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OH 824/4

Full transcript of an interview with

JOHN PALTRIDGE

On 10 July 2007

by Charles Bruce

for the

"LIFESTYLE" HISTORY FROM AN ISOLATED COMMUNITY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Recording available CD

NOTES TO THE TRANSCRIPT

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J.D. SOMERVILLE ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION, STATE LIBRARY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA: INTERVIEW NO. OH 824/4

Interview with John Paltridge conducted by Charles Bruce at Avenue Range, South Australia, on 10 July 2007 for the 'Lifestyle' History from an Isolated Community Oral History Project of the State Library of South Australia.

DISK 1

Charlie Bruce, and I'm interviewing John Paltridge from Minnecrow near Avenue Range. It's 10th July 2007. (break in recording)

John, can you tell us your early memories of farming in the Minnecrow area?

Yes, well, to start with, very little farming as far as *we* know it. Originally, back in about the 1870s and the 1880s they farmed quite a bit of this country trying to grow wheat, and they must have been having as dry a spell as we've been having now because where the old houses were built and the country was ploughed, mainly with two oxen – and you can still see the land's there where they ploughed even though you've Majesticked[1] it, you can still see all where they were. Then of course they diverted a lot of water from Penola down through these flats because they were considered to be only good for grazing, and wiped all those farmers out. (laughs) And the same round Conmurra, they all got very wet, so the only farming that really used to go on then as far as farming's concerned [was] growing a few oats for the horses, and that was very few areas because all the range country was covered with trees so you only got the odd spot out on little lunettes or something like that out in the water that could grow enough oats to feed the horses, which was the mainstay of getting round anywhere, if you wanted to go anywhere.

There were very few cars earlier on. I think Dad had a 1926 Plymouth and he kept that right up till 1948 where he traded it in and managed to get another one. And all the roads were very – if you carted the wool, all the wool went by train from Avenue as far as our wool went and he used to cart it in with a trolley and four horses, and later on of course we had a truck. We actually had an old thirty-hundredweight Chev and used to put about eight bales on it and thought that was absolutely fantastic. (laughter) And used to roll the wool bales up to the – put two saplings up against it and then you'd put a rope underneath it, from the tray underneath the bale of wool and two fellas would stand up and pull on the rope and one'd guide it to make sure it

[1] The Majestic plough was used extensively for land clearing in the Keilira district.

didn't roll off and you could pull it up three tiers high quite easily. But then the Rivetts started then to cart wool and they have always carted our wool while the train was going up until of course they pulled the train down or pulled the train line up.

So there was very little farming went on, it was all grazing, and very few cattle, only a few old house cows and things like that because no-one had yards and it was all too wet, all the high country was covered with scrub. It wasn't actually – when my grandfather came here in 1901 there was no or very little actual scrub as we know it, that all came when the rabbits came, and it was all open – all these high ranges were covered with tree ferns in the gullies and huge big hill gums and on the flats red gums, and on the hills they had stringybark, and of course they were monster trees. But once the rabbits came in the ate every – the only thing that grew was the stuff the rabbits didn't eat, and they ate all the tree ferns. Then we got all these dreadful little things we have at the moment.

And they had huge sheep runs in those days because I think we had about thirty-two thousand acres and we used to run about six thousand wethers on it, and used to breed most of our sheep out in Fiveash, and there was about eighteen hundred acres out there and my grandfather used to lamb fourteen hundred ewes out there, on the blue rush, and of course once they started to drain it all the saltwater tea tree came in and within twenty years he could only run four hundred wethers on it. So yes.

How many horses would a farm have had?

You always had to have at least six or eight to ride, then you always had your four to six buggy horses, and I think he used to have, just to grow our few things, we'd always have at least a dozen old Clydies[2] for pulling the plough and the binder, because we used to cut all our hay with the binder. And if we wanted a bit of grain, which was very, very hard to get of course, we had an old stripper and then you came back and put it through a winnower, which was really hard work. You had to turn the winnower by hand – it was like a big mangle – and if you were a really bad boy that was your job, was to wind the handle of the mangle because it took a huge man to do that.

Our shearing shed was converted from old stables in about 1902. Before that they used to shear under a tree.

And that was all blade shearing.

[2] *i.e.* Clydesdale heavy horses.

Yes. And then in 1904 my grandfather bought a second-hand eight-stand plant because all the cockies were so used to – they were real gentlemen, the shearers in those days, and they'd all touch their forelock and say good morning. And of course when the machines came in – a dreadful mob of fellas used to go round and lie on the board and spit on the board and a lot of the people couldn't stand it so they pulled the machines out, went back to blade shearing, and my grandfather bought an eight-stand plant and hooked it up, and it's still quite mobile. It's been converted a bit, now a four-stander, but she's still going so yes, they used to make things properly in those days.

Where did your shearers come from?

Well, they came mainly by pushbike and they used to push their bike up to the Coorong – because there was no roads, of course, round here at all, there was only a little buggy track from here to Keilira and up to Winpinmerit and Didicoolum, Pigeon Box, they were about the only – all the rest of the places weren't – – –. And Mount Scott, of course, that used to be a big old changing station when the coach went through, and there used to be a huge lot of stables and horse yards over at Mount Scott. They had a changing station at Cairnbank and the next one was at Mount Scott.

And that was an organised coach road, was it, some company – – –?

Yes, that was from – yes, it was all organised by Cobb & Co, although most of the mail used to come from Meningie up to Kingston and then on to Millicent, and when they put the railway through, before that they used to come from Naracoorte, down across past Fairview to Cairnbank and depending on whether they went to Reedy Creek and through there or there was another track, was a summer track, went across to Mount Scott. In those days there were quite a few springs that were fed by the – we call it now the 'confined aquifer' or whatever it was, and they used to run the horses into, it's on Bainger country now, there's a big swamp over there that was fed by these springs and they used to run the coach in there and give the horses a drink up to their guts in beautiful water, and of course when Baingers got it when they were logging it one of their tractors caught on fire and they just drove into that and put it out. (laughter) But of course now it's all different.

When the big earthquake came in 1901 it closed all the flowing springs at Bull Island and opened the ones up at Earthquake Springs. Yes, and put a crack in the old Minnecrow woolshed that's still there. It must have been a pretty decent sort of an earth tremor. We've had a few since then, but –

Nothing like that one.

– nothing like that one, thank goodness. Yes.

And most of your produce went in and out on the railway, did it?

Yes. Before that we used to send the wool to Robe town on a bullock dray and nearly all the – one of the big fellas, a fella called Jackie Walker used to come from Mundulla and then they had a track down, they had Jackie Walker's Track that goes through Vandepeer's country, or it used to be part of Minnecrow and then Vandepeers bought it, and mostly now it's just about, because it's been ploughed over and 'dozed and filled in you can hardly see it. But those bullock wagons used to go all the way down either through Mount Scott or down through Mount Bruis and take the wool, then once the railways got here we used to cart it about four bales at a time on the old trolley.

Originally, of course, there weren't any presses and they used to put a big long bale up under a tree and you'd jump up and down on that, and it still used to weigh about two hundred and fifty, three hundred pounds, but they were big, long, soft bales. Jackie Walker dropped one off and he couldn't lift it up at Mount Scott and it stayed there between Mount Scott and England's [Shepherd's Hill] at the moment, and they used that there as a gap for years until it eventually fell apart. (laughter) So yes.

But everyone used to shear then and the shearers used to – it wasn't till the 1930s that the shearers would turn up in old T-Model Fords and what have you and they always used to camp on the spot in those days and all the women would have to cook for them.

The farm women?

All the farm women would cook for them. It was rarely that you had shearers' quarters with a cook that would cook in the shearers' quarters. That's only fairly recent.

It was just single men that came?

Yes. Yes, you didn't ever see the women turn up because it was too rough. None of the shearers' quarters were like they are now, and they had very basic sorts of – how the hell they ever shore all the time, because they used to shear more sheep than they do now with narrower gear. The old Bristow combs were two inches wide, the next one were two-and-a-quarter, and of course now they're just about as wide as a broad-mouthed shovel to take it off but in those days it was illegal to have anything over a two-and-a-quarter-inch comb, two-and-a-half. Yes, they were all the old shearers

and of course most of them would come out here, they'd go in and cash the cheque and drink it out. They'd come out in a dreadful mess but by the time they'd pushed their pushbike out to Minnecrow they'd sobered up pretty well.

Where did they go, into Lucindale or Kingston?

What for?

For the pub.

(laughs) Yes, well, they couldn't – or they would, they'd go to Lucindale if they could, but most of them didn't have – – –. There was one fella, he used to try to ride to Naracoorte. He had a lady friend in the pub at Naracoorte and he tried to ride his pushbike up to the railway line to get to her but we reckoned if he did get there he'd only be there for about five minutes, which would hardly give him time to have any – but he would have got a result, I suppose. (laughter)

He would have got his breath back.

Yes. But in those days everything revolved round the sheep. Lots of people in this scrub country ran all wethers and we didn't have the terrible scream you've got now if you put a wether on the place, all the shearers going berserk. Well, in those days that's all they had to shear were wethers.

Was Minnecrow mainly wethers?

Yes.

But you bred them all?

Well, we used to breed them all because transporting them was such a problem. There weren't any trucks in those days so if we wanted to sell sheep – and of course there weren't the roads and there weren't the meat buyers to come round. In earlier days they used to drove them to Kingston, kill them there and melt them down for their tallow, but most old sheep didn't have a market for them and we used to take two days to walk to the 18 miles into Lucindale, into their auction in there, take them to Avenue and put them in the yards in there, and then the next day walk them into Lucindale. So in the hot weather that was a bit of job, which mainly fell to us kids. We used to love it because then we'd get out of bloody schoolwork. Yeah, we used to hate school.

But Mum used to teach us correspondence and she did a fantastic job because she raised five kids, taught them all correspondence up till high school and then we went to Naracoorte and boarded up there. But yes, the women in those days – – –.

That would have been a shock after correspondence.

That was absolutely horrible. Yes, disgusting, because fancy having to live with someone else who had different ideas. And I couldn't take my ferrets to school – because we used to get most of our money out of rabbit skins and whatever, and old Tony Gabriel used to come round once a month when I was a kid and we were allowed to rush out then and present our fox skins or rabbit skins or kangaroo skins to old Tony and he always had this huge bloody wad of notes with him that he used to hate bloody giving to you and old Tony'd hold the roll in his hand and he'd sort of begrudge giving you every single penny he could. (laughs) And years later – because he was a great man for the races, Tony – years later I was at the races one day and he was there backing his horse and he still had the same roll, still hated to give the bookie the money, but he did, (laughs) and his horse won so he would have got most of his hard-earned money back. Yes, poor old Tony, he used to buy all the dags and the crutch wool and everything like that and make a hundred and fifty per cent on it. But there was nowhere you could get rid of all your odd bits. I mean, you just chuck a bale of wool on and take it in on the back of the ute;[3] in those days there weren't any wool buyers anywhere. Tony was the only one that came round. You either sent it to Adelaide on the train to sell or you put it under the fruit trees because in those days there were no roads anywhere. We used to go to Lucindale once a month and it'd take us an hour and a half to get in there. In the wintertime we used to have an old ..... and ..... with the two quiet old dray horses and used to put the leading chains on them and drag them down to about Minnecrow South through all those little swamps through there, and from then on we had a Corduroy Road, which would be about six or eight feet wide, I suppose, they just used to drop saplings side by side, and that went from Minnecrow South right round to where Brian Woods's house is at the moment, and you'd bounce on that and pity help you if you slipped off because if you slipped off you had to sit there and wait and hope that – because you didn't have any mobile phones or anything – – –.

Who built that?

My dad and his brothers. The old Corduroy Track.

When would that have been?

Well, they must have built that in about – in the early 1920s, I reckon, because they had an old Amal car, the boys. There were four or five boys that were there on and

[3] Ute = utility vehicle.

off at Minnecrow, but Hockings managed it from 1912 to 1922, and then the boys were big enough to start working a little themselves and Hockings went and opened up a butcher's shop at Bull Island. So yes.

The marketing in those days was once you walked them into Lucindale they were on the market and for sale, because if you got a bob for them or a shilling or ten cents, whatever you like to call it –

You weren't going to bring them home again.

– you couldn't bring them home, so yes. And the young sheep were the same: you either kept them, which was a bit of a curse because when you're breeding your own you've always got a third of them as culls and they didn't have any market value because no-one else wanted them, and there weren't any – – –. In later years, when the semis turned up and of course the roads started to get more manageable – – –. We used to get bogged going to *Naracoorte*, and you'd get bogged going to Lucindale. We could never go to Kingston; we were in the Kingston Council area but there was no way, there wasn't a road to Kingston at all unless you went up the railway line.

It was just too wet.

Yes. And to get to Adelaide – – –.

Would you go there in summer?

Yes, but there was only a sand track. You ever tried to go through the sand track – you know, we didn't have four-wheel drives or anything, just those old cars and once you bogged them you were buggered. And there were no tractors to pull them out, we didn't get a tractor until 1948.

How did you get petrol for your cars? You had to cart that yourself?

Everything you had to cart yourself. To start with, all the petrol was in four-gallon tins.

Would that come on the train?

Yes. Then, once Lucindale got a garage, and that was about 1976 I think Wally Oakes[?] opened the first Shell garage in Lucindale – and through the War you had petrol tickets and we all used to save up madly until we could get a forty-four-gallon drum. And, well, how do you get a drum out here? Because we didn't have any way, didn't have trailers, there was no way you could pull a trailer behind – well, we didn't know what a trailer was, anyway. So that was a real job to get the petrol out here.

Then you had to ration it all the time. Through the War all the cars had a tin of petrol sitting high up on the firewall and you started your car up on petrol then switched over to power kerosene, which was highly illegal but it was the only way you could get round. You either did that or had a gas producer on the back, which was pretty handy. But they used to start all the fires, the gas producers, because people would stop and have to clean the – you'd always carry it on the back bumper or sometimes they'd pull it in a trailer.

Were there many of them round here?

Not a great number because you had to have charcoal to burn in them and you had to make that yourself, and that wasn't easy to do because, see, if you built anything you didn't have any cement or anything like that, you did it all with lime, but you had to dig a pit about as big as the kitchen and then you'd put a layer of wood and a layer of stone that you picked up in the paddock and walked in with a dray and then put another layer of wood, until you got up to the top and then you covered it in with about a foot of dirt and lit it at the top and you just left a bit open for a chimney and it burned away there for a week, and if you were lucky it turned the stone into lime and then you had to go and pick all the ash bits out, and if you picked the right wood it would go away to ash that you couldn't see, and you see all the old buildings in between the rough stone and everything it's all this –

Lime.

– lime, and you can see all the bits of ash and everything in it. Well, that's because it was burnt in a pit. The same with the charcoal.

That's all the old freestone buildings.

Yes. Yes, because there wasn't any cement or anything, that was something that only came later on in life. Then you used local sand, which was dreadful stuff, unless you could get a little bit of red sand on these – where it runs down the hill, and down the bottom there's a shovelful or so of lovely washed sand, and that was terrific to work with. But you only kept that for a bit of plastering or something; the rest of it you had to dig out by hand and shovel it up on a trolley or a dray or a spring cart or something like that. You couldn't carry much in a spring cart because that was only meant for personal use, a spring cart. And to burn charcoal you had to also dig a pig – nowhere near as big – and do the same with that, and slow burning, and it'd turn the wood into lumps of charcoal, which would then burn in your gas producer and it was very much like a – you don't see them now, no-one's got a rabbit fumigator any

more, but they used to burn wood and pull it over water and the burning would make carbon monoxide which would –

Poison the rabbits.

– either poison the rabbits with carbon monoxide or run your car on it.

Did you have to use petrol with the gas?

Well, we didn't ever have a gas producer, I don't really know, but I would think that you would. But there were lots of funny –

Things invented.

– things invented to make your car go, because the petrol was just, you know, two hundred litres would have to last our farm for at least a month. Well, if you can have a look next time you buy petrol and think how much petrol you – and diesel and everything, you had to be very economical. You didn't just run in to get the mail or something like that, you rode a horse in. And Dad reckoned that there were five gates between Minnecrow and Avenue and if you had a good horse you could canter in there and if you were game you could jump the gates, and you could actually come back with the mail faster than you could to drive in there, because if you drove in you always – – –. (break in recording)

Can you tell us about when the phone was put on and how it worked?

Yes. Well, I've got the original letter that the concerned people of Avenue Range in 1915 wrote to the Minister of Transport, whoever he was then, and begged that he give them a mail service and a telephone service because the telephone line went past Avenue between Naracoorte and Kingston, and they said they had a person to actually do it, which was Auntie Hilda[?] – I'm sure it was Auntie Hilda because they didn't say who it was but we worked out Auntie Hilda was born in 1908 and this was 1915, and she was the postmistress for all those years and I'm sure it was her. Anyway, it's got all the people round Avenue and the Seckers[?] from Ardune – and incidentally it's [pronounced] 'Ardoon', it's not 'Ardune'; same as Didicoolum, it's not 'Didicoolum', it's 'Didicullum', and that's the way the old fellas pronounced it. And I know things are dreadful the way they're mispronounced, the grammatical errors people make these days are all highly Americanised, but you don't hear anyone calling it 'Ardoon' any more, but all the old fellas called it 'Ardoon', and all the old fellas called it 'Didicullum'. It's only the Johnny-come-laters that call it 'Didicoolum'.

So anyway, I think I didn't see any Limberts on there, at Bull Island, because they've been on Bull Island longer than anyone, and I think – because they had the train used to stop at Bull Island and take on water there, and there was an actual station and it was a mail stop as well that the Limberts had, had the telephone a long time before we did. Anyway, the first telephone went out to Cairnbank. Grieves didn't ever have it out at Fellwood, it didn't ever get out that far. And we joined on in 1927, and of course it was all done – you didn't ever get a grant or anything like that and all the post holes were dug by hand, and you didn't have any bulldozers or post hole diggers. They cut all the posts on the line, probably, bored them all. There was a two-line phone line, so it was very modern, and they put out a special telephone wire – I don't know what it was, but it used to rust like you've never seen – and that stayed with us right up till in the late 1950s, early '60s when we got the proper telephone line on, which has now been superseded as it's virtually useless, because when it was put there it was put there for everyone's telephone and now of course it's got so much to carry the poor old copper wires can't take it, so I don't know what they're going to do now but the telephone line has all been superseded, pretty well.

So you went through an exchange at Avenue, did you?

Yes, and that was open from nine in the morning till six at night with an hour off for lunch, and everyone on the party line had a special ring. We were two and Ungarami[?] was three, Coppings were one, and then you got a short-long-short and I think I was a short and a long. It was marvellous be if anyone got sick or anything there were no wirelesses. I can remember through the war years Dad had an old battery wireless – not a battery wireless as we know it – dreadful old batteries, and he used to sit there with his head in the wireless trying to listen to the war news, and we could only ever get 3WV, right up even now, with all the modern technology, you've got a very – you're almost a blackout as far as wireless reception goes, and I don't know what it is but we can't get any mobile telephones won't work here either, even a satellite phone won't work here. So someone doesn't like us when it comes to that. But yes, the telephone was a huge innovation and all of a sudden you could ring up.

We still couldn't get up to the doctor if someone got hurt. Well, Mum was a nurse and if someone got hurt they came galloping in to her. I can still remember a fella coming in, it'd be in the early '40s I think, the Leech[?] brothers had bought the paddock that we used to call 'Schofields' and they were ploughing that and the old tractor started to boil and he'd taken it off and scalded himself, and you've never seen a mess like it with Mum trying to fix up this poor fella, and they had to bring him

about six or seven miles over the ranges and everything to – – –. Because getting over the ranges was a real task because nothing – it was all bush tracks and if someone got bogged how do you get round that when you've got a great jacker[?] that'll – every time you went somewhere you got jacked up on a yakka and it was a real job to get anywhere. I can still remember this poor fella there with Mum trying to fix up all his – he was blistered and scalded over two-thirds of his body and of course he couldn't get his clothes off, it hurt so much he couldn't get his clothes off. And there was always someone with their fingers off or crushed or leg broken, and poor Mum not only had to look after five crazy kids but she had to, if a calf got stuck or a foal got stuck or something she was there. And of course she always had half-a-dozen lambs and a pet calf or something like that, and forty cats. How they – – –.

The women these days don't know they're living. They think they're working hard but they have absolutely no conception how hard it was for the women in those times because they used to have to bake the bread. The hard-working men, I mean no-one works physically anymore, so the women don't know how to feed men – well, they do up to a point, because if they feed them like they used to you'd all be dying of obesity, but when you're hard-working you need a good breakfast and a good morning tea and a good lunch, afternoon tea and then a nice big roast at night. And the women used to have to work like billy-o because they used to have to make it all, there was no shooting in the deli and buying some buns or anything, you had to make the buns and the cake for morning tea and fresh bread every day, and of course they used to get all their groceries, most of our groceries like that would come from Adelaide on the train so you'd have to buy bags of sugar and big bags of flour and then keep the weevils out of it, and it was no good saying crikey, you've come to the end of the flour, because everyone would everyone would starve because you didn't have enough petrol to get into Lucindale to get a pound of flour. And you used to have to make your own butter, of course, which was lovely.

Yes, and milk a cow every day.

Yes. Yes. That's the only thing Mum didn't do. Someone told her, 'Don't ever learn to milk a cow', which she didn't. (laughter) Otherwise she would have had that job as well, but mostly there were at least two families on the farm and Mum always had a couple of Dad's brothers or sisters or someone like that, there was always a whole host of people to feed.

When you killed a sheep she cooked as much as she could, there was no refrigeration whatsoever. We had an old cool safe after a while.

What, a water sort of thing?

Yes, an old Coolgardie safe where you put water up the top and it soaked down the sides and it was really good, it would keep milk. Because you've got to remember, you know, milk in the hot weather would go thick in twelve hours, so you had to have fresh milk all the time, so you had to – it was no good drinking condensed milk all the time. Eggs were the same, they used to preserve eggs in stuff called waterglass.[4] Mum had a huge pantry and you'd go in there and there'd be all these four-gallon kerosene tins or petrol tins, whatever, everything was in four-gallon tins with handles on it, and that'd be full of eggs with waterglass and it would seal the outside of the egg and they'd be able to, when the chooks stopped laying – – –.

The farmyard would have these monster haystacks that were full of mice and the chooks would get up and lay up there because they hated dispensing their eggs, and we'd be sent out to – if you heard a chook cackling you'd rush out to see where it came from, and the old chooks would be that smart that they'd lay an egg up on the top of these huge mounds of bloody hay and then wouldn't cackle till they got away a bit. (laughter) But being kids we knew all those tricks the chooks would get up to and every now and again we'd find a clutch of eggs, and of course being way up away from the water – and eggs have to be kept moist otherwise they go bad when they sit on them, and of course old chook would sit on these eggs way up on top of the mound of hay or the haystack and of course they wouldn't hatch out – and when we found them they'd be marvellous and we used to throw them at people. There's nothing better than that.

Mum'd be there – and of course, there was no water pressure or anything like that, all the water was – she used to bath five kids, herself and her husband and we had a thousand gallons of water and that was cemented, the thousand-gallon tank was cemented, and we had to live on that.

That was rainwater?

Yes. And the bore water, there was no pumps or anything on the bore water, had the old windmill that was put there by hand, dug by hand the hole in 1902 I think they put the old windmill there. It was an old Monitor.

How did the stock water? Just out of wedge holes.

Out of wedge holes, yes. And they had to be cleaned out about once a month in the summertime, and some wedge holes were good and some were no good, but that

[4] Sodium silicate solution.

water, that pump was the same pump with the old Monitor – they had renewed the head a couple of times, and the old Monitor was an old single ..... and eventually they had a Metters K on it – same tower – and that stayed there right up till they dug Jackie White's drain and within twelve months of them digging Jackie White's out there it went dry and it's never had water in it since. So people who say that the drains don't alter the depth of the bores don't know what they're talking about. But don't start me on drains or I'll never finish.

And there was a thousand-gallon tank up on a stand and that had to do the stock round the house, the old house cow and the horses, and Dad's garden, because we had to grow everything. You know, there were no greengrocery shops – well, there might have been at Naracoorte but we only went there once every six months, and that was a bloody so much of a day out.

What was your social – you were keen hunters, weren't you?

Yes.

Jumpers, hunting with the horses.

Yes. Well, a lot of people went to shows in those days and of course you went to the Kingston Show. They had a train that used to go and pick all the horses up on the way and now of course everyone turns up in a horse float and what have you, but in those days – still, I think the first show in Lucindale was back in the 1870s or something like that, 1880s, had seventeen hundred people there.

Gawd, strewth.

And a hundred years later they didn't have seven hundred. Because the shows were something that everyone used to –

Everyone went.

– everyone went to, yes, and made it their business to go there, go to the Lucindale Show. We used to canter our ponies in there in the morning and put them in the show all day and then canter them home at night. But all our horses were fit then. Now people talk about their horses being fit and dogs being fit and they take their dogs for a kilometre walk and then say the dog sleeps all day: well, when I went from – I hurt my back and couldn't ride horses any more so I had to get a bloody motorbike, and I used to do up to seventy k's a day on the motorbike and the dogs would run beside me all day and work the sheep as well, so they would done at the minimum seventy k's a day, and I'm sure they would have done well over a hundred, and people talk about a dog can only run two k's and it's exhausted. They don't know

what they're talking about. The same with the bloody horses. But anyway, my grandfather used to have a pair of buggy horses called 'Cigarette' and 'Charlie', a couple of greys, and he used to come down from Mount Gambier to Minnecrow – well, the closest I can ever get there is it's as close to a hundred miles and I don't think even cutting corners, and there wouldn't have been any roads he came on, he would have had to come across country all the way from Kalangadoo to Mount Bruis because Mount Bruis was one of these stopping points if you're going anywhere, and he used to come in at night and the same horses would do a hundred miles pulling a buggy. But people don't ever think about that these days.

Old Hensley, he used to be at Cairnbank until about 1923 or '4 or something, when the Coppings bought it. He went into Avenue and missed the train at Avenue, came back, put a new team of horses in his buggy and headed out for Bordertown and beat the train to Bordertown. Of course, you couldn't do it now because there's fences and everything in the way, but it just shows you how fast people can move with the horses compared with modern-day travel and how many – I mean, to me, from here to Bordertown the way I go is sixty miles, and there he was – I mean, the train had to go to Naracoorte and Wolseley and Bordertown, but the old fella still –

Still beat it.

– still beat the train to bloody Bordertown, yes. But getting back to the water and everything, everything Dad used to grow in the garden and the only fertiliser he had was sheep shit out of the woolshed, and he had a marvellous bloody orchard there. Each tree, he'd put bird wire – not bird wire, because that wasn't ever heard of in those days; it's just rabbit netting – over each tree to keep the birds away, and there would have been fifty trees there, right from cherries up to apricots, pears, quinces, plums, apples.

So the birds have always been a problem.

Oh, huge problem because then we had scrub right up to the back door and the birds never left us alone. Even in those days, the galahs would come in and hit the almonds and give us very few. And in those days there were no white cockies; a huge number of black cockies but they only landed in the pine trees, they didn't ever eat anything of ours, the black cockies; no white cockies and half a dozen galahs. Now of course, since everyone started to grow wheat and barley and everything, all the galahs and the cockatoos are here in ruddy clouds of them, so – – –.

But water was a real problem in those days. In the finish we had a huge cellar at Minnecrow and the only way we could get enough water, Dad plastered the cellar up

and we ran all the water into the cellar and that held about seven thousand gallons, and that was a huge amount of water, and that still holds water, the old cellar. And that's where we used to keep everything because you could put butter and milk down in the cellar and the cellar was about – how they ever did it I don't know, but it's in solid rock and it'd be at least ten feet by twenty feet and ten feet deep, I reckon. At least ten feet deep. If you killed a sheep or something, Mum would cook up as much as she could and we'd eat fresh meat and the rest of it, Dad had a house there – or shed, whatever you call it – a salt room and that had a huge big red gum that had been adzed off flat –

Chopping block?

– it was about six by four at least, it was bigger than six by four, it'd be about ten by four, I suppose, twelve by four – and the whole lot had saplings round it to stop the salt, and there was about four inches of stock salt, which we used to use a lot of, on it and he used to put the meat in there and everyone that went past the salt room would go in and turn the legs or the chops or whatever over. And if they ever killed a pig – they used to kill quite a few pigs, they always had a pig on the – but never a bullock because we hardly ever had a bullock and if we did we used to sell it to Hockings would come and get it and take it away for their butcher's shop.

What did you do with the salted meat?

Eat it.

Would that keep for a week –

Oh, yes.

– or for weeks or – – –?

Yes. If you properly salted it, it would keep for a month.

Right. You'd just leave it in the salt room.

Yes, but would recover the salt. It was all built up to about three feet high and then it had four feet of flywire around it to keep the flies out, because the flies would love to get in there. It used to didn't keep well down in the cellar. The cold meat did, if you cooked it and put it down in the cellar it was good, but yes, everything went down the cellar.

This salted meat, you could –

Beautiful.

– just roast it, would you?

No, no, no, boil it. Yeah, you only roasted – – –. See, the biggest thing was the caul fat because Mum used to make candles out of the caul fat, and soap, and that was the first – and a lot of the sheep didn't have the caul fat and we used to keep every single bit of fat there was because it was so valuable, and the caul and the kidney fat and everything Mum'd render down and make her candles and make her soap out of it, and you'd also use it in cooking because nowadays you'd put a roast in the oven and it cooks in its own fat; in those days, you'd go through fifty sheep trying to get one – Dad would always feel under their tail and he could feel whether it was fat or not, and it would be horrible killing a sheep that didn't have enough fat in them because Mum'd go berserk because there wouldn't be any caul fat to render down to make candles and what have you, because we used a lot of candles for light and hurricane lights to go outside, because the lav[atory] was always outside, well away from the house.

All our lights were kerosene lights.

When did you get the power?

We didn't get power until 1948 because Dad bought an old – well, it wasn't old, it was a new one – thirty-two-volt plant. We didn't know anything about electricity in those days and it was only a little eight hundred-watter with a two-horsepower Lister engine driving it that used to get sticky valves all the time. It was always stopping and starting, and you could very little stuff in thirty-two-volt in those days. We had a drill, a post drill. But Dad had manufactured a tractor one out of a handpiece and an old head gear and drove it off the belt pulley of – the first tractor we had was a 1948, an old Hart-Parr. That was eighteen horsepower on the draw bar, old twin-cylinder job, and that wouldn't pull much, it was only eighteen horsepower on the draw bar and thirty-six on the engine, it took eighteen to push it along, a steel-wheeled job. Then he broke it – – –.

Where were they from?

They were made in America.

Oh, right.

And when it got really hot she had a little cock there that you'd turn on and let a bit of water into the combustion chamber to cool it down a bit, and that was a petrol–kerosene one, and you had an oil pump there that you used to wind up by hand and oil everything before you'd start it, and you could never quite tell whether it was

firing on one or two unless you knew what you were doing, and you used to start it with the giant handles that took an eighteen-stone man to be able to turn it. Then we broke out and bought the first Fordson that was out and that had a belt pulley on it, which was great for cutting wood because in those days they used to only have the one engine round the place and the shearing engine was a five-horse Sunshine two-stroke and that was a hit-and-miss job, and when it was working it'd fire on every stroke and when it was racing it'd fire on about every sixth stroke. So four shearers would pull into gear and it would be back – especially if Dad was grinding, and it would be flat-out firing – – –.

END OF DISK 1: DISK 2

Charlie Bruce here interviewing John Paltridge about the history of the Minnecrow district. John, do you want to tell us a bit about the history of the district, the early settlers?

Yes, well, it started off of course in Jackie White's time when he owned most of this stuff and there were no real boundaries here, nothing was surveyed or whatever, and the counties just went from this bluff to that bluff, and then it got a bit more organised and the Government suddenly decided that they needed some money out of all this so they had big areas and lots of people came and some of them were absentee landlords and some of them were just going through. There was quite a bit of stock movement going through from Victoria through to Adelaide, and a number of stock routes through here that are still here – there's Three Chain Roads. But in those days they weren't surveyed and originally Keilira was run by Jimmy Brown, who also had Tilley's Swamp and on that ride where he went through he was on most of his country, so he knew where to go heading for Adelaide.

Then Hensley had Cairnbank, which went right down to Robert England's and Rory Paltridge's boundary, and that was the boundary there of Keilira and Cairnbank. Cairnbank, they had country of Fiveash right through, that at the moment's owned by Robert England, that was the Cairnbank horse paddock, because all that country through there was wonderful blue rush country that the horses just loved, and of course since the drainage was put there it's all covered with that dreadful saltwater tea tree which doesn't allow anything to grow underneath it once it gets mature. There was very little saltwater tea tree here when the white man first came here, but I can't believe that you go along and people are actually planting it down the side of the roads now. It makes you feel sick, that's horrible stuff.

Anyway, see, where Vandepeers were, that paddock originally was all freshwater swamps there and Jimmy Brown used to put all his – had six thousand hoggets and

that was their summer food out there, all the tongue weed on all the swamps, and when they started to drain Penola they ran all the water up through here and that altered everything and turned all those swamps salty, and now of course they've got deep drains through them to try to get rid of it, but when Grandpa bought it from .... about eleven thousand acres would only carry about six to seven hundred sheep then, because by that time the rabbits had got in and turned all the wonderful range country into just scrub. It's an interesting bit about the Aboriginals used to live out there, it was one of their famed camping spots was out at the Cave Swamp, and it's funny how everyone's always gone out and had picnics at the Cave Swamp right up till now, and that was one of their burial grounds there on Mallee Island, which has since been cleared, and they used to bury all their dead up in the – they used to put them up high in the mallee scrub on platforms and then they'd stand underneath it and as they melted they'd rub all the juice into themselves so that they could get all the good bits and it would come off onto them.

Of course, they reckon that *keilira*'s the name of the hopbush that grows all round here, but old Jim Kelly, he used to own Keilira, he got it from Jimmy Brown, he always reckoned that the Abos didn't ever have names for things like that and when the old white man of course said, 'What name belong that bush, Jackie?' And Jackie said, '*Keilira*, *keilira*, I don't know what you're talking about', and of course they decided then that the hopbush was called *keilira* so that's what the place is called and everyone thinks *keilira*'s the name of the hopbush but I don't think that's right. But old Jim Kelly's gone so you'll never know, and so are all the blacks, they're all gone too, so – – –. Influenza killed most of them.

What's your early memories of the Aborigines round here?

They were all good fellas here. They used to come and – – –. The only one that ever lived here permanently was out at Mount Scott and all the rest of them moved into Kingston. They used to come out here and they used to fence out there on Vandepeer's, that was one of their good spots out there and they used to trap rabbits out there and fence for Dad or my grandpa for living out there, and they used to come round here just down here when I was a kid, build a wurley and everything out of – and he stayed. Old Sid Steed stayed there for years trapping rabbits and doing a bit of fencing and shearing and what have you, because through the War we had Abos shearing for us all the time because in those days they weren't frightened of hard work and everything whereas now they're living mostly on the dole.

Were they good shearers?

Yes, some of them were excellent shearers. I mean, the shearers in those days used to work like billy-o. They used to swing on the doors – they had narrow combs – – – . The year Dad died I had to get Merv Braithwaite in and that was one of his first sheds as a contractor, and there were four shearers there and one shore two hundred and thirty-two, one shore two hundred and thirty-one, one shore two hundred and twenty-seven and the poor bastard dragging the chain shore two hundred and nineteen. And they were with narrow combs. There's very few people nowadays that can, and they certainly couldn't do it with narrow combs because they don't work like they used to. They used to swing on the doors and look for the – grabbing the last one and half of them would shear the last sheep through the smoko and all the rousies used to – Dad used to go berserk because the poor old engine would never get a rest because the rousies would be barrowing[5] all the time through the smoko and through lunch and everything and you'd never switch the motor off. But nowadays no-one does that, or there's no young shearers shearing at the moment. There are a few young fellas taken on, but there's no point bending your back shearing when you can go up and drive a Euclid that a woman can drive and pull in twice as much as you'd make shearing.

But no, the Abos were – and of course very few of them drank in those days – well, they weren't allowed to, but it was a reasonably good idea because – – –. Anyway, you'd better not go up that path, I suppose. But they used to come out, but of course now they don't, and of course there's nothing to hunt now anyway because all the swamps have been drained and no ducks to shoot, and you're not allowed to trap rabbits. We live in a land of poofters, which gives me a big attack of the bloody screaming shits, I can tell you. Here. But the Abos here were originally a very nice mob. They weren't warlike or anything. But unfortunately the influenza and diphtheria and things like that just ironed them out, they just didn't have any – well, no-one did. Diphtheria killed so many kids when they were young and, see, old John Hensley[?] didn't believe in doctors and his two kids got diphtheria and he just knelt by their bed and prayed and said, 'If the Lord takes them he can have them', so the Lord did want them so they're buried down the bottom of the Cairnbank garden.

When was that house built?

[5] *I.e.* finish shearing a partly-shorn sheep at the end of a run.

I'd have to look up. That and Crower were built by the same fella at the same time, and nearly all the stuff was imported from England, all the slate roofs and everything, and they were very smart houses in those days.

That was during some wool boom, was it?

I'd have to look up in the books because – – –.

They're huge houses compared with everything else, aren't they?

Yes. But they had huge areas of country. They used to run sixty and seventy thousand sheep and you can imagine – how they ever shore and mustered and how they ever did all that I've no idea, because – – –.

They had a lot of men working for them.

They had a huge lot of men, but I mean they've got to be cooked for and looked after and bedded down, and the sheep physically how you ever shear sixty thousand sheep under a gum tree I just can't understand, because we just can't do it. But they used to do it. But, see, things are so different now because when they first got here a lot of this country was covered with –

Grassy stuff.

– yes, and very edible grasses, and the main thing was little tiny sheoak, then of course the rabbits ate all the sheoak out and now there's nothing. I mean, now if we brought twenty thousand sheep into a paddock it'd just make a huge mess of it, so how they ever worked all bringing the sheep in and looking after them and everything I don't know. But they did. I mean, Crower itself, I forget how many acres that was then but that was only the horse paddock of the big places and of course all that was all done with horseback and people. But they didn't ever pay them much, I think it was old Kelly, an old chap working for them used to work for a pound a week and he went to Kelly one day and said, 'Could I have a draw on my wages?' and Kelly said to him, 'What for?' And he said – I forget what it was, he wanted twenty pounds anyway, and Kelly only used to pay him once a year. (laughter) So he ended up he sacked him because he reckoned if a fella couldn't live for twelve months on last year's wages he wasn't worth having. So things are a bit different.

And the amount of water that there used to be here's hugely different, too. My maternal grandfather walked up the Coorong, as everyone did, looking for work and he got to Kingston and of course everyone used to get onto the pubs then and they knew what sheds were shearing and he heard there was a job going out at Keilira so

he walked, carried his swag, walked out, and from Blackford to halfway across the Avenue Flat – he was six foot four and he carried his swag on his head, and the water lapped his chin walking across there. It's a bit different now. So yes, there was a huge amount.

But it must have been dry, otherwise all these people wouldn't have – I think there were three or four families on "Minnecrow" that were – because about 1865 or something like that they started to survey it up into hundreds and then they resumed a lot of this land and Keilira lost a lot and they split a lot of country up and opened it up into – they used to have to live on the block for five months of the year to keep it, so they used to build all these houses, old houses are built on a section line and they'd live in this end of the house for six months and that end of the house for six months and then they could get two sections. There was lots of country out there that you can see it's been ploughed and cropped, so they wouldn't have done that unless there was dry enough to try to put in crops on the flat country there before it would rain, it would be absolute madness, but those fellas did it so there must have been a dry time for ten or twelve, fifteen years for them to do it all before it turned wet again. I can remember as a kid there was a house out there, out the back where Chris [Paltridge]'s block there, that house was habitable and he only left there because – you know, they had a garden and adzed these great bloody logs out and they used to water the bullocks with a big bucket, you know, they'd swing it in, big leather bucket, and then swing it out and they wouldn't let the stock walk into the wedge holes, and a couple of kids went down there and got drowned, so he buried them there under the tree and left. But he must have been there for a number of years, I don't know that there's ever any record of any of those fellas.

What, were they just squatters or did they own the land? Or leasors, were they?

Well, it was all leasehold until this freeholding business, till the Labor Government decided they want some more money so they freeholded it all, but it was all leasehold then so I take it it was on agricultural leases: if you lived on it for so many years and grew a crop on it you could have it. And that was round about the 1870s when they started to cut all the country up and then Cairnbank lost all that country.

Sort of resumed the great big holdings.

Yes, and tried to get people to come and live down here by opening all this country up for selection. And we got paddocks there, we got Middle Selection and Bottom and Top Selection, but who used to own them all – – –. I take it the Shannons did,

owned Minnecrow, because they built three houses there and the stables, so they wouldn't have done that in five minutes.

It's amazing all the old surveying, isn't it, like the roads everywhere, and when they did that it must have been all scrub.

Well, what they did was follow all the tracks. Out round 5S there used to be a track because that went straight across to Mount Scott, from my block straight across to Mount Scott, and when Baingers had bought it Bill [Paltridge] closed that off because he didn't want Baingers taking his cattle through his place.

Oh, so that would have been an original route sort of going from Avenue or Cairnbank or somewhere to the Mount Scott?

Yes, but Avenue wasn't theirs. They used to come from Naracoorte, past Fairview, they had a changing station at Fairview, over to – they had a changing station at Cairnbank, and then you either went straight that way to Reedy Creek or out through Fiveash to Mount Scott.

Right, and that'd be the way to Kingston, would it?

Yes. And a lot of the wool used to come down by bullock wagon, it'd come down to Keilira, come through the little – see, the big trouble, getting over these bloody ranges in those days in the summertime was a real bloody – – –.

Gutless sand.

Gutless bloody sand, and they used those little avenues, you know, that's what the avenue in there is called 'Avenue' because it's that little avenue there that they could get through.

Oh, right.

That's where the water used to run through there, because each of these flats is fourteen feet lower than the next one and most of the water goes south to north.

So Avenue Range was a track through the range?

Yes. But originally that was called 'Downer'. They only changed it to 'Avenue' when the War was on. They came down and pulled all the signs down so that when the Japs landed they wouldn't know where they were. (interviewer laughs) Well, that's the way people thought in those days. It's all very well laughing about that, but we didn't – you couldn't pick up any wireless. No-one came through, there was no road anywhere to come through so no traveller came through to tell you anything, and there were no papers, no TV, no telephone: how would you know what was going

on? But, see, once the train line went through all the big old fellas like Jackie Walker and Ben Heath that used to be in Lucindale and those fellas didn't have a job anymore and they had to resort to road making, because the bullocks were good for road making but then they used to have to dig all this bloody gravel out by hand and chuck it onto a dray or a wagon by hand and then go and put it out on the road and break all the rocks up with a knap hammer and there was a bit of metal there, a tiny bit there where the water used to run, about opposite, back a bit from "Minnecrow" through to "The Glade" there. There was a little bit of Ben Heath's metal there, and all he did was just make it wide enough for one car to drive on and it was all broken up with a knap hammer.

Into two-inch pieces.

Yes, and it'd never wash away and the water just used to run through it, and he could sit there and hear the water tinkling over it all night. And that was the deepest bit, there, and of course now that's all covered over with bitumen and tar and what have you.

Must have been wet.

Yes. Righto, switch her off.

END OF INTERVIEW.