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Full transcript of an interview with

CLIVE ERROL BROOKS

On 04 September 2008

by Sally Stephenson

for the

MEADOWS 150 ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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Interview of Mr Clive Errol Brooks conducted by Dr Sally Stephenson on 4th September 2008 at Meadows, South Australia, for the Meadows 150 Oral History Project.

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I'm Sally Stephenson interviewing Mr Clive Brooks in Meadows on 4th September 2008 for the Meadows Oral History Project. This project is funded by a Positive Ageing Development Grant from the Department for Families and Communities and grants from the History Trust of South Australia and the District Council of Mount Barker.

Clive, I'll just start with some biographical questions. Can you tell me your full name, please?

Clive Errol Brooks.

And when and where were you born?

Twenty-six one '45, and I was born in Monreith Hospital.

What were your parents' names?

Gladys Brooks and Keith Bowden Brooks.

And your mother's maiden name?

Blake.

What were your grandparents' names? On your father's side?

They were – well, I just used to call them 'Grandma' and 'Grandpa', I can't even think of their names now.¹

That's okay. And do you have any [children]?

Yes, I've got Troy and Leanne, and Troy's got three girls and daughter Leanne's got two girls, so I've got five grandchildren, all girls.

Do you have any brothers or sisters?

Yes, I've got a brother, Len, and I've got a sister, Valerie.

¹ Bertha Anne and Thomas Bowden Brooks [CEB]

What work did your parents do?

My dad was a farmer all his life. We're still on the same property, I've only shifted five hundred metres from one end of the farm to the other, and that's where I'm staying.

I think you mentioned to me in our preliminary interview that it was a war block that he had, is that right?

Yes, it was given to the soldiers back in the olden days and they developed it and then it's a perpetual crown lease, which I think my nephew now – it's all now freehold.

Were there many other war blocks in that area?

I'm not really sure, but I can remember in my younger days it was nearly all scrub, that's all it was. We used to go out and clean up wattle, cut down wattle trees and cart wattle bark over to the tannery at Mount Barker to clear a bit of land so that Dad could milk more cows, back in the good old days.

Can you tell me a bit more about how you got the wattle bark? How did you strip it from the trees?

Well, you used to just cut them down, then you'd have a sort of shelf made up, just put it up there and belt it with the back of a tomahawk or an axe and split it, then just peel it off. It was rough work because the wattle bark was very rough and it was scratchy as anything, but make up bundles of it, tied up with the old baler twine – back in those days, we'd a lot of baling wire, not the twine – and load up the truck and take it over to Jacob's factory.

And how large was that block that your parents had?

Eighty acres.

I'd like to ask you now a bit about your schooling in Meadows. Where did you go to school?

Meadows Primary School, start to finish. Then I went to Goodwood Boys' Technical High School in Adelaide, went on Robertson's bus, for three years and then I left there and I had the choice of being an electrician or a carpenter. I chose to be an

electrician with Meadows Electrical Service, which is still going at Meadows but different owners, of course.

If we could come back to your schooling a bit before we talk about your work, what do you remember about your schooling in Meadows?

Schooling in Meadows? Well, there wasn't too much to remember. I remember the oval there was shocking and I never did like school, I only went to school to play sport.

What sports did you play at that time?

Well, cricket – at that stage I was cricket and football. Later in life I turned from cricket to tennis and football, then when I got too old to play football I umpired football.

What was the oval like then, when you were at school?

Well, in the summertime it was beautiful, but in the wintertime it was a shocker: the septic tank from the school and the Hall used to find its way out onto the oval and when you were playing football there at times its smelling was something fearsome. Nowadays, OH&S² would just ban it, but that's what we did back in those days. You played in conditions you might as well – it was like a cow paddock at times; in fact, a cow paddock might have been better.

And then you mentioned at high school you went down to Goodwood on the bus. What route did the bus take going down?

Well, we used to go down through Coromandel Valley, Blackwood, down Unley Road. Then we used to get off where Alfred James Funerals used to be and I'd have to walk down to Goodwood Road from Unley Road, which used to take us, I suppose, fifteen minutes. But we used to always have fun, there was about eight or ten of us at any time going to school down there.

So it wasn't unusual, then, to be going to Goodwood?

No. No, a lot of the boys up here used to go to Urrbrae, being the agricultural school. Some used to go to Unley High School, and the girls used to go to Unley Girls' High

² OH&S – occupational health and safety.

School, and Unley High. But there was a full busload, two buses every day, backwards and forwards down there, taking the children from up this way.

And that bus originated from Meadows?

Meadows, yes. Robertson's Bus Service. They used to have another bus shed down at Clarendon where you used to get on one bus from here and get onto that, then catch onto that bus, because the bus we was on used to go down South Road, then the school buses would go from Clarendon through to Adelaide and back home each night. So you used to leave home at ten past seven and get home about quarter to [six], [six] o'clock each night.

Now, you've mentioned when you left school that you had the choice of being an electrician or a carpenter, but did you consider dairy farming?

No. No, I didn't like the idea of seven days a week, fifty-two weeks of the year. I used to milk cows on weekends for neighbours, because I could get paid there, if you do it at home, all right, it made everybody feel good but didn't do much for me.

So what made you choose to be an electrician, then, rather than a carpenter?

Well, I just spoke to the two people – I had Bill Fleming and Mr Gilbert who was the carpenter in Meadows then – and I just spoke to both of them and I just worked out that I liked Mr Fleming. [section of transcript deleted].

And who were the main customers that you had in that Meadows Electrical Service?

He used to do the – well, anywhere, Echunga, Macclesfield, Meadows, Prospect Hill. There was another electrician was John Buckley, he was the other man, other qualified electrician, and I was the apprentice; so I used to work with John just about ninety per cent of the days and ten per cent I'd be working with Bill Fleming. So we used to keep busy.

And was that just in houses that you were doing the work or in local businesses – – –?

Back in those days it was everything.

Can you tell me a little bit more about what that involved?

Well, it was all the pumps around here, the bores, all the irrigation. In the summertime you was doing pumps – you know, you might be doing three or four pumps a week, connections. But I liked wiring up houses because I could finish up wire a house without even thinking about it, but some of the others it was a bit technical, when you start putting timers and relays and delays and everything for bores to work and that. So I used to stick to what I knew well and I left the rest to the others.

So how long were you working as an electrician?

Five years. And then my father-in-law had a farm and he used to have a milk truck as well, so while I was still an electrician I used to go and drive his milk truck for him on the weekend to give him a spell, because he'd sold his property and left it and bought a milk round, which was milk cans in those days. And then the deal fell through with the property so then he had to go back on the farm, so then he had a farm to run plus a milk round, which first pick-up was seven o'clock in the morning, so on the Saturdays and Sundays I used to often – well, just about every Sunday I used to go and do the milk round for him to give him a spell and some Saturdays I'd do it, depends what I was involved in football and that, because you'd be finished by ten o'clock, half-past ten, eleven o'clock my milk round and the rest of the day is yours. And then to finish up he decided he wanted to sell that so I bought it off of him, and then when I finished my apprenticeship I went straight from one job to drive a milk truck seven days a week. At least I had half the day off. You'd get up and start, first pick-up seven o'clock, and a lot of days you'd be home before midday and the rest of the day was yours.

What sort of truck was it?

I started off with a Commer 'knocker' in the olden days, then I went to – well, I had lots of Commers. Then I went to Bedfords, and I had the last milk truck picking up milk cans in the district, in fact in South Australia, so nobody can take that record away from me, but to finish up with I was only picking up I think it was thirty-three cans of milk from farmers that never turned over to bulk, and I think my biggest pick-up was three cans, so I was going to about [twelve] or [fifteen] customers to pick up thirty-odd cans of milk and that's all I was getting.

And before the bulk tanks were introduced, how many cans would you have been picking up then?

Well, back in those days we had the factory on the Kondoparinga Road at Meadows and I was with Dairy Vale so I used to pick up around Bull Creek and that and into Meadows, and I'd drop off three-parts of my load at Meadows and then I'd pick up and I'd go out through Ponders End and out through to Mount Compass and have another load on, so you're virtually doing one and three-quarter loads per day, in the spring season. Then it gradually dropped back. So that's what we used to do.

Then there was a job come up, a cream run, which used to mean I'd leave Mount Compass and pick up all the cans and then I'd go to Adelaide, pick up all the parcels – at Parkside there was a Dairy Vale factory, used to pick up the cream from there, then I'd go up to Kenton Valley, pick up the cream from there, then I'd call into the Balhannah Railway Station and that milk used to come up from down the south, the cream used to come up from the South-East, and load it up there. Then I'd be back to Meadows and pick up the cream from there, drop off parcels, then back to Mount Compass and drop off all the cream, then load up my milk cans and go back home. Those days I didn't use to get home till five o'clock at night.

So how many years were you doing that work for?

Good question now, don't really think – I suppose it must have been [nine]-odd years, give or take. Not really sure.

So what stage was it, then, was it immediately after that that you started working for the Council?

No, no. When I got told by a man that Dairy Vale had come in and gave me one days' notice that I'd finished on the milk cans I flew off the handle to him and he gave me a month, so I had a month to work out what I was doing. So I went and bought a brick truck, then when my month was up thanked Dairy Vale for the time I'd been with them and left there on one Friday and went and started driving a brick truck on the Monday, so then I worked for Hallett Bricks for must have been close to [seventeen years] – mightn't have been quite that long, but quite a while – delivering bricks all around the countryside, which meant I had to drive to Allenby Gardens every day for the start off and then they changed and I went down to Lonsdale for a

while. Then they closed the Lonsdale yard so then I had to drive out to Golden Grove every day. And to finish up with the private contractors come in and had their trucks and the private fellows got no loads at all, virtually, so I'd leave home at six o'clock in the morning and get out to Golden Grove and do one load of bricks and I could be home by nine o'clock, so that's when I gave that up and went and worked for the Council. Been there working ever since for [sixteen] years, one month and twelve days.

So at that stage it was the District Council of Mount Barker when you joined it?

No, there was the District Council of Meadows – no, that wasn't quite – – –. It was Mount Barker Council but there was still a depot at Meadows and they used to work from Meadows. Because I went and applied for a job at Meadows yard, but my mate got that job, but they made a job for me over at Mount Barker. So I had to drive to Mount Barker every day, but it wasn't too long after that the Meadows depot was closed down and those fellows all come to Mount Barker anyway.

What has your work at the Council involved?

Well, now I'm virtually in charge of anything out on council land, from people's property out to the road. Anybody wants to do any work out there they've sort of got to catch up with me. And I'm looking after all council buildings, so all the halls, anything like that, public toilets, communities have got different little halls and that and if they want to do something most of them are allowed to do it but they've sort of got to approach Council if they want help with it and if something goes wrong it's my problem to sort it out.

So what's that like, working with the different little communities?

Well, I like it, because I'm between a rock and a hard place a bit because I'm the Chairperson of the Meadows Rec[reation] Grounds, so I've got to be seen to be unbiased, but I'm all for the committees because I know how hard we work to keep our buildings and that looking good. And the Council, they're now starting to appreciate what we do, but it's still hard work because some places get – – –. (break in recording)

So you were talking to me just a moment ago about working for the Council and working with the local community groups as well.

Well, what happened, when I first went to the Council I went as a truck driver, because I'd got a heavy duty, heavy articulated driver's licence which allowed me to drive any truck at the Council. But then only eight years ago I messed up a knee – it was probably sport-related, but it finished up at work when it packed up on me, so I had to have an operation. So at one stage I was bow-legged, now I'm not because they had to break my leg and straighten it. So then when I come back and finished up with I couldn't work on the outside workforce so then I got transferred into the office, which I thought was the end of the earth for the first three or four years. I still don't like it, but I know I've got to do it because I just can't work outside, so I've adapted sitting in an office and I've even adapted to use a computer. On the computer I can do what I have to and that's about it, I don't go doing anything else, I don't go googling or anything like that. The grandkids tell me you can do this and do that, but not for this duck. So that's what's happened there.

And then back here two years ago on my brother's birthday I had a car run into my other leg and messed my other knee up, so now I've got two crook knees. But it hasn't changed my work style or anything, but now I don't have to favour one leg because one's as bad as the other.

What sorts of facilities do you look after for the Council? Can you tell me a little bit more about them?

Well, it's all the halls, all the – not really the rec grounds so much, because that comes under horticulture; but if they want to do work on the rec grounds like they want to put up buildings and fix buildings up and if it's construction it's sort of the Council's problem; if it's maintenance work I've got to tell them, 'I'm sorry, you've got to pay for this because this is maintenance'. And so any of the committees can put in a request to me and I put it through to the boss, because we've got to budget so much of every year to spend and we've got to spend it wisely.

All the asbestos removal, we're getting rid of all the asbestos out of the buildings gradually, because each year it costs us plenty for a person to walk into a building and say there's asbestos there, then they send us a bill for that inspection. So we

picked on all the small ones for a start to get rid of most of what we'd call them, the high cost of the inspections for little reward for us, so we got rid of a lot of those are done; now we're down to the jobs where you're looking at between let's say ten thousand to forty thousand dollars to remove asbestos and replace it. So when you get a budget of something like fifty or sixty thousand dollars a year you can't do two or three jobs; you've got to pick on one job. But now we've only got a – well, there's enough of them left, but I've only got another like about eighteen months to go in the workforce, but we'll have well over half of them cleaned up by that time.

I deal with ETSA³, any work they want to do on the road – – –. All the, what do you call them, the services – ETSA, Telecom, SA Water and that – they can just come and do what they like on our land, but they do let us know so we just file that away in the records for later on.

Has that changed over the years, the way that your job has worked? Has Council taken on more responsibility for facilities, for example?

Like I said earlier, it's got better now because at one stage you were dealing with one person that used to deal with like ten things in the Council; well, now there's a person in the Council that deals specifically with this job and he hasn't got six other jobs to worry about as well. So to me, like I said, now the committees get a lot better deal, and I'm hoping by the time I leave it is better still. But, as I said, I've got eighteen months to try and get this sorted out and that's what I'm pushing for, is to get equal opportunity for all sporting facilities, all committees, throughout the Council. At this stage the playing fields are not quite level, it's a bit uneven.

In what way do you think it's uneven?

I can't say that because of work.

That's fine. You mentioned sport, I know that's played a really big part in your life. After you left school, what sports did you play for Meadows?

Well, when I was going to primary school I represented South Australia in the cricket. Lucky enough to go to Western Australia playing SAPSASA⁴ cricket when I

³ ETSA – Electricity Trust of South Australia

⁴ SAPSASA – South Australian Primary Schools Amateur Sports Association.

was in primary school. Then I played cricket all the time at Meadows, I went down and played with Sturt for a while but I found that was too big a drain. And back in those days money wasn't that much of it around and to play cricket down there you had to do it all yourself, didn't get paid anything. But then when I went and I played football for Sturt and they used to pay my fuel money, which is all I wanted. I didn't want to make money out of it, I just didn't want to lose money in it, because I couldn't afford it. So I played football and cricket all my life, virtually.

Then probably when I was about, I don't know, thirty-fiveish I gave up cricket and turned to tennis and played that till I was fifty-something before I messed my knee up.

To come back to when you were playing football and cricket, particularly for the town, what was it like being part of the club?

It was good. That's the part I liked about Meadows is the cricket. You were all friends, all knew each other. The football was virtually the same. In those days there was virtually no outsiders in it, it was just all the locals. We struggled like hell, especially in the football, because when I was playing – before I went to town I was playing junior football then I might play a senior Colts game of football, then I could play an A-grade game of football, because Meadows just didn't have the numbers of players in the top teams. And that's how it used to be: used to often forfeit the B-grade and go out and play in the A-grade, and you might only have sixteen players in the A-grade. If you didn't have fifteen, well, you had to forfeit, so that's what we used to do in those days. But they were good days.

Who were the coaches?

Back in those days, well, I can remember Cec O'Leary[?], Murray Hibbard was the cricket coach, he was my neighbour. He was our, like I said, next-door neighbour. But he coached us all through our cricket years. In fact, I don't remember another cricket coach except for him. In the football there was Viv Maywald. I coached Meadows for, I don't know, three or four years, five years, I don't know, when I come back from Sturt, before I went down and I coached and captain-coached Kangarilla. Managed to get premierships at Meadows and premierships at Kangarilla. That's how that went.

So the coaches then were all locals. I think now they're not, are they?

No. There has been some local coaches, but I'd say eight out of ten you get now come from out of the townships.

Does that make a difference, do you think?

It probably does, but if you can't get a local to do it you've got to come up with somebody. All right, these coaches might get paid a bit, and I'm hoping money's not taken over in this league yet too much. But I believe up in some of the northern towns that they don't quite buy a team but it's getting that way.

When you were playing, did the football teams have trainers?

Oh, yes. Yes, we had trainers, but they weren't — —. See, nowadays you'd have to be accredited by the leagues and that to be a trainer. Back in those days you'd just grab anybody you could and tell them, 'Just rub a bit of oil on this one', or, 'Take a wet, cold towel out and throw it in his face, that'll get him going', and things like that in the good old days.

So what were the facilities like that you had? Were there clubrooms and things at that stage?

Yes, we had an old besser block building, I remember, first, and we used to have to go out and pump water up to the tank outside with a hand pump, and then it'd come back through two Dux hot water systems, one on top of each shower, and if you turned the water on too fast it was too cold and you turned it down too low it was too hot, and it was I'd call it primitive, to say the best. And the conditions we played in were terrible, so having a shower, lot of times you'd think, 'Well, get the worst of it off, go home and get in a bath home and have a good shower'. A lot of times you'd have a shower up here and then still go home and have a shower, just to get the rest of it off you, because there was only two showers and even then the opposition, you played the opposition on the weekend, still only two showers, so it was first in best dressed.

And after the games, did the club stay and have a celebration together, or — —?

Back in those days there was no clubrooms. It was just change rooms and that was it. Once you walked outside the door you was out in the open and there was nothing

else. It wasn't till thirty-odd years ago when we had to shift the oval that we built the complex we've got at Meadows now, because it worked out that the public toilets at Meadows, just on the eastern side of the Hall, were built on Education land so the Education Department woke up one day that they were there and we had to shift those. So when we had to shift those, and part of the oval was on Education ground, so we had to shift the oval, so we had to shift the oval down the hill and that's when we built the new – shift the oval, new tennis courts, new complex, new tennis courts, everything now is – I'd say conditions now in Meadows are just about as good as we've got in the Hills.

How was that all organised? Who did the work of shifting the oval and building the new facilities?

The Council done nearly all of it. Can't thank the Council enough for that. Because that's back when we had the Meadows Council was an identity on its own, so what we had to do is go over and see the workers there – because they all lived in Meadows, most of them; some of them come from Kangarilla – but those fellows would come out and work on all the weekend, you know, the graders, tractors, everything, and shifted the oval. It was a huge job, shifting that oval.

And who built the new clubrooms?

Well, I was the – started off we had a fellow called – what was his name? – Granville someone. We got him in as a supervisor. And that fell on its ears after a while because he was never around to tell them what to do. So I took the job over as the supervisor – that's when I was carting bricks, so every day I'd be home by half-past ten, eleven o'clock, and then race up there and work up there till whatever time of the night, to keep the brickies and everything, [moving]. [section of transcript deleted]. I got all the bricks for that building. So soon as I'd finished I'd bring the bricks home and we built that building.

And was that volunteer labour?

No, no. We got a grant for that. The Rec Grounds paid for some of it, Council went guarantor for our loan, and Gary Dawe would be the best one to talk on that one

because he knows all the ins and outs of that. But I was virtually the supervisor for that job.

So when was the Recreation Ground Committee formed?

That was formed before I was born. I can always remember a Rec Ground Committee at Meadows, when we used to meet down in the old besser block building. I've been on that since, I don't know, sixteen, eighteen years of age, so had lots of years on it. Been good years.

So you're the president now, I think, aren't you? How many years have you been ---?

I call myself 'Chairperson' now.

Chairperson. How many years have you been chairperson?

Too long to remember. I would hate to think.

So can you describe what that committee does for me, please?

Well, the committee's made up of two people from each sporting club, like at present we've got two from the cricket, two from the football, tennis and netball. We've had soccer in it, we've had bowling club in it, but the bowling club went on their own way back I would say best part of fifteen, twenty years ago. But I believe now they may be coming back into our fold because there's moves up there to change the bowling green all around, but got a meeting next week, that'll decide some of that. And then there's three people from outside the committee that can be on that, so anybody in the township can get on the committee, because I'm one of those now because I don't represent tennis, netball or anything, so I'm an outsider. And we used to meet the first Monday every month, then about two years ago – because the council representative of our district, our councillor, who's supposed to be on our committee, and they couldn't come to our meeting because they got a council meeting every first Monday every month – so we changed ours to the second Monday of every month, and now we have the councillor come so he's on the committee as well, so we're supposed to have at least [seven] there every meeting, sometimes we get up to eleven and sometimes we don't get enough to have a quorum, but most of the times we do.

So what are the sort of projects that you've been discussing recently in the committee?

Well, there's big discussions on at present because we would like to make the oval about fifteen to twenty metres longer because we've probably got the smallest oval in the Association because we're cramped at either end, and we're hoping that we might put in a price on the land directly north of the oval so when Mrs [Hayes] passes on or wants to bequeath us that bit of land we'd love it, but we'd like to have the first option of buying that land so we can extend the oval, because at this stage it's not quite big enough for football. It's good for cricket, there can be some high-scoring cricket matches on there, because it's just a little bit small; but that's one of them. They want lights, like I said, on the oval to make it so they can – well, the cricketers are talking about if they could make up a twenty-twenty cricket or something like that at night-time to raise money. But I think other towns have already started putting up all these fancy lights, because Blackwood have got them and I think Nairne have got them and Kangarilla have got these lights now. But you're looking at the megabucks, you're looking at a hundred thousand dollars nowadays is like ten thousand dollars used to be ten or fifteen years ago, so there's big money involved to do these jobs. And we're trying to get bitumised right around the oval. We've started and we've got about one-third of it done, and I hope to have that all finished in the next couple of years because we've sold some land to the Education Department, because they encroached on our land, so I've got a bit back on them. So that's what we're up to at this stage.

I know you told me in the preliminary interview about some of the ways that you'd raised money over the years through the Rec Ground Committee for facilities. Can you tell me about some of those, please?

We've done everything from the chook raffle through to growing potatoes, cutting wood, just about anything you'd do to raise money we've done it over the years. Probably the wood-cutting one was probably one of the very good ones we had. Potatoes was a bit iffy because if potatoes were a good price that year you made money, and if potatoes were worth nothing you worked like a slave for not much result; but there was a few good years of growing potatoes.

Where did you grow them?

Well, one of the people around the district would let you have a paddock, and so then you'd go and plough the paddock up and plant all the potatoes and he'd let you have the profits of the potatoes. And that's what the farmers used to do in those days, we used to every year one farmer, we'd just go and ask him, 'When you're doing your supering, can you super the oval?' 'Fine, no problems.' But nowadays, yesterday I went and got a price for the super for Meadows Oval and it's two thousand, two hundred dollars for one tonne. Back in those days I'm guessing you could have got thirty tonne for that price, but that's what's just happened. And those days we never used to have tractors and that, we used to always have a mower but you just go and borrow one of the neighbours' tractors and borrow his tractor, come and mow the oval and take his tractor back home and say thanks. But nowadays we haven't got the farmers round here so we got to do it the hard way nowadays. We got our own tractors, mowers, to do all the work and the people on the committee or the football club, cricket club, have got people that cut the oval so they can play their sport on it and have the oval cut when they want it.

Now, there's another club in Meadows with a similar name, that's the Sporting and Recreation Social Club. Can you explain to me how that differs from the Recreation Club – – –?

Well, that's the one that's – yes, they run and look after the sporting complex on the oval. They've got a kangaroo lease on that, whatever you want to call it, peppercorn lease. One metre all round that building is actually on a separate title and that belongs to the Meadows Sport and Rec and Social Club, which they're on – we all have our meetings in the same building. It's virtually the same place, but it's just how that was called.

Okay. Well, I'd like to change topics a bit now and I'd like to ask you about the Meadows Agricultural Show, which I think you remember when they were held here. Can you tell me what they were like?

They were good shows. Used to have the – well, the ladies used to make all their cakes and put all their cakes up and the flowers, and us kids used to have – there used to be rabbits, you know, pets, and fancy bikes and all those sort of things. Back in the good old days that's what shows used to be about. I don't think nowadays you'd go to many shows and see those things. But they were good years.

Where were they held?

In the Hall. If you're about where the car park is now is where the – virtually just on the top of that there, was where the Hall used to be, then there used to be the Show Society shed out the back, then there used to be a house there as well, Bungert's house, and that all got knocked – everything's been knocked down over the years and all gone.

So that Show Society shed that you mentioned, was that attached to the Town Hall or was it a separate building?

No, completely separate building. That used to have all the trestles and all that in there. The fire truck used to be in there at one stage, before they built a new fire shed round back in Mill Street.

So what was that shed like, then, what was it made of?

It was just an old, tin shed. Real old.

And they had displays in there as well at the Agricultural Show?

Yes, yes, there used to be things in it, because all the trestles would be taken out into the other building and had things in there. But then people showing all their vegetables used to go in there and you'd see all the beautiful potatoes and the pumpkins people that used to grow.

Did you use to participate in any of the events?

No. Well, I used to have rabbits, pet rabbits, and we used to fancy our bikes up and cover them up with all crêpe paper and what kids used to do in those days.

Another thing I know you've been involved in over the years in Meadows is the CFS.⁵ Can you tell me what that was like, being part of the CFS, and perhaps some memorable occasions?

Well, it's like everything in Meadows: it's the camaraderie we have in there. You know, back when I was in it there was probably only let's say ten members you could say that would be there all the time. If there was an incident on, there'd be other people that come in and help you out. When we started off we only had one old fire

⁵ CFS – Country Fire Service.

truck and that was a Blitz, old Blitz fire truck, and she was a shocker. You know, you virtually needed a degree in science to drive the thing: had all these gear sticks and there was more neutrals in it than anything else. But nowadays, with the fire trucks they've got nowadays, anybody can get in and drive them.

But we've had Ash Wednesday fires, they were things you don't want to see again but I know they will happen.

Were you fighting the Ash Wednesday fires?

Oh, yes. Yes, I was in both Ash Wednesday fires. First time I was on a fire truck and the second time was when I was carting bricks so I had a prime mover and I also had a water tanker, which was an old milk tanker, and I used to cart water in those days to people that ran out of water, so back when the Ash Wednesday was I used that to fill up water and I'd take that out and I was a mobile water tank for the fire trucks. I'd go out and pull up on the road and fill up fire trucks one after the other and when I was empty I'd go and get another one, another load of water to keep putting the fires out.

Never forget the day I was up on the Range Road there with three fire trucks and the fire went straight through us, straight up over the top of us. I was back in the truck and soon as the fire went out I got out the truck, but then when I got back in the truck the truck was alight in the middle of the inside, sparks had got in there, so finished I soon got a water hose and put that out, but it didn't do any damage, which was lucky. But, you know, it's all over in probably thirty seconds, two minutes, but you wonder what's going to happen when something like that. You couldn't see nothing, all you could hear is the horrible roar of the fire coming up the hill, straight up and over the top and through us. But nobody got injured.

Did that have an effect on the town?

Oh, I don't know if it had that much effect on the town, but that day – because that was the fire that went right through to Cox's Scrub then turned around and came right back to the top of Meadows, and all the people had been – a lot of the people had been evacuated and the Meadows Oval was the evacuation point. So that was that day. But I think it just welds the town together more.

Apart from fighting fires, what other jobs did you do as part of CFS?

Oh, accident rescue. That took me a while to get used to going out to an accident and find somebody in there in horrific pain. Saw plenty of bodies and things like that. But you dealt with it and it's what you had to do. Police used to tell us – it might sound a bit callous – but, you know, if there's a body there it's just a piece of meat and that's what they used to tell us to think of it as and then it's not quite so bad. If you think of it as a person, there's not really a person there when they're dead. But children in accidents was terrible.

Did you see increasingly more over the years?

Oh, yes. Accidents, yes. When we first started we'd probably go out to, let's say, I don't know, ten to twenty accidents a year. Now I'd suggest they're going out to a lot more than that, a lot more. And they're probably more horrific nowadays because the speed of the vehicles nowadays, and they just seem the cars are not made like they were back twenty years ago, thirty years ago.

I'd like to change a bit now and talk again about the Meadows Primary School, because I think your children went there, didn't they?

Yes, my children went there, and like when you've got children at things you get mixed up in there and I was chairperson there for, I don't know, probably three years – might have been four years, I'm not quite sure. But yes, I was the chairperson there for a while.

What activities were you involved in as the chairperson?

Back in those days you didn't have to do much. You know, all you had to do was preside over the meeting every month and it was quite a good committee to work on. But now we're talking about a lot of years ago and it's pushing this grey matter up here a bit to think about some of these things.

Were you involved in fundraising for the school?

No, I don't think we ever had to do any fundraising – not that I can remember, anyway. But Tom Bowden was the teacher back in those days.

One of the other main bodies in the town apart from the sporting groups are the churches. I don't know whether you've ever had any involvement in any of the churches locally?

No, very little involvement with church. The wife is a member of the Church. Because I used to work on Sundays with my job, so I just never got around to going to church. The only time I went to church was when I was married and children christened and things like that, virtually, because the rest of the time I was working on Sunday.

Do you think does that make a difference to the way you're treated in a small town, do you think, if you weren't going to church?

I don't think it makes any difference in a township like Meadows. Because I know people that go to church every weekend, they're friends of mine, so I don't think there's much difference between us.

Well, I'd like to ask you now just some general questions about Meadows. Firstly, what do you think are the main changes in your lifetime that have happened in the town?

Main change I notice is like once upon a time the people in Meadows I used to know everyone, virtually, and now I don't think I'd know ten per cent of the people. And a lot of the people now, they live in Meadows and that's all they do in Meadows, they just live there. They're not mixed up in the football, the tennis, the cricket. Because I'm a sports person and I used to say when somebody come in there, 'What sport do you play?' It didn't worry me what sport they played; long as they played sport in the town and mixed up in the town, that was all I – I'd think they were good people. These other people are probably good people, but to me they're not much benefit to the town because if the town hasn't got a cricket club, a football club or whatever, the town to me will die. That's how I think; I could be wrong.

So what's had the biggest impact, then, on the town?

Well, I think it's the influx of these people that come in and, like I said, they just live in the town and don't do much in the town. That's my thoughts. But I don't know.

How do you think Meadows has fared compared with other nearby towns of fairly similar size like Kangarilla or Echunga, Macclesfield?

Well, I'd say they're probably all in very similar boat. But, see, Meadows now has had more land divisions than probably those other towns. Macclesfield's had the one little subdivision go on, but Meadows has had the big one up on – shouldn't say what I call it, but up on the hill. And Kangarilla, well, virtually that hasn't changed a lot. I suppose it's doubled its houses, but it's not a big area land division. And if this new land division goes in Meadows, well, we'll wait and see what happens then. I'm hoping some of those people play sport, but I fear that they won't.

What do you hope will happen with that new subdivision - apart from the fact that they may play sport - what are your hopes for that area?

Well, if it changes and goes ahead like it probably will, like I said, it will change Meadows forever, I reckon, because it's going to virtually be a one-third township built on one area. So the town's going to get one-third extra population in one foul swoop over let's say it takes five years or whatever to get up and going. So it's got to change the town.

What do you think the townspeople could do to try and make the best of it?

Well, it's try and make the people feel welcome, I suppose. But how you do that to people that you – – –. Like I said, once upon a time you knew all your neighbours up and down the road, your kids would be in each other's houses, and nowadays it just doesn't happen. So I don't know how you do it. They call it 'progress', I think, but I don't know if it's retrospective progress, what it is, but to me it's not really progress.

Do you think there's much community involvement in Meadows now?

That's a good question. Well, we have like the committees – well, even like the Rec Ground Committee, we have trouble at times getting people to keep coming to the meetings. Like we said, it's only two people from each sporting club and each year when they say at the annual general meeting they've got to appoint two people and they should appoint a proxy, but sometimes they just don't turn up. And like you go out to a meeting, all right, we get up there and it used to be a half-an-hour meeting, now we're taking a bit closer to an hour now because there's more things to do, and I wish we could get through it in half an hour, but last couple of meetings – we had a meeting with the Council here the other week so some of the people could ask the

council people a few questions. They weren't happy with the answers I was giving, so we got all the Mayor and everything there to have a talk to it and hope that enlightened a few of them, but that's just the way it's going nowadays, I think.

What do you think are the best things about living in this area?

I like the fresh air, myself. I just don't like being crowded in, that's why I live out where I live. All right, I've only got a house block, but my nearest neighbour's two hundred and fifty metres and that's just how I like it. But it's up to every individual what they like.

So is that the main reason that you think you've stayed in the area?

No, I think I'd stay there because, well, I like what I'm involved in. Because I've got no handcuffs on me to say I've got to stop here. The wife's not a hundred per cent happy with it, but she realises what I do and how I think. Because the cold weather, she doesn't like the cold weather much, and if you live at Meadows, well, you're certainly going to get some cool weather. But in the summertime it's not too bad. Last few years to me are getting hotter. I used to hate hot weather, I always hated it, but you've just got to put up with it, so wait and see what happens.

What do you think's important, really, about living in a small town? What makes a good small town?

Well, that's back to like I said before: the committees and the sporting clubs and you can go up the street and run into a friend. Once upon a time you used to see them quite often and now you don't see them because people just don't have time now to go and visit people and spend an hour or two hours with them. So if you run up the street and run into somebody you might stand there talking fifteen or twenty minutes on things that you haven't spoken to [them] about, and that's the part I like. At least I still see some people I call them 'friends', I hope they think I'm a friend, and you can stand there and talk about anything for ten, fifteen, twenty minutes.

Well, I've asked you all the questions now that I was planning to ask, except to check - was there anything else that you were - any other memorable incidents that you can recall that you wanted to mention?

Well, I suppose I should mention – it might be blowing my own trumpet – but the tennis clubrooms, I built those on my own, lock, stock and barrel⁶. I'd class myself as a handyman. I did get help with the foundations, but apart from that I laid every brick and I put up every bit of steel, bit of roof, windows. So they've even got my name in that. The tennis courts and that, the first set was built by the Council or with their help, you know, the working on Saturdays and Sundays and doing that, but the second set I built virtually lock, stock and barrel with help from the Council but I was the supervisor for that lot. So all the sheds there, I've put up, helped put up, organised the working bees but through the committees. But apart from that I don't think there's too much I've missed out.

Then thank you very much for agreeing to be part of the project and for coming along and telling us all about your involvement in so many different aspects of Meadows life. Thank you.

That's quite all right, and I guess you've spoken to some other identities of Meadows so it'd be interesting to see what their thoughts are.

Thank you very much.

No problems.

END OF INTERVIEW

⁶ Others helped with secondary fittings. Electrical work was done by John Buckley; Barry McAllister (Meadows Plumbing) did the plumbing; Bruce Long (Long Tiling) did the tiling. [CEB]