Oh, yes, great friendship. You had no hesitation to walk into a winery any time. If you wanted anything, or you're passing through, or just say hullo to someone. Everybody worked with one another. Even in the early 70's people worked much better, or as good as, but that was mainly through community projects. Clare was a very stable place with the crops and vineyards and light industries and all those sort of things. People knew one another. Some of the smaller towns were probably even better. You know, like Watervale and Auburn. They still are. You know, community-wise because of their size. Clare because of it size was slightly different. You had the doctors, lawyers, indian, chief, sort of thing, or the shop owners and then the workers. There was a big differentiation in those years between workers and those who employed them. We used to talk about the working class. You don't hear that very much now. The working class are better off than those who employ them now. *(Laughs)*

Could well be true, too.

JM: Yes. They got their wages regularly but you're the one that had to supply the wages.

Exactly.

JM: So going back to that particular time, Heinz had bought into Stanley and bought Stanley out. Yes. Heinz the food people.
And also that particular time was when Tim Knappstein went out on his own and created enterprise.

That's right. I think Peter Weste came up here.

JM: Yes, Peter Weste was here. He was here that period—Peter Weste, yes.
And then there were the Mitchells in 1975—Andrew and Jane Mitchell set up. And that was a new enterprise. And Jim Barry roundabout that time decided to set his own winery up.

Did you have much to do with Jane and Andrew at that point?

JM: Oh, yes. We were in communication all the time. This is the beauty of it, we always shared ideas or helped one another. I remember a grower that was battling to get his fruit in and I went down with our front-end loader and spent all Sunday driving the front-end loader. You know, I was throwing the grapes in so he could get them into—that sort of thing. We did a lot of that. We don't do it now.
So in '63, sort of jumping back, there were five wineries here—Quelltaler, Sevenhill, Birks, Stanley and Clarevale Co-op. And now there's thirty-nine. Or at least there's thirty-nine members of the Clare Valley Winemakers' Association. Jim Barry was the first one to make a move by himself. And then followed by Mitchells. I'd have to look up the records to find the rest of it.

TAPE 1 - SIDE B

John, you were saying that when Andrew and Jane Mitchell won their first gold medal at the Brisbane Wine Show you all went to celebrate.

JM: Yes, quite a number of us raced down to the Mitchells with bottles in hand and had a celebratory drink. That's the sort of thing that people did. They're not doing that sort of thing so much now. I think we all seem to be so busy. I'm fortunate because I suppose in my position—I don't earn a living in that sense and I don't get paid for what I do and all those sort of things—I feel that I could ring people up and congratulate them if they've done well, and things like that. I think others might feel that there might be a bit of competition or something of that nature. But any rate, it's a sort of thing I do. Plenty of other people might do it too, I wouldn't necessarily know. In those years it was quite obvious. If someone like Mitchells just start off and won a gold medal, everybody would be happy for them. But there's probably so many wineries and so many people now, and so many awards.

During the 70's, or mid 70's, I started to do external studies at Roseworthy and Wagga because by then I started to realise that I needed to know more: like, the cellar hands course, laboratory work and various things like that.

And then during that particular time I came across people like Bryce Rankine, Andrew Markeesee, Patrick Ireland, Peter Hoey and Andrew Yap at Roseworthy. I think I remember going to a dinner at Bryce Rankine's at Roseworthy, and various things during that particular time.

I got involved with Landcare. I was a State representative. And also vine improvement. I represented vine improvement. I think I was the first Chairperson of Clare Valley Vine Improvement. Goes back to '73. People like David Lloyd was a foundation member as well. And they were the years, for argument's sake, when we were first starting off, the earth had

to be sterilised. David Lloyd, a grower, took his trailer with the earth into Clarevale and they'd steam sterilise through the boiler—the earth—and then we'd put it into a little nursery, and that's how we started. And some of us also belonged to the Barossa Valley Vine Improvement, which I still am a member. On this property now, the vine improvement shed is there, which they use for their meetings. They use it for their cuttings, and assembly of cuttings, and various things like that. So the vine improvement that started in the mid 70's is still going strong.
Those years it was very hard to convince a grower to use selected cuttings because the average thing was that the people would go out and say that they were after some Rhine, or after this, or whatever the case may be, and they'd go out in the middle of winter and cut it. They had no idea. Even in Mick Knappstein's time when the Stanley Wine Company were increasing, they got Cabernet from here. Big bully vines etc etc. It didn't produce any fruit. It took a while to convince the grower that if you're going to plant a grape you may as well plant a good one. But the growers in those years were more interested in tonnage rather than quality.

John, was it unusual—I mean, you've obviously from the moment you came here, because of the way Sevenhill was, had this interest in the vineyard too.

JM: Yes, because I went out there pruning and ploughing etc. And I've always been a person who can see the possibilities of better ways of doing things. If it made sense to me I would sort of get behind it.

Well, very few winemakers, even in the 70's, were doing that though, weren't they?

JM: No. After the vine-pull, for argument's sake, and everyone—I've just got a note here that the growers were more interested in the tonnage than the quality. So the vine-pull for some was a financial assistance. Stuff was pulled out like Shiraz, Chardonnay, Riesling, Mataro, Pedro, Cabernet, Grenache. So in the '75/78 to 80's, we started planting red varieties. New clones from the Department of Ag. We paid a very minimal price for these

but the verbal contract, or the thinking behind the vine improvement, was to produce source blocks, or at least have source blocks by the Department of Ag that would produce good vines or cuttings. And these were propagated through the districts. So the result is that we have a number of source blocks here that cuttings are still being taken from, and they were planted in that period of '75 to '80.

So did you get advice on these new clones from people -

JM: It was through the Department of Ag. They recommended them. Being a member of the vine improvement I had inside knowledge of these particular varieties. People like Andrew Ewart, who was at Roseworthy at the time, were assessing some of these new clones.

That's right.

JM: More recently I rang Andrew up—we planted some Barbera two years ago—and asked him, 'Do you think Barbera would be suitable for Clare?' Barbera is an Italian variety. It's very fruity and strong variety, as opposed to some of the other ones that are more of a lunch style wine. This is more of a man's wine. Barbera they call it.
So through the Department of Ag we got these, and they always have been a wonderful source of information and help and assistance, and also especially the vine improvement. Next week we're having a wine tasting here through the vine improvement—State vine improvement. We've got two or three clones of Geisenheim Rhine because we planted it through the Department of Ag a few years ago as part of a source block, and we made our Riesling this year. I planted another hectare of Geisenheim, and really do produce an excellent fruit. So what's happening next week, they've got three or four clones, and I've got pilot wines made from these, and so we're going to assess them here with ourselves, Geoffrey Grosset and one or two other winemakers. You know, Kerry Thompson. And then get the growers to come along in the afternoon to have a look. So I've been

involved with this sort of thing. Anything that's innovative, and to me it makes sense.

And this began in the 70's, you were saying?

JM: Yes.

That's something very new, all around South Australia at least, these groups of growers and winemakers interested in getting better clones.

JM: Yes.

It must have been a pretty exciting time, John, really.

JM: Oh, it was. Especially Cabernet Franc, the Merlot and Malbec, which weren't here. We had Mataro here, way back, but those were new clones. I made a wine from that. I made a Cabernet Malbec and Merlot Cabernet Franc, and then put them altogether and created St Ignanius. And that gets me back to Doug Crittenden.
Doug Crittenden gave me a bottle of Pomerol way, way back, and I said that I'd like to make a wine like this if possible. So I looked up the French Pomerol in the district and what sort of grape varieties. What were they? Cabernet, Merlot, Malbec and Cabernet Franc. And I planted these varieties with the concept of making a wine like that Pomerol. And these were available from the Department of Ag.

What was there about that style that you thought was going to be enjoyable, John?

JM: It was soft, and round, and so different to a straight Cabernet and Shiraz Cabernet blend, which in the 60's and 70's that's all there was. By the 80's you couldn't sell Shiraz, and then all of a sudden it was combinations. We were making a straight Shiraz in the 80's and we found by '82/83 we couldn't sell it, so we stopped. And then it came back again. So I've seen the movements of styles over a period of quite a length of time.

Were there cycles, in effect?

JM: Yes. And then, for argument's sake, we were making a straight Crouchen and we got a gold medal for it in Sydney, I think. Sydney or Melbourne. Forgotten now. And Tim Knappstein was judging the class. He said, 'If I had known that I wouldn't give you a gold'. He thought Crouchen was the pits. And then that particular time Chardonnay started to come in. And then Sauvignon Blanc. So Crouchen just sort of fell out. We didn't make it any more. And then by that stage we had planted Rieslings and we started to produce Riesling.

Now Crouchen was always considered a very good base for sparkling wines, wasn't it? You mentioned that earlier.

JM: Yes, we did that for that. And it also did make quite a nice white wine.

Oh, it does indeed.

JM: And it developed well. I've had it eight years old, nine years old here, and it was excellent. And dry Tokay was another one. This is where Wolf Blass comes in again. In 1972/73 Jim Barry was advising me. We had a big crop of Tokay out there, and I said, 'What are we going to do?' He said, 'Make it into dry wine'. So he helped and assisted to do that. And I said, 'What do we do with it now?' He said, 'We'll have to try and sell it'. So we bottled some, but we sold half on consignment to Wolf Blass when he was at TST.

John Glaetzer was there.

JM: Yes, John Glaetzer and Hanging Rock man. I met him Wine Australia. I can't think of his name now, but he started the Hanging Rock winery. I don't know, it'll come back.

I was thinking of Neil Robin. It's not him?

JM: No, it's not Neil. This is John—he said, 'We had a terrible time with it, trying to stabilise it'. Tokay in any case is very hard to get stable—protein stable. It's one of those things that use a lot of bentonite etc.
Mechanical harvesting, followed on from vine improvement. The next thing was trellising of course. A lot of the vines here were very, very short and close to the ground. When we started to mechanical harvest in about 1978 we realised that we had to get the vines up, and then we raised everything another foot, or 300, and then we started to do some more planting in that particular period. So in the '75/78 and the 80's, we came up a little bit more but not high enough as far as we were concerned because by the time the mid 90's arrived, by about '85, Richard Smart came into the scene. Richard Smart, Peter Dry, Di Davidson. And I attended a seminar with Richard Smart at Roseworthy—sunlight into vines and the wine. And Peter Dry was always interested in various things. That got me interested in trellising and mechanical harvesting. So all our new plantings are 1.2 to the first fruiting wire, and we're using lifting wires, and so a lot of the vineyard's been retro fitted. And we've had Richard Smart for a number of years as a consultant.

He's got a lot of knowledge.

JM: He has, yes. And he's not slow to share it with you either.

And so has that made a huge improvement?

JM: It has, yes. Especially once we raised the Rieslings and various things like that. They ripen better, there's less mould, less sprays required. We put in G9 V3 Cabernets, which was at the particular time the best clone from the Department of Ag—and it still is a very good clone.
We did the various trellising things like the Scott Henry, the VSP, Ballerina. So we've done all those sort of things through Richard Smart, and modifications are the same. The harvester people reckon our place is a bit of a dream because it's all up in the air and VSP. It harvests well.

So, John, you get in contract harvesters, do you?

JM: Yes, we use O'Connor Harvesting. I used those when they were Pokolbin Harvesting Company. So we've been using a harvesting company since 1978.

Really?

JM: Yes. So we were one of the early people on that.

Very much so.

JM: The industry, regarding exporting wines, has been good for Australia because there's limits to what Australia can consume in this day and age. And the big companies, I've felt, have paved the way for the smaller ones. We've got to hand that to them. Switch back to Brian Barry. When Brian Barry was with Heinz, actually that was sort of the partial beginnings of the Clare Valley winemakers. In that particular time we used to have a rural wine festival here in Clare.

That's right.

JM: And the owner of the Bentley Hotel set a bit of a pace for Clare—very up-market things—and so you had people coming to a wool and wine festival. And then I think it was Brian Barry, not directly, but in 1975 he got together marketing of the golden dozen. It was certainly 1975 wines, the wines had won a gold medal in Clare Valley. It was put into a dozen and marketed with Heinz behind them.

That was a great idea.

JM: Yes. So that was the beginnings I think of the Clare Valley winemakers.
I was first financial Chairman of the Clare Valley Tourist Association, and the first Chairman of the Auburn Players, a song and dance stage show.

I didn't know your talents extended that far, John.

JM: I was with them for fourteen years on the stage. *(Laughter)* Musical stuff. It was good fun. I got to know a lot of people that way.
So regarding exporting, we've been exporting all the wine since 1968 to Indonesia, India, PNG on a regular basis, in the sense that they buy every two or three years. It's a consignment of about 90,000 litres.
Table wines, we've been exporting probably the last ten years, and that's to Switzerland, New Zealand and the last two years to the UK. A little bit to America.
With the coming of road transport—Frank Sheppard comes to mind. It's such a big industry now with so many people in it carting wine etc.
In marketing, they employ so many people this day and age, and there's so many degrees of marketing. And packaging is an interesting growth industry.

Indeed it is.
Did you have any particular people who were doing your labels when you first arrived?

JM: Yes. I spoke about it the other day. It became Precision Labels. It was the Swiss man.

Did Wytt Morro have anything to do with it?

JM: No. Jim Barry was involved with Wytt Morro. I just can't think of his name but I did mention the other day that he sold to Precision Labels.

Don Wallman.

JM: Yes. He was doing that. And we've been with AQ Print Works now for many, many, many years. We feel that they're doing a fairly good job for us.
In this day and age, regarding laboratories and things like that, most of the smaller wineries now have their own little labs, with special yeasts that are available.

Yes, probably the major contribution to the Australia winemaking was refrigeration. To me that was the biggest thing that's ever happened to us. I put in, in 1978, also refrigeration, and it's just part of it now.

That you could control your fermentations.

JM: Yes. Years back, in John Hanlon's time, we used to run cold water out of the well through stainless steel tubes into the open fermenters, and return it back to a second well. But even distillation, we'd start off with cold water and run it around the roof to cool it down and back into the tank. And then sometimes you had to stop because you had no refrigeration. You didn't have refrigeration or cooling towers. And younger people appreciating wine and wine courses—like, gourmet weekends and things like that, which is good from a tourist point of view. And then wine tourism—you know, cellar door sales. A big thing with the chief wineries. And now in this day and age we're getting into the EPA and vineyard sprays etc. And what vineyard sprays are available is quite extraordinary too.

There's a lot more care today, John?

JM: Yes. Far more care. It was nothing to go out with some very nasty spray to spray young vines to kill cutworm and various things like that. You just don't do that now.

Along the way, even with the all the camaraderie you have and the care that was given to things, were there some pretty tough moments here, John?

JM: Oh, yes. All the time, say from the early 70's, we didn't have much money. What happens now is the money goes into a central fund that helps to educate our younger priests and helps with our mission in India and South East Asia, and the other apostolic works we do, which is helping street kids and various people like this. Those early years I asked our Provincial, who's the boss of the show, 'If you let me spend some money, I'll make some money'. And that's what it amounted to. What happened was that I actually had to earn all that money before I could spend it. I

wasn't allowed to take out a loan or anything like that. So the whole of Sevenhill from '72 right up to now—well, up to last year—was built on funds raised.

So earnings were driving any growth, in other words.

JM: Yes. Now we're in a situation where we have 135 acres of vineyard. We have been up to 500 ton crush. Since then we've pulled out some of the older varieties and planted newer. We'll be back out to 450 ton crush, which suits us. We only use our own fruit. We do our own marketing, our own bottling—everything. So it is in-house.
In November of last year they appointed Paul McClure as a general manager. I'm no longer the manager. My title now is Director of Winemaking and the PR person. I still go out and sell wine, do tastings and PR work. I did a lunch in Sydney recently for Johnny Walker's restaurant, and that was a promotion for Sevenhill. So that sort of thing I'm involved in now. I'm starting to dabble with a computer a little bit and send out a few e-mails and that type of thing.

And John, it sounds to me as though it's been, despite the challenges, very gratifying.

JM: Oh, yes, to me most satisfying. When you've actually built the place with your own hands, with my men,—we've been a team and a family all the time—it's been very, very good. Trevor's been with us now for thirty-six years. John Hanlon employed him as a schoolboy, and he's been with me right through and he's shared in all the development. We have a vineyard manager now. Prior to three years ago, I did the lot. I think four years ago I started to back off and have a vineyard manager, but now I have a vineyard manager with good qualifications. He has an assistant. And each person has a job to do, but Paul is responsible for the overall management of the winery now.

John, is it unique in Australia for the religious to run a winery like this still?

JM: Well, it is in Australia now because I'm the only religious brother who is a winemaker in Australia, and the Sevenhill Cellars is the only Jesuit commercial winery left in the world. They've all sort of fallen by the way, and various things like that.

You mention the signage and things like that. We started to utilise, if you like, the fact that Sevenhill Cellars is a Jesuit winery, and through that sort of approach it reminds people that it is a spiritual situation more than a purely commercial situation. And here in the complex of Sevenhill we have the Church, which is historical, and the residence that was a former boys' school going way back. Now it's a retreat house and a house of prayer, so people come here for peace and quiet and contemplation. That's all part and parcel of the one thing. I hope to spend the rest of my life here and be buried in the crypt. Because I like it, I love it, I'm part of the community and have been here virtually since 1963, except for the two year break.

Well, John, it's been just wonderful to hear your story in this way. Just in hindsight, listening to you talk, for all the changes that have taken place in technical matters or in the vineyard, it seems to me that the one joy you've had all the way through has been the people, not just the challenges.

JM: Oh, definitely. Without people there's nothing in that sense. I think it is your relationship to people. And for me, my relationship with people and relationship to God, I try to tie them in because I believe we're all made in the image and likeness of God, so they've got to be respected from that point of view.

Well, thank you so much for talking with me, John. It's been delightful.