



Verbatim transcript of an interview with

WILLIAM CLEMENT DENNIS

Interviewer: **Linda Coleman**
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LC: Mr Dennis, could you tell me your full name and when you were born?

WD: Yes, I was born on 5th January 1921 in Subiaco and the first I can remember from then on I believe my father was with me at Curtis Street in Wanneroo Road at the time and he moved to Becks Sawmill in Wanneroo and that was on a block at the foot of Caporn Road on a Lot No. 2737.

LC: And what about your mum, what was your father's full name?

WD: He was born Henry James Dennis and I have a brother and a sister. My elder brother was also named Henry James Dennis and there was some confusion in later years because it had to be Junior and Senior for clarification. My sister Alice was, she was in-between the pair of us and just the one girl and I'm just not sure where they were born, I believe they would have been born either at the foot of where they were living at Greenmount or possibly when he moved to the South Perth side of the Causeway.

LC: You were the youngest were you?

WD: I was the youngest and next I can remember was growing up at the Saw Mill near Lake Mariginiup which I named 2737 block. My dad would take him up the timber for saw milling purposes from that homestead block as far down as the corner of which is now Yanchep Road and Pinjar Road. I lived there until such times as I can remember the Mill starting and the types of trucks and old timber trucks they made do to cut up logs on them they were cutting tomato cases far from the ordinary timber from building their own homes. In those days tomato cases were cut out of jarrah, sometimes beautiful logs and it seemed a shame to cut them into two foot six lengths, just for the use of carrying tomatoes and of course that was before they went over to today's method of carting them in paper cartons and therefore saving a terrific amount of timber.

LC: Where did they collect the timber from? Where did they chop the trees down?

WD: Well, in those days it was hand pulling and they were cut off by hand, the ordinary hand cross cut saw. Very heavy work so my father always bigger and better and he had some of the earliest cars that came to Western Australia. He was telling me that some of the earliest ones, the Oldsmobiles and so forth they were even tiller steering and chain drive. In the event of bettering his, of lowering his work load on the timber and case cutting, he designed and built the first power saw for cutting logs and apart from the saw milling part of it, they even cut many yards of logs for the then Roads Board in Wanneroo for laying in what they used to call a block road. They consisted of slabs of approximately 8 inches in diameter, carted by horse or early old motor cars and laid in the road which was then the

early road to Yanchep. On the block that my dad had, it run and covered quite a few acres from the block 2737 in Caporn Road down as far as the Pinjar Road turnoff. In those days there was a lot of what they call sand planed jarrah. They weren't particularly tall trees, a 20 foot trees would be a tall tree but it was solid and quite good timber.

LC: So they cut the tree by hand would they? How would they cart it back to the Mill?

WD: Well it was all hard work. They'd have, convert old motor cars into a flat top truck and the two skids at the back being short legs of log, they would roll it up it's edge onto the truck and to facilitate this he used to make up winches out of truck gear box gears and a drum, the legs were forged, forged metal straps to hold the drum, forged handles for it and sometimes use wooden bearings for winches and this process was used right up until 1929 or 1930.

LC: And was there a control over the timber you cut?

WD: At that first mill I don't know. Whether there were concessions, I don't think that time it applied, I think he took the land up and in those days the Forestry Department didn't have such a control that you had to stamp the logs and whether he paid for the timber he took off it or whether that went, I think he took the land up for clearing purposes and he was allowed to cut the timber off.

LC: Then at some later stage there were controls were there?

WD: From that first mill he sold it out to some of the Italian immigrants that were coming into the country in quite large numbers and he decided to disperse it out in 28 but they were establishing the township of Wanneroo and they were cut into allotments and my father bid for several of the roadside blocks and he established in those days they called them picture shows, picture theatre garage at a private dwelling, that is now almost opposite where the Wanneroo Tavern and the Hotel is. They were hard times in those days as everyone knew 1929 and 1930 were in the centre of the depression days and it was a bad time to start off on another occupation. However, he decided to get back saw milling and he got an allotment off the Forest Department at the top end of Lake Pinjar and established another mill. I myself had just left school and I went along with him and we lived in a tent while we were building the mill. He later sold the picture concern and the garage to a family named Crisafulli and my elder brother and he went back to once more cutting tomato cases. In that case it was a lease from the Forest Department and we were only allowed to cut long timber for building our own homes.

It seemed a shame at the time because it was a bit better class of timber up that way and to cut it just into lars for cases was rather a shame however times were still hard but we built

our own homes, built a small township but I believe today that has been set aside as a small picnic spot where the mill was and finally I decided that I didn't intend to stay with the milling as there was very little money in it, hard work and in the meantime my brother and I had developed the original timber cutting machines to a much lighter machine and made various designs both for cutting and falling and we finally left my father to lease the mill out to people who are still in Wanneroo by the name of Villanova. Mr Villanova Senior was leasing the mill from my father when the last war came along. My brother and I were doing quite well producing and selling power saws on a commercial basis and we invented and patented what was called a geared head type of circular portable power saw for both falling and logging off. That particular circular saw revolutionised particularly the falling element throughout this state.

LC: Do you want to describe how you made that first power saw?

WD: Well it was evolved once again from mainly automotive gears, we used to in those days have to travel to Perth to have the castings made from where castings were required and be bought and fitted both Villiers, Velocette engines and later on the large machine an AJS, all second hand motors which naturally needed repair and it wasn't the same as having a new engine. I sent to England for three Villiers engines and built them onto drag saws that is a reciprocating saw and we had the one AJS machine which was sold to what was then Pattersons an agency in Wellington Street and things looked bright for the future however with the event of the war I had to join the Air force and my brother was impressed into Ford Downs in Wellington Street as a machinist, he was a very good fitter and turner, in fact some of his records when he was a Ford Downs would probably stand to this day for producing nuts and threads for particular jobs that Ford Downs required for defence purposes. A lot of them were for mainly bridges as he told me later. I was away for approximately four years and of course when I returned my brother had decided to allow a chap by the name of W. Schultstadt to manufacture the gear he had patented under licence. It meant that we had to start all over again. Mr Schultstadt produced quite a number with Harley Davidson engines built, on once again second hand motors. As the demand grew my brother and I at the time were working with him and we were charging a fee for what is known as a royalty on the amount made. Well, this was satisfactory in a way but we could see that Mr Schultstadt could not produce enough to warrant us to stay with him insofar as there would be nothing in it to be worthwhile after you had to run your own business previously. So we decided we would help him insofar as making our own engines to build onto the machines. Previous to this we had made the first motor in the workshop we had in the mill at Lake Pinjar but of course we didn't have the time to start to mass produce due to the advent of the war that started in 1939. However on coming back we remade a whole lot of patents again and

started to rebuild and design the engine which eventually Mr Schultstadt turned out to the extent of some 2,000. After a couple of years with Mr Bill Schultstadt, we can call him Bill, he was a very nice chap approximately the same age as my elder brother. We decided to go back to producing power saws once again for our own sale for the market so we came to an agreement with Mr Schultstadt that he would take over the patent of the geared head circular and we went back to making what we call a drag saw. That was more or less a hand driven hand cross cut, much like the one my father invented so many years before. Once again, we were up against the motors, so what we did, we had to raise with Mr Schultstadt insofar that for the price of the patent that we sold him, we eventually cut the price out in motors that we had designed for him and which by that time he had set up his own foundry and manufacturing set up. So then we went back just half a block along the road both factories were on the river front in Maylands. We did well with the new breakaway but eventually set up once again, made another lot of patents and set up our own foundry and started to make engines once again, so more or less there were two power saw manufacturing concerns in the one street however there was plenty of custom for the machines insofar as they were eventually used not only in the timber industry which sprang up after the war with saw mills everywhere really, both big and small but also they were used extensively for farmers and various other people who had a need of cutting or falling timber. Clearing{unclear...?16:08:46} once again. We also invented a post hold digging device so therefore the machines were used for digging holes for fencing because in those days just after the war steel posts weren't used to the extent they are to this day, there were still a lot of wooden posts used. So the advent was from the days from when my father made the first machine, we still have photos luckily of that particular machine until the second world war came along and then starting again we eventually made over 2,000 machines in our own factory and I feel certain that W. Schultstadt would have made over 2,000 as well.

My father was born here in Western Australia, in Perth but I just don't know the locality. King Edward Hospital started in the later part of his life but to this I'm confident in the knowledge he was apprenticed as a carpenter and I remember him saying he learnt on what they used to call mill huts in those days in Nanga Brook was one and lots of the mills were starting up in those days and they had need of carpenters to build the living quarters for their workmen. He later after finishing his carpentry business, he got a job with what is now and still is Zimpels of Perth. They were a very old firm and Zimpels are cabinetmakers and dealing in furniture and my dad took a liking to cabinetmaking as an offshoot of carpentering and Zimpels also used to send him out on a lot of jobs around Perth renovating on houses and I can remember him saying he fitted a lot of these seats to the first picture theatres in Perth. I can't name the now but of course in those days there was the Grand Theatre which has

been demolished recently but this was the days before I can remember when the Ambassadors and the Capital Theatres were built in Perth, I can remember going to them when I was a teenager, but getting back to Dad he seemed to have a knack for mechanical business in those days and when the first motor cars came here, he saved up enough to buy them second hand and eventually repaired them and kept them going along with an Uncle of mine by the name of Clements. Strangely enough my mother and father and one of his sisters, Aunty Kate, it was brother and sister married a brother and sister between the Clements family and the Dennis family. I knew him in those days as Uncle Charlie and I can remember Uncle Charlie and Kate, they had a number of children and they used to come and visit us out at the sawmills on the block in Caporn Road and they remained and we still have remained very close friends over all the years, all the offspring in the way of the Clements and Dennis family. In fact I met both Ron and Aldi Clements when I was in the air force in both Melbourne and up in Townsville during the war. Due to my father's interest in the old cars, he must have got my older brother interested so they evolved apart from the early days he even had built some of the old motors into boats on the river which was unheard of in those days but he eventually shifted to the first mill he built in Curtis Street in Osborne Park on Wanneroo Road. By this time my brother must have been becoming a young chap that had left school, he had become a teenager and of course he was a valuable help to my Dad on the mechanical side and also with the first timber milling. So Harry apparently took (my brother that is) took to the mechanical side of it and was far more adept at it than my Dad was. Dad in the meantime had taken on, or had learnt and was quite a good blacksmith, in those days a blacksmith was the general workshop for the old cars. So for the time he built the mill near Lake Mariginiup in Caporn Road, He had acquired quite a number of these old cars, but I am a little ahead of myself there, at the time of the saw mill in Curtis Street he also built and started a bus run from North Beach and there is a photo or two of that but had he had the foresight, he was onto something there that could have made him a lot of money with a lot less effort than rolling timber and logs and saw milling. I can remember him saying that he used to have his clients on the bus, some of the sisters to the convents at North Beach apparently they had institutions out there and this was in the days when they had a plank road out that way, it was either to North Beach or to City Beach – all those beaches in those days, it was rough and ready roads but I can remember him stating that he had various cars, mainly he seemed to have gone for the overland cars in those days. Overlands were very old make both in trucks and light cars, this would be before the advent of the Fords and Chevs, they came into the state at a much later date. However, he apparently must have been a bit of a roamer and whether he sold out of what he did with that I could not tell you. Apparently he sold it to somebody and went back to full time saw milling. The timber at that time I believe, whether it was like a session or grant or cutting of

private property, was around the area where the present Yokine dog links are. All of the sand plane in those days had quite a good stand of jarrah, not a lot, but interspersed with banksia and sheok. Sheok was another good timber but jarrah of course had the quantities and it was more prolific in those times. But it was solid and it grew to quite a big diameter. That is why some of the land in those days, it took a lot clearing because once the trees were cut down the stumps would die and the roots would rot and while some could plant around them, the large stumps, eventually they would dig around and burn them out. But that is as far as I can tell you on the saw milling days. After like when Lake Pinjar was sold to Mr Villanova and the two boys, Tony and Louie that eventually carried it on. I went to school with Tony and Louie.

LC: Which school did you go to?

WD: Wanneroo State School and it was only a galvanised iron school in those days and we just depended on galvanised iron tanks for water in fact and we didn't even have a bore. In fact even below the mill where went to school from I used to have to walk to school from Caporn Road, its approximately two mile every day to the state school and even at the mill site we had no bore water we used to at times when we ran out by depending on the catchment from the roof on the house on the mill sheds. We would have at times to cart water from the lake approximately a mile down to the house for our washing and general use. So they were hard times but we didn't necessarily worry that much about it, we always had plenty, there were market gardens springing up everywhere and lots of the gardeners would come and get a load of blocks of us for firewood and also we would never be short of vegetables, so it was quite a lot of a barter system in those days between the people, none of us were wealthy.

LC: Who were your neighbours when you were in Caporn Road, can you remember?

WD: Caporns lived at the far end of the road on a small swamp, Caporn Road that's would be there today but it could be named on the, possibly a different name today. That locality has quite a lot of swamps around it some of them quite big. The one below us, Lake Mariginiup, was quite a deep swamp and it was quite good to swim in eventually it was opened up and in fact my father opened up the face of it and was gardening for some time. By the way, when they had the first mill, the one I walked to school from, they acquired a Stanley Steam car engine or a Stanley Steam Car it was from people in vineyards with the name of Barret Lennard. Barret Lennard had vineyards in the Swan and this car was in a pile, the back of it was burned, it was a sidecar, the rear end had the fire and strangely enough that was the end where the engine lies, the engine was located between the two back wheels in that particular car. The boiler had a heat section which was at the front of the

car in other words where the normal engine was in a car in those days was a steam boiler. My brother by this time had got to the extent that he became quite a good mechanic and to keep the saw mill engines going, or wheel engines in those days and also he used to have quite a lot of the local people that were then acquiring motor cars, in fact Mr George Leach had the first Ford out in there, a Ford Ton Truck and I can remember seeing photos of it and it had the name of WN1 on it so this is going back to the advent of cars in Wanneroo. Our near neighbours were Ashbys, Tappings. The Italian population were just coming into it then, in fact my father was the instigator of helping them and in many ways when the immigration was starting in a larger way in Wanneroo. The local people in those days was more or less a spread out community but of course when motor cars as they will do started to get trouble and need attention and various things needed doing to them, clutches burning out or wooden wheels coming loose or bells burnt and so forth, my brother eventually used to have quite a lot of work brought to him by the local community. The types of motor cars which occurred from mainly with the advent of the Ford T and then the various sheds and other makes that started to come onto the market, it was the main prompting I think for the old dad to sell the first, or the second then in Caporn Road and breakout into the township of Wanneroo. But for the times, I feel sure that he would have progressed along with my brother and never every went back to saw milling. But 1929 and 1930 and the fact that the hall and picture show they named Centenary Hall.

LC: What did the Hall look like? - can you describe it?

WD: It was quite a large hall by the standard in those days, it was far bigger than the only other one which was the Roads Board Hall just up the road where the City of Wanneroo is now and it was all built of timber, strangely enough after cutting a smaller quantity of timber for it my dad and brother had to buy the timber and cart it from North Perth from a timber yard there cause it was timber frame, large building, galvanised iron walls and in those days they used a metal lining, a flat metal lining for the interior lining and ceiling. By the way, he could be credited with having the first electric light in Wanneroo for housing and to a degree along with the Wanneroo Roads Board Hall, they had what they call a Delco lighting plant, installed electric power into the picture show and garage that they built. Mainly due to the lack of finance in those days I think led to him deciding to go back to milling. Well, in those days films were just coming to their own and in the Roads Board Hall they had a small show going - in those days the projectors were wound by hand and to this day I couldn't tell you who actually ran that, whether it was run by the Roads Board Authority or whether it was individuals, that I could not tell you but it was just a small show and but films due to them just coming into their own, it was just before the advent of talking films, talking pictures as they

called them in those days, but it seemed to be to my father I suppose, a venture along with the advent of the repairs on motor cars to be well worth a profitable venture.

LC: Did he put seats in there?

WD: Yes, he bought a lot of the seats, they were built in rows in those days, like clusters, with iron frame and some of them he bought from one of the theatres in Perth, quite a number, could have been 100 seats I suppose. I remember them they were red plush back and a red plush seat, more or less a satin effect and quite good, of course the rest of the seating in those days they used more or less a wooden seat with a wooden back on them. The seating over all would have catered for 200 people, so there was quite a lot. Of course in later days after selling to the Crisafulli people, they were originally market gardeners but the young Crisafullis, there was Ned, Santo the eldest and Ned, I went to school with Ned and Ned eventually became the projector operator of that show after the dad had sold it and he went back to sawmilling and Ned later put in an open air set up along the side of what was then the existing hall.

LC: Did you serve refreshments in that hall?.....Did you serve refreshments?

WD: We had in those days a small set up, yes, for soft drinks, chocolates and McRobertson and Miller, not McRobertson Miller but McRobertson's chocolates. They were all the go, I can remember that as a boy and there was quite a nice little choice renewable things, cigarettes and chocolates and the various types of stuff that was in demand in those days. It was not much different to what goes on today and that type of thing.

LC: Do you want to tell me about the opening night at that hall? Do you remember when it was opened?

WD: I can barely remember the opening night there was so much of a lead up to it at the time they got the plant and equipment in the borrowed box as they called it in those days, projection room and naturally the crowds would come from far and wide from market gardens and mainly around the place a lot would come by the little bush tracks in those days but some of the tracks were quite solid, that type of country was beaten down with cars a few times it became quite solid particularly after the winter but in the summer time it got hard in the middle but it was an avenue for people to go to but I think the recession was what more or less killed it because people couldn't even afford in those days (I think it was sixpence) admittance – in those days sixpence was a lot to a person to spend on entertainment. Things were really hard. So the same along with the repair of cars a lot would have to try and wait on the next crop to pay for the repairs they had done, in other words

things were only just starting to come good to become a little better when the Second World War came along.

LC: Where were you living when you were running the hall and the garage in Wanneroo, where were the family living?

WD: When we moved from the Caporn Road saw mill they bought several blocks and when they built a house it was {..unclear?16:32:42} type house, all timber frame. The garage set up was all timber frame but quite a large set up, in fact we lived at the back of the garage for a short time in temporary quarters until such time as my father and my brother finished building the house next door. To my knowledge they were about a half-acre blocks, each one and plenty of room. However we moved from there to Lake Pinjar and then had to start over again and build our own homes again. We were allowed to cut log timber for our own use at the last mill but the subsequent mill was certainly under Forrest supervision.

LC: Ok.

WD: Each stump as you cut a tree down had to be stamped and a number, I had a number engraved in the bottom, I can remember the number to this day, it was EK6. After a number of trees had been fallen, ready for removing to the mill a Forestry Inspector would come through and in fact I can remember a man's name, he was a bonzer old chap, a chap by the name of Meslin. Mr Meslin would come through and he would measure up the logs and he entered into his record book and then you'd pay on the number of super feet that was needed up at the log, they'd take the diameter and the length of the log.

LC: You needed a permit obviously to fell the timber?

WD: You were required a permit before they could even start the saw mills.

LC: Did you.

WD: Ah yes, in those days they were starting to tighten up on the timber industry. In those days a lot of the people had quite large holdings of land they take up and they'd allow you or sell you privately the logs that they wanted removed or cut because eventually the Forestry Department got a much greater control over the felling and cutting of timber.

LC: Why weren't you allowed to cut timber for general house building?

WD: Well, the powers that be considered that as they grant the permit for cutting for the use of some barricades for that area. They would not allow us to compete for the bigger mills like Bunnings and Whitakers, they were well established mills in those days and for some reason

the beaurocratic system decided it was tomato cases and that's all. We get a special permit to cut to build if you want to build a house or accommodation on the mill site whether you were allowed to do that.

LC: And what about, when did your father build his power saw...that was when he was in.....?

WD: Well, the first one, that was built at the site in Caporn Road.

LC: Was it.....that long ago?

WD: I was born in Curtis Street and I don't remember, it must have been built when I was about between 1 and 2 year old and now I'm 73, so that would be 70 years ago at least but he as I told you before he was truly adept at blacksmithing and they had the old drill post machine for drilling holes, metal drilling, buffalo drill they are called. Just with bolts and drilling and the forging, well you can practically make anything if you want to, in fact I still have to this day the original anvil from that workshop and I still use a forge in fact, a wood forge, they are invaluable. Even in the air force I took a forge away with me to the islands and they thought it was rather strange the rest of the airmen at the time but it was put to good use even up there, particularly for making morning tea. He and old George were each mates, neither went to school but they were mates out there in fact they used to go possum hunting and roamed around in the scrub and whatever was going, kangaroo hunting in fact I went hunting with them as I grew up in some of the later years when we had the picture show but old George and old Harry as they used to call them, they had many a good time together but neither went to school and yet apparently my grandfather must have been schooled when he came out from England and he taught my father to read and write and figures and such and I think its figures he may have been better than me in those days, he seemed to have an adaptability but he could read and write quite well and was quite legible in his writing but strangely enough Mr Leets didn't bother to learn to write.

LC: Didn't he?

WD: No, I think dad taught him to sign his signature.

LC: Can you remember the house on that first property in Caporn Road?

WD: Could I now, the spot you mean?

LC: Mmm.....what the house looked like.

WD: Well they built it out of timber, in those days galvanised roofs were the thing for walls and roofing but they would have in those days cut their own timber. In those days you used anything you could get for lining. In fact they used hessian and it was white washed, in later, with cement used cement instead and they used to use flour and water for the wall papering or ordinary newspapers or whatever they decided to plaster the walls with, that was quite common. They mainly used it to keep the draughts out and just for lining but you needed to be wealthy in those days if you wanted to line correctly either by the flat lining metal which was tacked in or also there used to be a lot of tongue and groove Baltic timber come in, they used tongue and groove pine but of course that was a home for white ants and you needed to be careful about that.

LC: How did your mother cook?

WD: In those days it was more or less apart from open fires they used to use a tin fireplace and an open fire for warmth at night and a couple of bars across which usually had a kettle on or knock up a frying pan meal but the Metta stoves were the thing in those days, they were very good stoves, Metta had a big factory in Subiaco but Metta stoves when they came out they had the three lids on top and you put the wood underneath that and also they had an iron oven at the bottom and that was the usual way of cooking the meal in those days, almost every settler would have a Metta stove.

LC: So your father would hunt for meat would he?

WD: Almost everyone in those days would get what they call a brush kangaroo, they were the grey kangaroos and there were tons of them in those days, they usually had a dog, a kangaroo dog to round them up and they would go out and shoot a roo when they wanted it and no such thing as fridges but they would have a safe, once again made of a frame and covered with hessian with a water drip on it, much like the Coolgardie Safe and that's what you used for keeping your butter or frying fat and more perishable stuff in. In lots of cases the vegetables when you got them from the gardeners and of course they were plentiful in those days and you could get them fresh usually but a lot would bury them in yellow sand just to keep them fresher, just to cool under the sand where you would often just dig them out. But the old safe was all you had to keep the meat in and naturally fowls and ducks, almost everyone had their own poultry and you would go from Wanneroo to Perth probably once a week for supplies. Usually everyone made their own bread, tin stuff was all the go, bread and jam was the thing and desserts, there was all these jellies and custard and stuff like that.

LC: What do you remember about school?

WD: I can remember mainly walking to school, I can remember it, I hated it until the day I left there and I couldn't leave quick enough.

LC: (Laugh).....who did you walk to school with?

WD: Some of the Tappings I can remember Marjorie Tapping, she was a little bit older than me and she was the main one really she lived a little bit further than I did up the road and my walk must have been just under two mile I think Marjorie had a full two miles to walk. They had the next property along and Mr old Tom Tapping he was a great mate of my dad's and they were in the gardening. There was some Tappings further along and they were all gardeners and he bought one of the first trucks as well, he used to cart bulrushes to Subiaco, they used to use them for putting in pipes when they were making the first cement pipes and they used them for some silver binding in them and there are photos in the local Wanneroo archives of Mr Tapping and his truck with a load of these reeds as they called them on the truck. It's on the book that was fetched out three or four years ago, there are quite a few photos in that book relevant to what I am talking about. There are photos of the father's hall and picture show and I'm afraid very few of the mill that was sold to the Villanova's by that time and of course in that book some of the old trucks were then owned by the Villanova family.

LC: Would you like to tell me about the fight that occurred on the first night that picture hall was opened, without mentioning names?

WD: Really, I remember it quite well I would be approximately about nine I suppose, I'd started school, walked to Wanneroo and by the way my dad also ran the first school bus in Wanneroo, apart from the one they had a horse drawn one photos of that are also shown on that book on Wanneroo. It was run by Mr old Jack Steel, he was a wonderful old chap but dad got the contracts for carrying the kids to school, that was in a Ford T one tonne truck, he built all the body on it for carting them and seats at the side and that used to run from the then picture show garage up through Carabooda across past where the race track is now fronts from the Yanchep Road across to the Pinjar Road, past where the race track and the last mill we had, that mill wasn't so far from that rack track and then down the old limestone road down Pinjar Road and back to the school, with that we run night and morning in fact my sister, she was a lot older than me, when they ran that I was about nine I suppose and my sister used to drive that so, in fact my sister had about....oh might have been the third or fourth drivers licence in Western Australia.

LC: Did she.

WD: So dad was in lots of things but he never seemed to stick at one thing and I suppose I can say that for myself.....{laughs}.

LC: Was he involved with the Roads Board?

WD: Yes, he was a member there at the same time as he built the garage and picture show and naturally there was also a contention between members when you are in a Board that is much like Parliament, you start to get sides, they take sides and but going back you asked about the opening and that turnout. In those days it was quite a big project, two men, there was only my brother and my dad that built the lot of it and they employed very little labour and in fact they also, getting back to the apart from the power, I can remember Dad having power at the first mill they had batteries and helping him out to switch a light on in the house cause they had their own charging up apparatus having the saw mill and that for charging the batteries. So what they.....Dad would have had the first electric light in the house out there. This was before they moved down to the picture show and garage and then they needed much bigger power plants. The opening, it wasn't really an opening at all, there was a little bit of trouble, I think he had invited most of the people around for a social evening prior to the actual opening. Prior to the opening we had a member of as I say nine or ten, I can't remember the actual reason for it, but of course I had heard a lot from my Uncle Harry and dad talking about it. Round about an hour after the tune outs were going a car pulled up out the front with, well we can call them larrikins or louts, we still have plenty of them with us today in various ways but this was a big old tourer car it would hold anything up to 7 or 9 burley young chaps I suppose and they came and mixed in and started to create a nuisance, pushing people and slamming chairs and a number of those creating a fight and I suppose well some retaliation took place and there was a general set to for quite a while. The most I can remember about it, we had a small...as you asked me earlier if we served refreshments, there was a small shop at the side and no more than about might have been 10 x 8 with a counter and a little eave to go behind it, shelves behind, soft drinks and normal stuff so one of these louts leapt over this counter and someone was threatened to get at him and with that my mother, I can remember to this day and I was the most frightened I've ever been in my life at the time, she picked up a bottle and threatened to.....she was going to belt this bloke over the head, so I grabbed mum's arm and I'm yelling and carrying on and I prevented him from getting her out and maybe it was just as well I did because she was in such a turn at the time I think she was open to discover and maybe it would have been a little for the worse. Well we had enough of it and a little overcome by the opposition and by this time things were getting pretty rambunctious. So decided they must have let their mates know it was time to leave they scampered out and into their big old car and took off. Some of our people chased them but unfortunately the car was an old car of the name, I think it

was an Oldsmobile and it was owned by Harry Chitty at the time and Harry Chitty he was a man who used to deal in stock, the very late pendant outers and even this car had a blockage of the fuel and they had no hope of catching these other people, they got away but they must have followed them up or they must have had a phone call through that, I believe they got a call through the Bentleigh, that was their first old police car they had, the other one where they had a radio in those days and they must have caught up with them in Osborne Park and I think they came from around Osborne Park and probably this was organised around about the North Perth Hotel and to this day we don't know how it occurred, whether they were paid to do it, anyhow they were caught up with in a fashion and they appeared before a magistrate over it. I couldn't tell you whether there were fines handed out or what happened about it but I think they got off very lightly to my mind but as usual it was very hard to accrue evidence to prove that it was an organised attack. At the time, to my mind, at my age it was a very nasty affair, I can't say much more about it to this day because it's so long ago and a lot of the people that saw it or instigated it in any way they are all long and gone. Some of the younger people that would be there, they are no longer young, after all I'm past seventy and the children of those people in those days they went to school with it would be just a memory to them. I'd have of anyone more memory than anyone because I was so involved.

LC: Your father was very involved with the Italian community, did the Italians work for him?

WD: He was involved with the Italian community, in those days the immigration was, particularly from Italy, but not only Italy but Yugoslavians, Greeks, Albanians and quite a lot of the European people were coming here and to a degree the English immigrants were a little bit biased against them but dad seemed to get mixed up with them more than the average Aussie and the Crisafullis in particular, on the big swamp, not far from where the picture show was and the town site of Wanneroo and they became very good friends and when the Sinagras and some of the other Italians came out particularly the Sinagras, the Crisafullis were doing well with their market gardening and he built a big home, a big home at the time was unheard of in those days and so dad in fact he learnt old Tony Crisafullis to drive I think and some of the other Sinagras. My Dad used to go down with his cars, he had as I said before, quite a number of vehicles and he would, they'd probably pay him to go down and pick up the Italian immigrants from Fremantle Wharf. Of course, I think this caused a bit of animosity between some of the English settlers however he became more involved because strangely enough the mill in Caporn Road was bought out by some people by the name of Mangano and also by a chap by the name of Calabrese and later closed that mill and they shifted down to where the turnoff is to Mullaloo Beach and they built another mill there. So indirectly he was mixed up with the Italian community from an early stage and of

course the last mill he finished up losing that to the Villanova Brothers that was Tony and Albert who have done so well with the Wanneroo town and the hotel business. I can remember when Tony went to school in Wanneroo, the same school as I when he came out from Italy and Tony couldn't speak a word of English and it always amazed me and I've often said to him since "it amazes me Tony how you picked it up, to hear you today you would think you were never ever born in Italy" and I don't know if you've met him but if you do you will back up what I say, his English is impeccable....and yet he is quite....Tony would have been twelve years old when he came from Italy and he didn't have that long at school really to acquire the way he can speak the Australian language today, he was really remarkable, Louie was the same. Anyway, that is more or less how dad got mixed up to a great degree with the Italian immigrants and in those days the market gardens were just being opened up and also it was after then that they instead of just having market gardens on the swamps to garden where the water was available to keep the land suitable for growing without drying out they decided that stuff grew better in the sand and strangely enough dad and my brother they eventually sold engines and pumping plant to the Italians in Wanneroo to put in irrigation systems to irrigate the sand country because they found that....they weren't relying on the swamp and loose sands that were drying out and they could use sprinklers and irrigate when they wished to.

LC: Where did they get the water from?

WD: Well you can get water anywhere in Wanneroo close to swamps and in sand country just by putting a bore down, or a well, in those days in fact we cut a lot of timber for boxed wells, they used to make wells out of timber and the long arm sprinklers they used to have swinging around before they went to the butterfly sprinklers that had just been putting in some centrifugal pump getting the water supply with the spear and the free water from the dam to over the catchment then pump on the sand and of course that has grown to the stage today where.....(end of tape1)

LC: This is tape two of an interview conducted on the 29th of August 1994 with William Clement Dennis:

LC: Did you actually put wells down for the market gardeners did you?....can you tell me how you.....

WD: Well, this was something that was started in Wanneroo as I say from the swamps not being dependent on more or less rainfall, they found that it was more suitable to get onto the yellow or dark sand further back from the swamp, there was less chance of it flooding, less chance of drying out, one chap in particular that did very well out of it was a chap by the

name of Ted Gibbs, indirectly related to me because my sister married one of the Gibbs, one of Ted Gibbs brothers but it was something that grew fairly promptly in that area. When my brother and I started in the engineering business, manufacturing 1,000s for sale we dealt in the irrigation system insofar as it required engines to pull centrifugal pumps or plunger pumps to a lesser degree and we even put bores down for a lot of the gardeners. Cement pipes used today more or less right throughout the system of putting wells down but in the old days wells were sunk, you'd would find the spot where you considered it was most suitable or where you considered the supply would be. Normally there is a supply of water at the one depth right throughout, a huge amount at Wanneroo – any sand plain country, it only varies, it varies because if you're on a hillside you have to go deeper, if you're on a flat you'll soon get the water but you don't go as deep so if you are on a rise of 10 foot on the hill then you have 10 foot further to go for water and sometimes they used to irrigate on higher ground than that, you might put a bore down 30, 40 some of them go to 60 foot. I'm talking in feet because in those days it was all feet and inches metres, I still find it a little hard to come by it because you have to use it these times but when you've gone to school with feet and inches it takes a lot of breaking out of but I'm speaking because that is the way that we measured things in those days. Having the facilities for cutting timber naturally we were in demand for timber for wells. They used to put down wells called a box well, usually big enough to dig in so you could comfortably bend down and shovel earth into a bucket or a receptacle and you would have a windless on top and worm the bucket up, tip it out and drop it down and one at the bottom of the well and one at the top winding it up. It could be quite a dangerous set up unless you did things right and all you'd do you'd make up say about an eight foot length of box, the boxes were made out of planks, what they called {unclear 15:57:04} you'd let one plank overlap another on the corner and nail it in and then the next one would overlap that so that they couldn't fall in otherwise the nailing and the {unclear.....15:57:18} helped hold them together, if you just hold two sides together, nail them together well the nails ease out and they collapse which did happen in many cases in the area in those days, it was a dangerous business and we didn't know how to go about it correctly. If you're going down to any depth, I think the deepest well my brother and I put down was for a chap by the name of Tommy Neaves in Neaves Road. Tommy was the man that supplied all the honey to the area in those days and possibly one of the first and best bee keepers in Wanneroo, in fact he gets a mention in the book on Wanneroo and I think there's a photo of him too. He was a great friend of ours and I remember Tommy very well, he was a lot older than me. We put one down for Tom to about thirty foot and then you had to put the spear down, a bit of casing, drop the spear to get below the water level.

LC: What do you mean by the spear?

WD: A spear in those days is what they call a screen today or it's like a sieve to keep the sand out, it's called a sand bottom, you'd drop the spear, is all it was it was either a land wire spear or covered with a fine gauze to keep the sand back and let the water in, you'd put that 12 or 20 foot below the water level after you'd got the well down. The well was the means of getting down to the water level once you get to the water level the box wall would only go so far and then that's as far as it goes, that was it. Of course a lot the wells the people would use they'd wind up with water with a bucket, that was their only water supply well they would work the box down as far as they could then depend on water that would come through the box and good water it was, it's a very good water in Wanneroo. We earned quite a lot of money in those days on the early irrigation in Wanneroo. One of the last that I helped put in and in fact Harry and my brother and I put it in was the Crisafulli family of Tony Crisafulli for watering his lemons. He had a wonderful grove of lemons just up from the swamp in the sand and we built out our motor bike engine onto that one onto a big centrifugal pump and well we could see the difference once he put it in and he'd run this periodically during the week in the summertime he was able to double his crop of lemons on those trees, they were beautiful trees. Lemons are a tree that had surface roots, they don't put a tap root down and you need the surface water, when the water went down a couple of feet below them where they were dying for water and then the irrigation came in insofar as it flooded the top roots therefore it made the difference to the cropping. Otherwise apart from the motor car business set us up from the start and a lot of our early stuff was built from motor car parts and our early power saws and eventually we had to make our own castings our own patterns and cart them to Perth to have them cast. Motor cars were used in the evolution of the first machines we built both in the power saw industry and later in some of the pumping equipment we made. We used to make up pump jacks to replace windmills and some of those were no doubt of the chassis of the motor cars and the early motor cars in fact some of that stuff including the Stanley Steam Car engine is on display in the Yanchep Museum to this day.

LC: Did your brother have any training or did he just learn from his father?

WD: No, Dad had the training as a carpenter and a good carpenter he was and my brother naturally picked carpentry up from him but he was more adaptable to the engineering trade and of course Dad having the early cars when my brother had to start pulling motor cars to bits from an early stage. The cars in those days were just single cylinder engines in them and chain drive, well Harry learned to fix them or how to fix the starting device on them ignition business from an early stage and he grew up with engines by pulling them to bits along with him and Dad and it just evolved that, well there were no mechanics in those days, no trained mechanics, they had to learn from the ground up and he was lucky enough to be

able to fall into the category that he was adaptable, he knew how to time a car how it worked what the combustion was how to decarbonise it, what burnt valves were. Of course in those days right up until say the 1940s or just after the War motor cars were relatively simple. All they were {...unclear 16:03:11}....into a motor car until he reportedly resized it but the basic principles were simple so therefore blacksmiths became motor mechanics and Dad was a good blacksmith. So his training was by practical experience.

LC: When did the first Drivers Licences, when were they first introduced?

WD: When did Drivers Licences first come in? That is a question that is hard for me to answer but I can remember they were a little booklet, it was a folder but I think they came in possibly with the advent of the first ten or twelve cars that came here. I would say anywhere between ten and fifty when it became necessary to have a licence. Because I know my sister and my Dad they had some of the first that come out, it became compulsory to have a licence because they found out motor cars sad but became a means of creating accidents.

LC: What year did your father first move into Wanneroo?

WD: Well, from the spot we had at the side of the Causeway on the south end, he moved to Curtis Street to go bus driving and start the bus service there and then moved from there to the mill in Caporn Road and I can pretty well give you that and it would be pretty easy to find because I am seventy four and I was born in 1921, well I was born when we were at Curtis Street so he must have moved to Wanneroo to Caporn Road in 1921....in 1920 he decided to make the move. So today is 1994 so that's going back a long way.

LC: And he never left Wanneroo again after that?

WD: No, he finished up with the last mill we had steam engines there, two of them, before we sold to Villanovas or Villanovas took it over. Tony Villanova eventually put it over to diesel but that was just before the War ended. We did steam engines all the time we had it, the big old Marshall Steam Engine and a small Guard Engine but {...unclear 16:06:11} they had a, like the steam engine, the Stanley steam car then they had to have a ticket to run the Marshall Engine in Lake Pinjar so it gave us a good grounding on engineering in all stages. You still had to have a ticket different to a drivers licence to run a steam engine because they were dangerous contraptions and you would have to know your pressures and keep the water levels right and they have to be inspected every year so that was another grounding particularly for me being so young that I've seen all this and learnt, had more chance even

than my older brother to learn engineering and the whys and wherefores of what it takes to both design, produce and manufacture mechanical equipment.

LC: What did your father do after he.....?

WD: Oh, you mentioned or you asked me what happened, well he built a steam engine for the Villanova brothers and they looked after him well during the War and old Tony Villanova the father he was a nice old chap and they worked in and looked after one another, I was away and Harry was on the machining in Perth they wouldn't allow him into the services because he was too good a mechanic and machinist. So Dad stayed there till after the War (1945) and eventually sold the mill out to the Villanovas and we got him in here we had by this time established the engineering shop in the street down the road from here....so we built the, in fact the house I'm speaking to you in now is the house we built for my Dad, to get him in from Wanneroo. So this is the house in Johnson Road so we acquired land here and he was more or less looked after here and also I had the house at the factory in the slipway in Maylands in Hardey Road and his latter days he spent.... Mum lived with my sister as they got older..... to be looked after and Dad stayed with us in Hardey Road I had a house and my brother's house over the road and we had the big factory, we had a big two storey factory where we produced the engines and power saws. In the latter part then we went over to cray fishing and I put the slipways in for the cray boats. Dad actually died there.... I just can't remember the date he died but he lived well into his eighties, he was about eighty eight I think and in the latter twelve months or so he went to be looked after with my sister and he died in Fremantle.

LC: Do you know what year he was born?

WD: No, strangely I was only thinking that this morning, I can't rightly state when he was born, I will have to find that out, possibly my sister would know but I have never been a great one for ages.

LC: And what about your Mother Mr Dennis, was she Australian born?

WD: No, Maud was her first name, Maud Mary and she was a Clements, she came out from England with the Clements family and her and her brother Charlie he had an Aunty Kate, Kate Dennis, Dad by the way had five sisters, he was the only boy. Mum was a rather short person compared to Dad, Dad was just over six foot but Mum would be....she'd be battling to be 5 foot six she was a rather short, dark haired person and Uncle Charlie her brother, he was only short and they were apart from being closely related they were great friends all their lives. Our Uncle Charlie was quite a clever old chap too, he was pretty handy at

mechanical stuff but he was more mixed up in the building trade. He worked for some of the big builders in Perth and worked on some of the big buildings in Perth in various categories, I think it was mainly on grano path and foundations and he could turn his hand to brickwork or more or less anything in the building trade. Mum, she was.....a quiet spoken person, she put on a bit of weight towards the latter edge of it but she just went along with Dad and I'm afraid she wasn't too happy when he sold the picture show out and had to go back saw milling again and I feel rather sorry for her in that way because Dad was more or less a roamer.... I've mentioned so many things he's been in from being a carpenter to Zimpels and the furniture trade and then the move from there to run the first buses and body building, he had to build the bus bodies on the old cars in those days but from that he went back to case cutting, saw milling and so then after he finished up and retired from saw milling he came back to my brother and I and we employed him for quite a while then onto fill his latter days....on drilling and machining and various jobs when we were building the last power saws and engines.

LC: Did your Mother work.....your Mother was involved with running the picture show and the Hall was she?

WD: Yes, she would have loved to be a shopkeeper, she used to run the store and she'd run the store and she kept that going for quite a while when Dad started the last saw mill until he finished up selling out completely to the Villanova family.

LC: Did you have dances in that Hall as well?

WD: Yes, they'd hire out for dances and they would get an orchestra in as it was in those days. Films they weren't an overwhelming success financially by the time we hired the films and there wasn't the population, it was so far flung that people couldn't be bothered coming through bush tracks for twenty miles back out the swamps and homes every Saturday night to come to a picture show, it was a long drag, not like a day with the {unclear.....} of roads, there were many things against it and of course the silent films, it wasn't long before you'd be able to find out yourselves when the first talking films came in, well we had to convert to that, which was a costly business. I can remember the first talking films that you'd show the film on the screen but you'd have to start a record, a disc, to coincide with the film and sometimes the film would break and that would throw the record out and you wouldn't know where to start it again to coincide the talking with the film. It was rather a haphazard {chuckles} way of running a talking picture. I can remember some very funny episodes regarding the film projection in those days, it would be nothing for a lighting plant to cut out and you'd have to hope to get it going in time and there was the people sitting there with the lights on, well there would be no lights if the lighting plant went but you'd have to have

alternate lighting hoping that in ten or fifteen minutes it would get going again because if it went altogether you'd have to give their money back {laughs} or offer them a free ticket to the next show, so it was a bit haphazard. Of course when they put the soundtrack on the side of film, by that time we had sold out to the Crisafulli family and I think one of the first things they did was to get the later type machines in. I can remember when my brother was showing the films I was young enough to part take but I used to be far from watching while all this was going on.

LC: I believe that the early Catholic (.....unclear...muscles?) were set in.

WD: Yes, the Church wasn't built in those days, the first old priest that came out was the chap Prindiville, in fact Prindiville Drive in Wanneroo was named after him and of course being a predominantly Catholic population, it was predominantly Catholic religion so I don't know how.....Dad I think was a Catholic early in the piece but he didn't stick by it and the rest of us we don't profess to any particular religion at all but Dad allowed them to utilise the hall for the Catholic clergy to come out whenever they wanted to and utilise the hall for their services. It wasn't so long after that the Catholic Church they got the foundations going and I can remember it being built, in fact my brother, on the opening of the church he took one of our lighting plants up and set up lights in the Church for the opening. They had the mass and congregation there on a couple of occasions so we'd provide the lights for them. Otherwise there's not that much.....we dabbled in a lot of things but it's been, to my mind, being the youngest of the family because I'm 17 years younger than my brother, it was an experience for me and an education even though I didn't have much liking for school.

LC: How old were you left school?

WD: Well I unofficially left, Dad went up with the Ford Seasons put it up for kangaroo hunting on the mouth of the Murchison and I kidded him into letting me go with him {laughs} so I "nicked off" from school at thirteen and a half and I'm afraid that venture wasn't much good, he went at the wrong time of the year, there was too much water around and not enough kangaroos so he didn't last long at that so he came home again.

LC: What was the plan...what was he planning to do?

WD: Well in those days they were shooting for skins, times were tough and a chap talked him into going up, he said there's good money in kangaroo skins, this was when we had the garage and picture show you see. I think were only up there, away about two and a half months and we came home again, much to my disgust because I had to come back to school...{laughs} so this time I'd be home about {unclear 16:19:14}roo shooting and

knocking around the scrub so Mr Henderson I think it was at the time he collared me and said you've got to come back and finish school.....I didn't like him by this time I was wearing long pants for good.

LC: Where they very strict at the school? Did they used to use the cane?

WD: Oh, yes in those days we used to get six of the best....best thing that ever happened to us. Like all kids we played up I copped it three or four times and my best mates were Jack Hastings and Ted Pearsall. Pearsall was a big garage in Wanneroo and the boys, not the older ones but Ted and Burt I think, Burt was a bit older. Ted and I we were about the same age . So Ted and Jack Hastings and I, we were ... and one of the Howler boys, Monkey Howler we used to call him. And I think, I forget his first name I think he died fairly early. Ted is still going and poor old Jack wanted me to join the Navy with him when we had the picture show, I can remember him asking me one day he said "what are you going to do?"...I'd left school and I thought oh, I don't know I think Jack went to school in town for a while and Ted, my old Dad reckoned I didn't need any school anyway so poor old Jack Hastings said to me "I'm going to join the Navy" and he said " why don't you join with me?" so I thought about it but I didn't get around to joining the Navy or trying to. Well Jack served in the last war he finished up after the war he bought a power saw off us, off me actually, and he went back cutting wood in Wanneroo. So low and behold poor old Jack he was decorated man as you know, he was decorated in the Navy and he is also in that Wanneroo book along with the other old memorabilia there. While old Jack was going home and he got killed on the road, that wasn't so long after he left the Navy, maybe two or three years.

LC: What did the Hastings do?

WD: They had dairies....mmmm.....yes they had dairies. Cause in the latter years the power saws and Dad died and Harry and I we produced and sold about 2,000 engines and saws and the advent of television came in and not so long after that of course chain saws came in and the advent of chain saws that just put us out of business because they were lighter and more manoeuvrable and we then went to the fishing industry. We were on the river front, we had slipways in for our use and I put a bit slipway in the Cray boats and we used to go through up to sixty Cray boats a year until they put the big slipways into Fremantle they altered all that and the industry got bigger and bigger and the boats got bigger and we decided that it was a pretty hard way to earn money after the relatively more profitable business of the power saws and engines and we sold out so we gave the fishing industry away. We could have stayed in it after being so long in business, I'd been in it since my father was a teenager until I was about sixteen or so I was making power saws and engines in Wanneroo along with Harry and I was travelling on the road as well even in the

latter part selling right up until we sold out. So we decided to sell out we sold to the {....unclear 16:23:42} they called the area Greenbelt who had the slipways they didn't close down but we just decided to get out. Dad had fishing boats even when we had the picture show and garage he tried fishing up the coast we were floating out of ports in those days {unclear.....16:24:08}.

LC: Where did you have the boats?

WD: Eglinton Rocks he fished out of there, then Quinns Rocks and we used to go to Yancheep when it was a bush track, they went out there in the Stanley Steam Car once when it was a going concern and it was all bush track, you'd get stuck going out that type of thing but Eglinton Rocks Dad fished out of there with just hand line and there was nothing in it in hand lines, crayfish hadn't come in you see and they were there but no one realised the potential. In fact I don't think I can ever remember Dad dropping a pot over the side when he had the boat. He had a big boat it weighed about seven tonne but he lost it in Eglinton Rocks. I don't blame him he had an old skipper with him but he said oh we can moor in closer at Eglinton Rocks but he used to moor on sand, on sand your safe. I've dabbled with boats as well in life as well as Dad in fact I used to be up there with him when I was a kid you see.

LC: Where is Eglinton Rocks?

WD: I don't know if they call it Alkimos now, it's in that area and Clarksons used to own all the property in Eglinton Rocks in those days, they used to run cattle and sheep on it. I remember being out there and living in camps on the beach anyway the boat dragged its anchor and this old chap moored it closer in and she pulled anchor and came in on the beach and they repaired it but when they tried to get it in the water again and it's pretty rough that coast you know and it looks calm enough but it came in rough and knocked it off the cradle and smashed to bits on the beach. Yes, I can remember that very, very well because by that time I'd just left school you see.

LC: Was he fishing to sell the fish or just for his own.....?

WD: No just for scale fish you know, hand line, snapper and stuff like that. He wasn't going long enough to try it before his lost the boat, not to establish much of a business out of it. As I say he used to try everything you know and it wasn't for the want of trying various things that.....to my mind looking back, if he had just stayed with the picture show and garage, particularly the garage, that would have been a far better money spinner than the last saw mill, the saw mills were all hard work and it was dangerous work. Back to the saw mills, Id

often have a two day report on making power saws because it was his brains I utilised and put the idea in my head just to get them lighter and better and faster.

LC: In the saw mill would you use different saws for different tasks?

WD: Well most saw mills are the same, you have from when the logs leave the bush, it's what they call a landing and there it goes on the breaking down benches which is carried through on a travelling trolley that breaks the log into smaller pieces and from then it goes through onto smaller benches and faster benches which they call the scantling, which make all the timber to size, like the main timber is 4 x 2 and 3 x 2 in the old style which is building timber for ceilings and roofs and flooring. So it is just the process from the log into the mills, break the sides off and run and break them down until it comes out the size you want, then stacked ready for transport. It's a dangerous job and its one of the reasons I left it because I said to Dad, I'm not stopping here because sooner or later when you're running large potatoes off your hands it's never far from the blade and many an old timber man has lost fingers. My fingers are worth more to be Dad than this here working for nothing, things were tough and what we were doing was getting tucker and just keeping the mill going and buying fuel. So by that time I was also started to learn to play a saxophone and I didn't want to lose my fingers because I became proficient at it after a while. Well that's about all I can give you I think on the family in general maybe questions you may want to dig up later I could fill you in.

LC: Do you remember Mrs Lindsay?

WD: Yes..... ah, you mentioned the lady that's in some days quite clear in my memory and otherwise she was always a mystery to me. She was an English lady and I can remember the old cab front trucks in those times, I think it was about the time the Chev 4's and Chev 6's came out, the Chev 6 came after the Chev 4, a bit better model truck and there was a bush track out to Yanchep in those days, anyway she took up a property on the beach at Yanchep, why or what for I don't know but she built a wonderful place because it was such a big home close to the beach, all in the hills, so Mrs Lindsay used to call around to our garage our motor garage and the show we had for petrol and odd repairs if they want it, we got to know her and she was mixed up with some of the Spiers people, the Spiers were in the early days of Wanneroo and Bob Spiers did a lot of work, he carted a lot of stuff he had wagons and horses in the early days. So Mrs Lindsay built this big home out there, it was like a big bungalow, a centre part with verandas all around it and she was rather slim faced woman who always wore a fairly wide brimmed hat due to the summer I suppose at the beach but she had the first house on this property at Yanchep, that's the little bay at Yanchep where the road goes from the cave right to the beach there is a little reef, the

Yanchep Reef, it just runs out, not so much a horseshoe it's just reef runs out and it was a wonderful fishing spot. You could walk out and you could pick up a crayfish or you could spear a fish of it – prolific – mutton fish or abalone as they call it today it used to be loaded with them, you'd be walking over them and that is why all these locals used to go there it was a bad track out you see.....but why she built the place or what she intended doing to this day I don't really know.

LC: You mentioned you Yanchep, what was Yanchep Park like in those early days?

WD: Well Yanchep Park, Dad used to go out to a, as I say it was a bush track, I used to remember going up when they opened Gloucester Lodge, in the day it was easy to find that but that wasn't so long after we built the picture shows at Yanchep and the caves were found...Dad went through those caves long before it was opened up, they used to light flares and go down through them with hurricane lamps, at least the first part of it, they opened the big part of it up later. A chap by the name of Harry White, they used to call it Harry White's Cave, well it's now called the Grotto on the road out to the Yanchep Beach, there's an underground cave where a stream flows through, its mentioned in some of the Wanneroo write ups, Cecil Cockman, I went to school with Cecil, he was the Ranger there and Cecil writes a lot about that in the latest publication for the Water Authority at the Lakes of Wanneroo. I read that recently and it's all authentic, I can verify as I know it, that is what Cecil and Duffy say that is quite authentic. So Duffy would be older than me but Cecil was a little bit older, we went to school together along with his brother Ronnie and Dulcie Cockman and there is a Cockman in Wanneroo now with the Shire I think, he contacted me the other day, he was after information on old stuff in Wanneroo.

WD: Have you heard of that lady?

LC: Margaret.

WD: Margaret, Margaret Cockman. Well Margaret I think might have been a bit older than me. She might be a little bit older than Cecil I think. My brother met Margaret a lot when he gave quite a bit of stuff to the Yanchep Museum.

LC: Were there a lot of visitors.....when they opened up Gloucester Lodge they started to get a lot of visitors at Yanchep Park did they?

WD: Well, my brother in law ran the first bus to Yanchep, my sister's husband, he worked for the bus company. They were grey buses.....a blue and white bus, in fact those buses were also photographed in that Wanneroo documentary and I think his photo was in it but he ran the bus there for quite some time.

LC: They'd sealed the road out to there then had they?

WD: Well this was when the road went through so it was a limestone road for part of the way for many years then finally I can remember, I think it went through just after we built the picture show and garage they put a single black top road, it was limestone for a long time and they finally {sealed? 16:34:59} it right through to the caves so when the caves, might have been limestone stuff, but when the caves opened up they had a narrow strip road put through to it. It was opened up with the local Premier went out and that and it was quite a big turnout. Since then quite a lot of alterations have been made but as a teenager I can remember one of the Lacey girls she was often diving and she became an Olympic Champion, I don't think it was Dulcie, there was quite a few of the Laceys.....Evelyn Lacey was the one and they were very good friends, all of the Laceys. I can remember always going there it was quite popular even in those days. They'd opened the Lodge and of course the Duke of Gloucester, they called it Gloucester Lodge.

LC: Do you remember him coming?

WD: Barely, I can barely.....

LC: Were the gardens planted.....you know all the flower beds laid out in there...?

WD: In their time the swimming pool, diving boards and there was a cave opened, they might have opened a couple since then, I think the Crystal opened first, what they call the Cabaret that's the one in the cave and they had a dance hall in the Cabaret and I never went to a turnout in that but I've been through it quite a few times, it was quite nice but they had done a lot of dredging on the Lake and so forth since then and I think the Hotel was built much later. The Hotel wasn't built naturally when they opened the Lodge, that came at a later date. It improved a lot since the major road went through and so forth. I've visited it quite a few times over the period, I've had visitors here that it's such a nice day's drive to take them out. It's much like Araluen or up to Mundaring Weir and it's all within its scope because it is a very popular place.

LC: And of course it's got a Dennis collection in there.

WD: My brother was the main instigator of that. When we retired from the power saw business, engineering and slipways, I had a big workshop where I'm living now and the unit was in my shop it was step down by the way we used to use that for generating power when we had the last saw mill, that same engine, used to create power for the settlement with it. It was here and on a stand and I loaned it out to, well both of us, we loaned it to the Police Academy for quite a while when they started in Maylands for their Police Academy for

instruction work so it came back when they had done with it to the workshop and my workshop was full these days, I said to Harry, I said it was cluttering the place up a bit and we will never use it so why don't you loan it to....by the way it is on loan it wasn't given to them.....and the Yanchep Museum had started up I said they might have room for it up there. Of course they couldn't get their hands on it quick enough and I've it once since its been up there that's all so that's why it's so messy at the time in fact I have to sign some more papers shortly just for the continuation of the loan to them. So it will be there to my mind for its life because we won't reclaim it. I have an elder son and he might like to think of it in his name, it's in Harry's own name now, whether he put it in both our names I don't know but we mentioned Mrs Cockman just recently so she rang me the other day and of course she is coming out to clarify things regarding that. But my brother went ahead and he gave them quite a few of those old photos, some I showed you the other day, and there's a collection of photos and of course they had the Roads Board with all the seats in there and they're the seats that were there when my Dad was on the Roads Board along with the Tappings, Ashbys and Denis Keane was the Chairman in those days and since then of course one the younger ones have taken over, you know Crisafullis and that they carried.....

LC: Do you remember Denis Keane?

WD: I can remember him barely, he was a big old man and I think he had a moustache if I can remember and he had a dairy in Dog Swamp. Dog Swamp in those days it had a plank road around the side of it, it still had water in the middle, where the big Dog Swamp set up is now. Now they are going to have to put the road out for them but as the water filled up they would have to go down and pull it out but "Dinny" as we called him had a dairy up on the hill on the right hand side coming into Perth or rather on the left going out more or less but that was the site. So he used to come out to the Roads Board meetings and officiate.

LC: Did he own land in Wanneroo?

WD: Possibly.....possibly. A lot of people owned land, lots had big tracts in those days because it was so cheap you see. My Dad took up all the land where he cut the timber off in Caporn Road. There was quite a big tract of land there run out behind the back of the township right down to the corner of Pinjar and Yanchep Road, that was that corner it runs off on a tangent, well later on the Sinagras took it all, he went all the way back to the crown and only kept the one we started out on No. 2737 he left that to our family. We only sold that about twenty years ago.

LC: You did mention the risk of accidents in the saw mill. Do you ever remember there being any accidents where someone needed medical treatment?

WD: There were accidents in the.....strangely enough at all the mills Dad created one small one, the one in Caporn Road and the Pinjar one but he never lost any fingers in the mill, nor did my brother, nor did I. But I got out early because as I told you before I wasn't going to stay at a dead end job and lose my fingers, sooner or later you do. Dad had a thumb off but he did that when he was with a firm Robertson and Moffats an offshoot of Zimpels. He cut it off on a bandsaw or something one night, he never lost one in his own mills. My brother almost did, he almost cut a thumb off and..... a shocking cut but he just bandaged it up and kept on working. In those days we would only come to Perth and the hospital if we had to. Talking of funny things.....from accidents regarding severe accidents, the back of a saw in our times of cutting or cutting cases or small stuff, the back was more dangerous than the front. You can cut your finger off in the front but the back if you let a bit of timber go up the back it throws it at you, it fixes up and it will smash straight into your face or any part of your body that's in the road. I've seen pictures come over on the last mill we had that would have killed us if we hadn't ducked. At the back of a saw when you get a big blade, they were a four foot blade I think, pulling a steam engine, picks it up and just throws it. We had some close shaves there. But otherwise, with log rolling and that, I've come close a couple of times rolling logs and just got out of the road in time but we were lucky because in saw milling it's dangerous and you take that chance and falling, I've had close shaves falling I used to do the demonstration falling when we were building the power saws. I'd have to go down to the various..... where the Forestry Department in particular and demonstrate to the workmen how to fall trees. You got to know which way they are going to fall, how to scout and see they don't split up and so forth and come back on you and look for dead limbs, that's a risky business.

LC: Did you ever fall the trees with axes?

WD: Yes, early in the piece you'd scarf with the axe, that means you put the first cutting and then you'd back them off with a hand cross cut just above the scarf so that they had something to sit on but you'd look first to see which way or estimate which way they were going to fall, that's an art on its own. Another little art I had to pick up as I went along, from my Dad and Harry, our working with machines you had to know what you were doing, particularly you had to learn from someone else. So generally you can see it's been a pretty hectic life, you can see why I wanted to leave school, because there was lots of other things out there to do.....{laughs}. Doing things didn't even let up for me, I got them in the Air Force and kept on going but.....

LC: Do you want to tell me a little bit about your time in the Air Force?

WD: Ahh, there's not a lot to tell. Well for a while I tried to join but they took one look at me and didn't want me, I don't know if it was the look of me or what it was about me but so naturally everyone was called up for the Army check up and ready for being clapped into the Army and I had decided that the Army was one thing I had no intention of going into. I'd read a lot about the First World War as a kid and I reckon that if someone was running at me with a bayonet, I'd be running the other way.....{laughs}. So I didn't mind the Navy so I thought I'd been down with the chap on the sea with two or three boats he had out there, didn't mind that, used to get horribly sick but I used to get over that and anyway I was able to call up for the Army but I was dead set I wasn't going to join the Army, I don't know what I was going to do about it but I wasn't going into the Army. So I had a good friend down the road David Hancock, they had a place not far from the Shire of Wanneroo so I was happily building power saws and flying in and out the town about three times a week getting supplies and steel and stuff and so Jack Hancock he was a Speed Cop, not a genuine one, he was employed by the Shire for speeders on the road. So this time they had him over on the Bullsbrook Road where Pearce is, the Air Force at Pearce. So lo and behold he pulled up a bloke Jack Walker, he was one of the ace jokers in the Air Force at the time so he pulled over Jack Walker for speeding. Jack said I'll give you a warning this time if you'll do something for me. He said there's a chap I know he's running an engineering business along with his brother and there's nothing he can't do in that line, he even made an engine up here recently. He is in the irrigation business and they put a bore down for me (which we did....put down a well for Jack) and he wants to join the Air Force and for some reason they don't want him. So if you can do that for me then you'll either get a ticket or you won't. So here you are I'm in the Air Force. So about a fortnight I think and I got a call up, I went in for an initial training so I'd done the rookies up at Pearce and in fact I just found old photos of myself blown up the other day when I first joined, it was taken up at the site in front of the last mill we had. So they sailed us across on the Queen Elizabeth to Melbourne for initial training and we were half way across there and I think it was the first or second bloke on the Queen Elizabeth they put us on the Queen Elizabeth to take us across it was a bit bumpy in the Bight, I got through it but was so sea sick.....ohhhh...never so sick in my life, the main deck poured used to go up and never come down. For two days I was in my bunk they told me to come up and do PT so they sent a runner down he said don't worry you've got to come up for PT I said you tell the " {b.....swear word} to go to so and so". So I just stopped there, they didn't hound me, they'd have to carry me up!.....{laughs}. So the second day I was right as rain, got over it, had a ball from then on. Even played the accordion on the deck for a concert we had. Some had the accordion had buttons, button

accordion I came from them, so Old Dad used to play it well and I learnt to play it in Wanneroo along with the Saxophone. I was training under Jack Payton at the time and doing well and so I played at this concert and we finished up getting to Sydney. On the train back to Melbourne, there for a while and they got us into the initial training, there's a training course out in Flemington I think it was somewhere out that way. I'd been doing the job they'd been trying to teach me for the last three years, filing saws, cutting and welding and making patterns and all it takes to make engines and make them go. You had to fix magnetos and what went wrong and how to keep them going and all these things. So I topped the course there and I finished the course about a fortnight before the rest of them, there was about thirty of us in the course. So dux of the course so before I'd finished the Instructor said what about giving us a hand help the other blokes through. I said what do you want me to do he said show them how to file the normal thing, you've finished you're done. I said well matter of will, I said, I'm in the air force, I'm here to be told what to do. So I righto, so anyway fiddled around there with him about a fortnight had it all done. Started from 4s and 6d a day to 11 shillings in those days you see, pounds shillings and pence I was on the way to a millionaire for a while from 4s and 6d to 11 shillings. So they shuffled me around then, I went to Adelaide and finished up there and back to filing, they had some parts they couldn't get, the ship was sunk well they helped me make a little part for the biggest machine guns. They had a little workshop there and the WO said you reckon you could make them? I said I'd have a go at it so I must have made about a dozen of them for them. The guns weren't firing properly without them so see, it's only a small part but rather intricate. Talking about funny things on my way to Adelaide they knocked us off about a day until we could get the next train in Melbourne so the three of us posted, all in Armament, all good mates, strange we were all sent to Port Pirie. So this day, as you do, we got into the pub and had no other place to go in those days so I got a rum, on whisky for a while, started on rum and thought it was pretty good, never drank rum in my life before {laughs} so then to top it off I thought I'd have a cigar {chuckles}. So I never remember getting on the train at Port Pirie so {Croydon and Kraft?...unclear 16:54:06} they must have poured me on and I don't remember getting to Port Pirie and I staggered off at Port Pirie and don't remember getting there, I was on the floor all the way.....gawd I've never been so sick in all my life! So getting back to the Armament section and everything was going alright not a bad little town Pirie, used to go to the dances. So they had old Fairey Battles there and so as the pilot was dive bombing they'd go to a range. They had these bombs under the wings that was my job, bombing and gunnery. When I topped the course there I went to Point Cook and I did a Gunnery Course, finished up a Fitter Armoury and so I'd never seen a bomb or machine gun in my life but anyway they got me working there before until I bucked and they had the little machine shop so they'd put you to work and I was missing classes so I bucked at the Sergeant I said no

{b.....swear word} good to me, like the rest of the blokes there doing the course and you've got half the time and I'm in here {workshop} I was out and I'd keep up with classes and they've got me on little lathe or stuff....anyway I finished at Point Cook and comes out pretty well. So anyway Port Pirie they had these old Fairey Battles going up and they had a gunner in the back, he used to have a Lewis Gun after the pilot dropped the bombs then dive bombing they'd probably pull out at 350 mile an hour and they went fast in those, they'd drop the bomb and pull out and you'd go up and go around and drop another one. I'd taken on a pound of magazines to fire over the back, the air ground gunnery cause they used to train a gunner in the back and a pilot dropping bombs. There was just a cockpit at the back and a pilot up the front. The gunner with me he'd fire his and by the time the pilot dropped his bomb I was.....so the gunner said to me you want to fire your magazine? I said you can fire or chuck it over the side I couldn't care less I said, I'm crook. I said {unclear 16:56:28} he didn't know any better there was a little place in the back you couldn't fall out of it, it was for a stern gunner. In England on the old planes, they were out of date but they used them for trainers. So there was just a vee in the back so I had the parachute harness on and as fast as I heaved out the back - the slipstream - I was getting as much back as was going out, well what a mess. I got on the ground and the parachute I had to go and wash that and so the face was just a bomb, my ears, my hair, I swore I'd never leave the ground again {...hearty laugh} I'd never had no crank on flying though they used to come across in the early days the {unclear 16:57:14} in Maylands. When we had the saw mill they used to glide on Pinjar plane. Rick New?...unclear 16:57:24}.....men of the brickworks, that's where I met Rick out there. We used to store his gliders until they built a shed for them on Pinjar plane. I don't suppose many know that they used to glide on Pinjar plane. There was him and Bluey Farmer, he'd become a Dornier Pilot, I met him in Townsville later and Rick and Bluey Farmer.....anyway Rick New his old man had a business in the building trade and after the war Rick built the Midland Brickworks, he was a friend of mine right up to the time he died. He'd become a millionaire..... {unclear.....16:58:14}. To me that was a joke going up my old Fairey Battle and getting drunk on rum in Melbourne. There was various other things, anyway after Pirie they shot me through to Queensland. I was up at the Atherton Tablelands and..... that's right, they set me in the Five Squadron, Four and Five Squadron, Five Squadron mainly that was we were raised on Boomerangs? 16:58:56}. It was while I was at the Atherton Tablelands that I designed that arming device for the canon magazines. I showed you the.....

LC: Would you like to explain that?

WD: Oh well all it was the 20mm middle magazines for a Sparnham canon, the Boomerangs had a Sparnham canon on each wing, quite a beautiful gun, they were Italian

made I think but fairly heavy. They were a magazine about 18 inches in diameter and they held about 100 rounds of 20mm ammunition, 20mm roughly is about ¾" slug in them. Well to get them into the magazine they had an old angle line frame and you had to take tension up and feed them in by hand and take the tension again and feed them in. So while I was in the Squadron up in the Tablelands I picked up some bits (the Yanks had a dump there).....the {b.....swear word } Yankees, stuff there and I picked up the stuff I wanted and {unclear.....17:00:25} bolted down, one lever and another one under your hand that fit the rounds in twice as, as fast as you would pull the lever down you'd drop them in. So that went to Air Board then I was flown to Townsville, where I met my wife by the way. I had to make all the drawings of it and they sent it to Air Board and my father he got word back that they were going to use it so in the meantime they used the one I'd made in our Squadron and that's where the photos were taken in Mareeba. So eventually a couple of other places we went to, I think it was Bowen for a short time and then previously to going there I'd been on these strip.....when I went from the initial posting in Mareeba I went to Townsville. I was in Townsville for almost two years on Duty Crew. That meant.... Duty Crew they service every plane that comes through before it can leave the strip for the next hop to somewhere else. From Townsville it was usually there to New Guinea, up to Moresby, somewhere up there. So I came green off course and Point Cook right on to Duty Crew there so if they thought they could use you they slapped you into anywhere at all so they could use you up. Well just imagine ducking your arm in the real stuff after coming off course. So anyway there were a few funny things that happened there too but I picked it up well enough and in no time it became a good job, we had twenty four on and twenty four off, which wasn't bad. So I saw how it worked on every one of our planes that went through Townsville and I was there when the first Yanks arrived. We had no lights on the strip even, we used to use kerosene flares, that was in Garbutt out of Townsville, it's a big airport today. So that's where I got my training on every aircraft you can poke a stick at. So from there I posted to three or four other places, from there I was sent to Mareeba. But even on the strip there, there was always something happening, you know, a mob of blokes like that on a strip. Well we worked hard but for us compared to the poor blighters up in New Guinea that's when the Kokoda Trail was going on and the Battle of.....what was that called, Battle went on when we were up that way and I just missed that I was there when that was going on because when I was in the Bight going across on the Queen Elizabeth for initial training that's when the Japs wrecked Pearl Harbour because I can remember it coming across the PA system on the Queen Elizabeth but I'll never forget the time the Japs hit Pearl Harbour because I was on the Bight on that ship, the Queen Elizabeth. Anyway, they packed the Squadron up from Mareeba and sent us down to Cairns and we had a glorious couple of weeks there in Camp just knocking off not on parade and report you off and you'd clear out for the day and we had a bonza Adjunct

there he used to come out with a slouch hat on and he used to be a funny guy, he was a bonza bloke.

So on the ship and away we went and we went up to the Solomon Islands. The Solomon Islands, it was getting towards the end of it then and we were Army {corp?... unclear 17:04:38}, stuff for the Army, we were the Boomerang scout spotting, there was a mopping up area for the Japanese then. The Squadron was there, there was definitely great danger but we did lose two planes they shot down with rifle fire...it was barely safe enough back at the depo, {Torakino?...17:04:54} we were at the time. Had a volcano at the back of there. That's about the end of it, not else more I can tell you and after the war I was demobbed and came back making 1,000s of engines.

LC: You've had a very interesting life.

End of recording



Joondalup Library, Local History

T: 08 9400 4746

F: 08 9400 4743

E: local.history@joondalup.wa.gov.au
102 Boas Avenue Joondalup WA 6027
PO Box 21 Joondalup WA 6919

joondalup.wa.gov.au

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