

**SHIRE OF BRIDGETOWN-GREENBUSHES
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
BICENTENNIAL HERITAGE PROGRAMME**

An interview with
Mary Klopper
Laurie Klopper
Keith Walter
1975

Conducted by Glenn Bennett
Coordinator of the Bridgetown High School
Oral History Programme in 1975

The original tape forms part of the Bridgetown High School Collection

Reference No OH 1
1 x 90 minute tape
Verbatim transcript

NOTE TO THE READER

Readers of this Oral History Memoir should bear in mind that it is a verbatim transcript of the spoken word and reflects the informal conversation style that is inherent in such historical sources. The Bridgetown-Greenbushes Shire is not responsible for the factual accuracy of the memoir, not for the views expressed there-in, these are for the reader to judge.

Narrator Mary Hamlin Klopper (nee Randell)
Interviewer Mr Glenn Bennett
Place Living room in her home "Concordia", Blechynden Street, Bridgetown
Date 1975

PERSONAL DATA

Mary Hamlin Klopper (nee Randell), born 15th May 1910 at Fremantle, Western Australia

PARENTS Ruth Huelin Randell (nee Carey) born 5/4/1877 in South Australia
Gerald Hamlin Randell born 27/6/1881 at Tarcoon Station, New South Wales

BROTHERS AND SISTERS Ruth Mattingly Randell born 13/10/1911 at Fremantle
Paul Henry Randell born 12/1/1913 at Fremantle
Helen Margaret Randell born 23/11/1914 at Fremantle
Lois Gertrude Randell born 6/5/1917 at Fremantle

SCHOOLING State Primary until Standard 6
2 years at Methodist Ladies College, Perth

Narrator Laurence Vivian Klopper
Interviewer Mr Glenn Bennett
Place Living room in his home "Concordia", Blechynden Street, Bridgetown
Date 1975

PERSONAL DATA

Laurence Vivian Klopper, born 5th March 1899 at Bruce, South Australia

PARENTS Amelia Christine Caroline Klopper (nee Simon) born 2/9/1855 at Gawler, South Australia

Charles Henry Ferdinand Klopper born 9/12/1851 at Hope Valley, South Australia

BROTHERS AND SISTERS Ida Amelia Klopper born 23/3/1879 at Crystal Brook, South Australia

Alfred Charles Klopper born 15/5/1880 at Crystal Brook, South Australia (died 4/5/1881)

Charles Napperby Klopper born 27/7/1881 at Crystal Brook, South Australia

Lavinia Christine Klopper born 21/9/1882 at Crystal Brook, South Australia

Norman John Klopper born 11/9/1884 at Crystal Brook, South Australia (died 24/7/1887)

Elsie Caroline Klopper born 19/9/1886 at Crystal Brook, South Australia

Amelia Charlotte Klopper born 5/2/1888 at Crystal Brook, South Australia

Henry Ferdinand Klopper born 5/1/1890 at Crystal Brook, South Australia

Louis Alfred Simon Klopper born 9/11/1891 at Crystal Brook, South Australia

Lottie Victoria Klopper born 24/5/1893 at Crystal Brook, South Australia (died 9/6/1894)

Linda Lorna Klopper born 6/1/1896 at Crystal Brook, South Australia

Edward Royal born 4/10/1897 at Crystal Brook, South Australia (died 6/12/1897)

SCHOOLING Original pupil at Winnijup Rural School from 22 July 1908 to

December 1912

Narrator William Keith Walter
Interviewer Mr Glenn Bennett
Place Living room in the home of Mr and Mrs Klopper,
"Concordia", Blechynden Street, Bridgetown
Date 1975

PERSONAL DATA

William Keith Walter, born 17th February 1896 at Bridgetown

PARENTS Louisa Emily Walter (nee Thomson) born 12/2/1870 at
Brookhampton
John Russel Walter born 23/6/1863 in Somerset, England

BROTHERS AND SISTERS Mary Matilda Prudence (Burgess) born 18/5/1892 at
Bridgetown
Emma Lucille (Taylor) born 15/8/1894 at Bridgetown
John Donald born 21/2/1899 at Bridgetown
Elizabeth Gardner born 8/11/1904 at Bridgetown (died
18/5/1905)
Eunice Janet born 6/4/1907 at Bridgetown
Mary born 5/5/1913 at Bridgetown (died 7/5/1913)
Octavia Winifred (Browne) born 31/3/1915 at Bridgetown

SCHOOLING Governess at home
1 year at Bridgetown State School
3 years at rural school at the Warren (boarded at Clover
Cottage with Mr and Mrs P Wheatley
Guildford Grammar School

SYNOPSIS

SIDE A

Power and electricity – Mrs Klopper (nee Randell) describes her father's introduction of electricity to Bridgetown.

1923 – Mr Randell came to Bridgetown (original student of UWA 1912)

Built original power house – 7th May 1924 power officially turned on.

Recollections and reminiscences – 1949 SEC took over (since the tape was made, SEC have moved to new headquarters).

Mr Klopper and Mr Walter talk about – Hester Dam built 1917.

Communications - Postal services – Mail runs
in - Telephones introduced 1920s – major breakthrough

- communications for farmers
- Newspapers

Depression - conditions
- prices

Early recollections of farming

- size of farms
- selection of land
- clearing
- cropping
- animals
- introduction of super and subterranean clover
revolutionized farming
- early machinery

SIDE B

Early machinery - chaff cutter using horses

Introduction of superphosphate

- top dressing of pastures began after WWI

Fencing

- Post and rail prior to 1900
- sheep netting

- Water
 - now ring lock
- Sales
 - driven by horse and with help of dogs
 - Sale yards on present High School site
- Animal pests
 - Kangaroos
 - possums
 - rabbits
 - foxes
- Floods
 - very bad flood February 1955
- Fires
 - Volunteer Fire Brigades
- Agricultural Shows
 - Original Show Grounds above the railway line from Wesfamers to Roe Street. Moved to new ground approximately 1905.
 - Importance of horses
 - Side Shows
 - Boxing Tents
 - Agricultural Show in November
 - Fruit Show in March
- Orcharding
 - Originally Cleos and Jonathans most important
 - After WWI – Grannies
 - Method of picking and packing
 - exporting
- Differences in farming

M KLOPPER, L KLOPPER, K WALTER

INTRODUCTON

Mr G Bennett interviews three people in this tape.

Mrs Klopper's family came to Bridgetown in 1923 and her father, Gerald Randell set up the first electric light plant and system in the town. Mrs Klopper gives details of this development.

Mr Klopper, whose family pioneered at "Three Brooks" in the Winnijup area, and Mr Walter, whose family pioneered at "Peninsula" west of Bridgetown, discuss farming methods, changes due to mechanization, early memories of the district.

VERBATIM TRANSCRIPT

SIDE A

GB At that stage, in the 1920s, in fact up to the mid 1920s street lighting was still gas, is that correct?

MK Gas lights were still here when we came to Bridgetown in 1924.

GB How did the lamp lighter go round at night?

LK On a pony ... he used to ride around

GB What sort of light did they throw out, a good clear light?

LK Not very satisfactory at all, better than nothing, that's all

GB What sort of gas was it? Acetylene - like the miners used in their lamps?

LK Stuff in a container at the bottom. Didn't that come from Germany in the first place? I think they installed this gas system about the time the war started and then gas cut out because it came from Germany, so I'm told. After the war they were able to get the gas required. Or the nucleus, whatever that is.

GB Then in 1924, Mrs Klopper's father, Mr Randell, came to town, in fact you said 1923 he actually came to town. Could you tell me a bit of background about Mr Randell, prior to his coming to Bridgetown, to open up the generator.

MK Well he was a station owner's son from New South Wales, then he lived on the station until he was sixteen, when he was sent to Prince Alfred College. He never returned to the station, he came to the west as a boy to live with his elder brother, who was a doctor and he did some engineering here at the Perth Technical School, I think. Because there was no school of engineering at the University in those days. He was a foundation member as a student at the West Australian University. In the old tin sheds in Pier Street where he did Science, because there was no engineering. After he had done that he went to Fremantle Tramways, and supervised the building of the power station which ran the tramways. From Fremantle he went to Westonia where he was an engineer on a gold mine. He left Fremantle because he knew that the East Perth Power Station would be closed. He went from Westonia to Malay States where he was an engineer on two mines, a gold mine and a tin mine. He came back and practiced as a consulting engineer in Perth and from there he came to Bridgetown in 1924. He must have got around a bit.

- GB Initially you said that he owned the concession for lighting in Bridgetown. When he first arrived could you tell me the setting up of the system?
- MK He had to start from scratch, he had to build the power station, he had to acquire machinery, and he had to acquire poles and erect the wires. Of course he had to wire all the houses before ... starting in a town where there had never been any electricity he had to do everything. The power was officially turned on the 7th May 1924 and there were sufficient houses wired to make it worthwhile. But from then on, of course, it grew and there were more houses being wired all the time.
- LK The actual building of the Power Station was built by Thain Brothers early in 1924, Athol Thain's two uncles.
- GB Cold you tell me something about the generators Mrs Klopper?
- MK The Petters was a new one, it was imported from England, but the other two I think he bought second hand, they were Gardner engines. Gardner 6 and 4. Petters was an oil engine, wasn't it? The Gardner 4 and Gardner 6 were run from a gas producer, it was a wood gas producer. He used wood all the time he lit this town for those two big producers.
- GB How far up did the electricity go when your father was operating the generator.
- MK I'm really not quite sure how far it went by the time he finished up, but when it started it was just in the very near vicinity, but it was spreading out all the time. Until it was quite a long way out of town, perhaps three or four miles in some cases. But with an Australian town like this is doesn't need any definite circumference from the centre of town. There was great controversy when Father first came here about where the power station was to be put. He tried to buy the old tannery which was on Peninsula Road, and it would have been much better, because it was a very bad place to have a gas producer, the whole town used to be covered in smoke, but that was where the Shire said he was to build.
- GB Where was the building? It's still there, isn't it?
- MK Yes, the SEC. The gas producer was out the back; I don't know what its like out the back now. I suppose all that machinery is gone. Around the back where it was not closed in – that was where the gas producer was. It's exactly the same as it was when Father built it, and the office is exactly the same. (1975: The SEC has now moved to a new location in Nelson Street, and the original site is vacant.)
- GB What hours did the generator operate?

MK Well, in the first place, from four o'clock in the afternoon until midnight. Then as people bought more appliances they lengthened the hours, and of course if there was any trouble at the hospital they would ring up for the light. Father would go and put on the light at any hour of the day or night, but the appliances gradually increased, then it was necessary to get the first Gardner engine to cope with the increase, because the other engine was very small. After a few years Father devised an alarm clock system which would stop the Petters engine, and he used to start it again when the main load went off about half past eleven at night. Then he would come home and the alarm clock would stop the engine at the time he had set it for. Depending whether it was summer or winter so that the thing would run to daylight. After a few years people did have an all-night service. Or darkness service according to the time of year.

GB Was it noisy, the generator?

MK I don't think it was a nuisance to the town.

LK The last season was, because in addition to the Gardner 4 and 6 he had a Kynoch, single cylinder, then he got a three cylinder second hand, and that was very noisy. I remember people saying they couldn't understand the sound of a three cylinder engine, it was quite different to a four cylinder, it doesn't run so evenly. They couldn't understand this noise.

MK The Gardner engine was very good. You see, Father had a lot of trouble during the war because he got concession, the arrangement was the SEC could take over in ten, twenty, or thirty years. Now twenty years must have come about the time the war (WWII) was on and he wanted to retire then and of course the SEC wouldn't take over, and the war was at its height and the engines were worn out and that's when he got that second hand Kynoch and it worried the town and it worried him, because he had a lot of trouble. He had quite a lot of breakdowns, but it was entirely due to the fact that he couldn't get any new machinery and he didn't want any new machinery because he wanted to retire and let the SEC take over; and of course as soon as the SEC came to the district all his machinery would be redundant, it would only be thrown out. There was a public meeting in the town complaining about it, Russell Dumas, who died this week, came down to the meeting because he was the chief engineer of the Public Works Department, and he told those complainants that he didn't know of any other engineer who would, in Australia, keep those engines going at all, that he thought they'd better pipe down until the war was over. There weren't any more complaints, because he knew it was lucky the town was lit at all. Because after all it was used every night and every day and it doesn't go forever.

GB You told us an amusing story about one of the very early problems that he struck too, could you tell that for us?

MK There was a lot of trouble in the first few years with street lights being broken by boys with gings and there was a policeman here in Bridgetown called Sergeant Stynes, who was very cooperative and did his level best to help Father catch this boy. Eventually Father caught the boy without Sergeant Stynes and too him down to the Police Station and told Sergeant Stynes he had caught the culprit and the Sergeant was very pleased and said "Who is it?" My Father said "It's Eddie Stynes."

GB Your father finally gave over to the SEC in 1950.

Talking further about the 1920s Hester Dam had been built in 1917, Mr Klopper was talking about the building of the dam and the reasons for it.

LK It was really built for the railways because the river water which they had been using in their steam engines was eating out the boilers but when they decided to put in the dam they thought they would use it for domestic purposes as well. My father had the contract to supply the horses with chaff and I used to take a load of chaff to the dam every week. It was finished at the beginning of winter 1917 which was the wettest winter we ever had, so it was filled in one year, something they didn't expect. One funny story about the Hester Dam there, some of the townspeople were afraid it was going to burst. Somebody started a rumour and a car load of them weren't game to go out the Greenbushes Road in case the dam would go, so they went out the Winnijup Road and sneaked up behind, but there was no danger, the dam was very well built.

GB What sort of difference did it make to the water supply in town

KW When I came back from the war it had made a big difference to the supply.

GB What had they been using prior to the dam?

KW Tank water, some did have wells, some of them were salt. There was one down at Mr Ted Doust's, they had to fill that one in, too salty, that's why it's always wet there. I think prior to that Mr Frank Chidzey had a vegetable garden there and he was using water from that well, but that was a long time before it was salt. Over the road somewhere near that big red gum at Clover's shop, there was a well there for stock, a horse trough. The same thing happened to that, it got salt. Because the present water comes out from near Ben Holland's and goes down where its always damp. That was salt.

- GB Postal services, how did they develop? During this period until the late 1920s and include 1817. They talk about 1917 being a bad year but tell me about postal services then.
- LK Until the beginning of 1917, Mr Blechynden had always run the mail by horse and buggy. He was enterprising enough to buy a T-model Ford at the beginning of 1917 and he was unfortunate enough to strike the wettest winter on record. A lot of the gulleys were often in flood, they referred to it as Blechynden's submarine! He still carried on for twelve months and at the end of that time the old T-model was worn out.
- GB Were the postal services still twice weekly in those days?
- LK Yes.
- GB When did they improve the twice weekly service?
- ANS Much later on.
- GB Telephone communication came to Bridgetown about the 1920s but from what you've been saying it didn't reach the farms until much later. 1926 on. Can you think of the difference that telephone communication made to the farmer?
- LK It revolutionized farming, it made us feel closer, to a doctor in case of accidents, a very good feeling.
- KW Breakages of machinery too, you could ring your agent in Bridgetown and tell them the pieces you had broken and they could send away. I had to take a piece of a binder in on horseback once.
- GB So telephone was a major breakthrough.
- KW When it first started on what we called the Peninsula Line and the Maranup one, it was party line. Old Mrs Powell at the local exchange only opened certain hours of the day. Whenever there was sickness in the home, she always let that house straight through on the open exchange over night. In case you wanted the doctor any time of the night. When there was a bushfire she never left the switchboard, she used to darn or knit or something, she was one in a thousand.
- GB Another aspect of communication in the 1920s in Bridgetown were newspapers, and in the 1920s in Bridgetown there were two papers, the Blackwood Times and the Nelson Advocate. Where were these printed?

- LK The Blackwood Times was printed in Bunbury by the South West Times but the Nelson Advocate was printed in Bridgetown. The premises are now the Potters Club (since moved) as it was built for the Nelson Advocate.
- GB Was that purely a Bridgetown paper, based on news in Bridgetown or did it range a bit?
- LK No, South West.
- KW More or less the Blackwood district.
- LK They called it the Nelson Advocate, so it was really the Nelson district, the electoral district of Nelson.
- GB Did most people buy both newspapers? Did you buy both?
- LK We did for a while.
- KW We had the Blackwood Times.
- GB Newspapers from Perth, did they arrive on the day of publication or one day later?
- LK They came down by train and we got them the next day. We didn't subscribe to the West Australian for many years, we used to take the Western Mail or the Sunday Times and a weekly paper.
- KW I don't think we did, we didn't take the weekly, sometimes they would pile up for a week or ten days before you got them.
- GB Moving out of the 1920s into the late 1920s of course the Depression hit Bridgetown, any recollections of the Depression days? Things like life on the farm and how you had to tighten then belts and that sort of thing.
- KW I think one of the things that brought home, really brought home to us, on our farm was when two men turned up looking for work, two Collie men. They'd walked over to Williams, Narrogin, Wagin, back to Kojonup, back to Bridgetown. They got to our place at two o'clock in the afternoon and they hadn't eaten for two days. I thought I had seen hungry men before, the older of the two had no soles in his boots, just the uppers of his boots left is all. It made you stop to think. I think the farmer was best off myself, because we could use so much of our own food.
- GB You said your recollections of the Depression came almost overnight. Tell us the story of the ewes.

- KW My brother and myself came into a sale here on the Wednesday, we walked a line of ewes on foot, paid two pound a head for ewes, and the next day we couldn't get five bob for them.
- GB How about prices in general for what you were producing on the farm and that sort of thing?
- KW I think I am right in saying butterfat was 6d, wool was 8d.
- GB What had it been say prior to that, 1929 to 1930?
- LK Prices were quite good, it was over 20d per pound, for your top line, or was it 24d? See, it dropped down to 8d a pound during the Depression. 8d -11d we would get for our top wool. In 1933 we sold all the wool on the place for 17d a pound. That was a fantastic priced after what we'd had earlier. Fat lambs, I think we were getting about 15 shillings to one pound for them and then they dropped to 10 shillings, you were battling to get 10 shillings a head.
- GB Mr Walter, you were talking about the sale in Bridgetown for cattle.
- KW That was a good while after, though it couldn't have been very long after because cattle prices were away down, I know that sale in Bridgetown they went down to five bob and up to two pounds and two pounds ten shillings.
- GB The going prices for cattle at that stage would have been far higher than that.
- KW The prices started to rise from then on, we thought when we sold those heifers for sixteen pound we got a record price.
- GB You said you thought farmers were the best off, but you must have had to tighten your belts too.
- KW At one spell there the wife used to drive the horse and buggy. I never went to town for four months, we never saw anybody except the ones on the farms.
- GB Did you cut back on the people you employed?
- KW Yes, cut them right out. We had nothing to pay them.
- LK No, I didn't employ anyone during the Depression. I did the work myself. Except shearing, of course, we still had men coming in to shear the sheep.

- KW I shored sheep during the Depression for a pound a hundred with blades. Seven hours was all I could do because I had to hand milk cows night and morning. My best day was an even hundred in seven hours. You got one pound for that day's work.
- GB Were people unemployed in town? During the Depression.
- KW We used to have a lot of tramps, looking for jobs. One occasion a man came in selling wire cake stands, made out of wire. I discovered later that he had pinched the wire out of our fence (laughter).
- GB Farming in the early days if we can try and follow through the farm from the earliest of times, as a topic. Mr Walter and Mr Klopper, the size of farming properties when you began and later on. Can you tell me something about the farm sizes?
- KW The acreage on my father's first freehold land was one hundred and fifty acres, that we bought. We then had a lease which we gradually added to, we had about 2,500 ... that was a big property. It was too big really, we didn't have the ways and means of clearing it. The clearing was done by hard yakka and horses. Laurie knows the experience of clearing our country.
- LK One of the popular sizes of farms was 640 acres, a square mile. Except on the river they were surveyed in 100 acre blocks, some farmers bought several 100 acre blocks. 1,000 acres was considered a big farm for our part of the country.
- GB Can you explain a bit more clearly why you mentioned a moment ago "land poor", what did you mean exactly by that?
- LK Well those who selected two or three thousand acres at 10/- an acre, they had to pay for it over twenty years, they'd have to meet the rent, they'd have to pay the instalments, plus the Road Board rating and then they'd ring bark hundreds of acres, to kill the trees, the first stage of clearing. The re-growth was more than they could manage, so all their energies was spent in keeping down the suckers and seedlings. They weren't getting any further ahead with their clearing. So if they had a couple of thousand acres they were "land poor".
- KW You weren't getting any returns off it; you were paying out rates and taxes.
- GB So what would you see as the optimum as to what was the best farm size?

- LK About 640 acres was big enough for us, kept us busy.
- GB The earliest form of clearing Mr Walter and Mr Klopper, what did you clear, what was on the property that you had to clear?
- KW Redgum, jarrah and blackbutt and blackboys. In the old days as far as our country was concerned, they grubbed around the trees, cut all the roots until the tree fell over. Then you ploughed with a mould board plough after taking out all the roots.
- GB You mentioned that they grubbed around, what did they do that with?
- KW Spade and a grub hoe, we had a couple of pretty calloused hands. Raw
....
- LK Out at Winnijup there were a lot of blackboys and my father pulled out the blackboys with horses, then they'd grub around the small trees, cut the roots and push them over. But the big trees were just ring barked and left. For many, many years we ploughed around the big trees. I'll tell you one very funny story, I had a young man from the bank out there for football one Sunday morning, and one of our main paddocks had all these big dead trees and he looked out there and said that I suppose you are going to clear this now I see you've got it ring barked. We'd been growing crops on that for twenty years.
- GB When you say your father used two horses to clear the land, how did he work the horses?
- LK He got an iron triangle made with a spreader in the front and a snig chain on the back and he hooked the two horses on to each end of the spreader and the idea was that if one horse pulled suddenly, it wouldn't hurt the other horse, but usually the horses worked together as a team and one pull and the blackboy would be out.
- GB When you first cleared the land, what did you use it for? What crops and what sort of animal did you run?
- LK We grew oaten crops for hay, we tried a bit of wheat, to give it a green colour (rood wonder-wheat) so that when the oats were cut it had a tinge of green, because we used to sell a lot of chaff around the district. We didn't have sheep on our farm for probably ten years, before we got any sheep at all, we had a few cows, dairy cows. There was very little feed, so we couldn't run many stock.
- GB Then you eventually moved away from cropping to run sheep?

ANS Yes. After WWI we started subterranean clover. That revolutionized grazing and superphosphate for top dressing our pastures, so we could run two or three sheep where one had run before.

GB Animals per acre, or acres per animal?

LK One sheep to ten acres originally, then two or three ewes to one acre.\

GB Did you start off in the same mould Mr Walter?

KW Yes. I never used the blackboy puller that Laurie's talking about. That's the first I've ever heard of one, I can see it in my mind, it would be good for small timber, wouldn't it?

LK If you had a chain long enough and you had an indirect pull with a block and tackle, you would be alright.

KW Of course some people did their clearing with bullock teams. Wheatley's, both "Orange Grove" and what they call "Park Farm", all the clearing on both of them was done by bullock teams. With big triple and double blocks they used to have a horse to pull the blocks back to the tree, put a wire rope up as high as they could, put the triple block up there and then on to the double block. It was marvelous the tree they could pull out.

GB Sounds almost like cheating compared with what Mr Walter Meares told me the way he had to clear by hand, grub around.

KW I can tell you a very funny story about a tree being pulled out by bullocks, Mr Leo Wheatley and Don Wheatley. There was a big pine tree growing on a bank at the back of the house, and they thought it might fall over the house so they decided to take this tree out. They had all the bullocks yoked up, and the blocks and tackles rigged up. Before they started to chop the tree, they went up the tree put a rope up, right away up, then they started to chop the tree down, axes, no saw, and they got rosin (resin) all over their hands, they were in a terrible mess, this rosin is sticky on the axe handle. They chopped through about that thickness, right through the tree, Leo went up and started off the bullocks with his whip, and pulled the tree out by the roots. It took the hole the tree made behind the house, it took seven big tip trays of earth to fill it u.

GB What crops did you grow at "Peninsula"?

KW We used to grow oaten crops as Laurie was saying, for chaff. We used to put with a bushel of oats, half bushel of wheat. We went in for pigs quite a lot, had a lot of field peas. Hard to explain the pea rake we had. Long prongs, wooden prongs flat on the ground we had to handle them, lift the

- handle right over and left the peas in windrows. You had to do it early on the mornings because the plants were tough and they wouldn't let go and they would shed the peas.
- LK Another way of threshing the peas was to use a horse with a centre pole, you'd start him off with a long rope and he'd wind the rope around the pole and come into the post and then reverse the horse and he'd walk to the outside of the patch of peas. Then they'd pick off the straw and put the other through a winnower and have a clean sample of peas.
- KW And a hand-winnower at that!
- LK I spent many boy-hours on a winnower.
- GB I was going to ask you about the earlier sorts of machinery in inverted commas, but it sounds more like man-power than machinery. You talked about these early and basic machines, what other sorts of machines were there, and how did they develop them?
- KW The first crop my father ever grew he had two men with scythes, he didn't have machines. That would be back in the 1890s, the men were Arthur and Alfred Reeves. Then they got a mowing machine with two seats, a side-delivery rake which pushed it off in sheaves, the men used to follow, they'd get a handful of the oats split one through, twist them and tie them.
- GB There was still a lot of manpower used.
- KW The first job I ever had after leaving school, I went to one of the neighbours, hand tying.
- GB Any other machinery?
- LK Reaper and binder, that was invented about 1898. We bought one second hand, which we still have on the farm, a Massey Harris.
- KW The first three binders to come to Bridgetown were cared from Boyanup to Bridgetown by Alfred Doust with a horse team, in packing cases to Elders, then Massey Harris assembled them on the farm. That was before the railways came this side of Boyanup. Lindsay Armstrong had one in 1898, pulled with three horses. The machinery was driven off a big land wheel, the knives flew backwards and forwards very rapidly after the start of the mowing machine, it would cut the hay and it would drop onto the platform canvas and then be elevated up the binder and fall over the opposite side and the packers would pack it down tightly, the weight of the sheaf would release the mechanism, and the needle would come over with the twine and tie the sheaf. Then at the same time the arms on the binder would

throw the sheafs out onto the ground or the carriers, if you had a carrier, which would take three sheaves and drop them in rows of three. The stokers would be very annoyed if you didn't use your carrier bars because they had to scoop them up from all over the place. We only had a reaper and binder, but our neighbour had a stripper to harvest his oat crops and then after the oats were stripped he'd bring them under a shady tree where we would operate the winnower, hand operated.

GB How did that work?

LK Well it was just a fan with sieves, you turned the handle and feed the oats in, it would come out on the sieves and the blast of air would blow out all the chaff and the oats would drop down and be sieved according to their size. The bigger the marketable oats would be lifted up onto the elevator with buckets on and dropped into the bag, all the small oats would come out the side.

GB Mr Walter was talking about a horse worked chaff cutter. Did you have one of those?

SIDE B

KW Yes, the first one we had was what they called a two horse, they used to walk around in a circle. The rod went through the wall straight on to the spindle of the chaff cutter, the horses used to walk in a circle, on a pole, with a rod from the bottom of the pole out to the horses bit, the same distance all the way around. Afterwards we got a bigger machine, that machine only had two knives. Then we got one with three knives and three folds and this was worked through the wall onto a spindle wheel and a belt and that wheel would reach out and you'd get a lot more chaff in a day.

GB You'd have to select your horses very carefully, wouldn't you?

LK We had one horse, good horse, good worker but chaff cutting he didn't like. The other horses would start and he'd wait till the pole would hit him in the back of the legs and then he would jump, he'd snap the pole every time.

KW Well we had a four horse works, but we used two horses with two poles and a two foot six flywheel driving a pulley on the chaff cutter which gave you a fair speed on a three knife cutter. The four horses we brought from South Australia were very well broken in and quiet. My father put them into the horse works, in the early 1900s. He had them running a straight belt, he made them work clockwise and they started to play up, and rear in their harness, he couldn't understand it, it appears they were getting

- giddy, going in a small circle, clockwise. He crossed the belt and put them around the other way, and they worked like that for twenty years, going anti-clockwise they would go all day. These quiet old horses just wouldn't go clockwise, it was the only solution we could think of. They would start to stagger, they were giddy.
- GB Any other interesting sorts of machinery that you can think of? How long did you keep horses working on the property?
- LK In 1938 I got my first secondhand Fordson tractor.
- KW We did all the fruit carting and super carting with horses until they put bitumen down from the main corner to the railway line. If I had to stop for a train, they couldn't keep their feet to start, they were alright so long as they were moving. But to start I had five horses in a heap one day. Its sort of uphill there, they could not dig their toes into the bitumen.
- GB Fertilisers, you mentioned the revolution with subterranean clover and nitrogen that put into the soil. When did superphosphate come and what did you use before super?
- LK Bone dust prior to superphosphate.
- KW That wasn't very satisfactory because it was so slow acting, though for years and years after you could see the drill marks, the grass growing along the rows of drill marks, where the bone dust went in so you got the benefit over ten years. Our first experience of top-dressing was we had a field we were drilling for oats but there was a big hollow with some paspalum – we didn't plough that up, I drilled one side of it. My gear lever on the back of the drill stuck – would not put out the seed, did not affect the super – a cog had slipped. Across this piece of paspalum flat the super sowed and not the oats. When I finished there, the thing dropped and wouldn't sow at all, so I took it home. A few weeks afterwards you could see going up the road from the house, you could see this strip of very dark green grass, the part where I'd sown the super. That really was a revelation.
- LK Superphosphate came in very early in the 1900s, but we only used it on our crops – top dressing of pasture didn't come in until after WWI. 1904 or 1905 we got superphosphate to put through our seed drills.
- GB Fencing, changes in fencing types, the early fences that you used?
- LK We didn't use the old "post and rail", which was the popular fencing back in 1900 or before.

- KW We had a “post and rail” around the homestead.
- LK We used all netting, sheep netting, weaved top and bottom with plain wire, with a barb on top. Until very recently, my son used all ring-lock, fabricated type.
- GB How about putting up fences, did you have a posthole digger?
- KW Good old muscle, crowbar and spade and a rammer.
- LK It’s only the last twenty years or so that there have been posthole diggers.
- KW A lot of this country even then you couldn’t use a tractor, let alone a posthole digger. A lot of the country down the river. Easier up the river ... if you struck stone or stiff clay it was pretty hard going.
- GB How about water for the farm property, some river water for the ‘Peninsula’ obviously.
- KW For stock, the river and gullies.
- GB Did you ever construct dams?
- KW No, never had a dam on the farm.
- LK We used a well and had rainwater tanks for the house, but in summertime when the rainwater ran out we had to cart from the well. But later on we had a dam. As far as domestic drinking water was concerned we always used that water.
- KW Geoff had a dam on his place, the first winter it busted, took all the clay down over the road, all over my best hay field. This yellow clay.
- LK There are quite a number of dams on the properties now.
- KW We were well off for stock water. Had springs.
- LK The brooks started to go salt and brackish, so we had to have rain water for the house.
- KW The stock liked the river water best of all. We were dairying and we would bring the cows in from paddocks with beautiful fresh water brooks and they’d go straight for the river.
- GB How about sales, where did you take your animals to sale, and could you tell me some of the methods to get them to sale?

- LK Drive them with sheep dogs, on horseback. We used to send some lambs to Midland Junction, you'd load them one morning, I left home at daylight and drove my lambs nine miles to catch the nine o'clock morning train, they wouldn't be sold until the next morning. They would lose condition on the way. We would sell them at a sale in Bridgetown, that meant driving them another three miles, so we tried to avoid that if possible.
- KW The sale yards then were where the High School is. Elders were the top part of it, Wesfarmers and Goldsborough's the bottom.
- LK No, Wesfarmers didn't get going for a long time. They'd hire the yards then, if Dalgety's or Wesfarmers wanted to have a sale they would hire them from Elders. JR Walter & Co were the first to have yards, Keith's father and his partner.
- GB How long did it take for you to drive the sheep or the other stock to, say you took yours to Hester, Mr Klopper.
- LK Grown sheep would travel two and a half miles and hour, lambs are very lazy about three miles an hour. It would take three hours to travel nine miles.
- GB Did you have to do the same thing (to Mr Walter) you used to have to drive your stock to Bridgetown?
- KW I drove pigs in for a long time, I used to bring the wagon with five or six drums of water, find a hole somewhere and tip a drum of water in and let the pigs wallow in it for a while. Twenty-two pigs I drove in one day by myself. Twenty two they wouldn't have gone in the wagon, it was before trucks. We thought it was the best way to bring all this water in 44 gallon drums in the wagon, let them have a wallow every now and then on the road in.
- LK Pigs are such cantankerous animals, I would never attempt to drive a pig.
- GB Did you have any problems on you property with animal pests when you started farming?
- LK Possums were very bad in the Winnijup area.
- GB Were the kangaroos ever a problem?
- KW They did a lot of damage to the netting fences, which they are doing now. I know one man who can't keep his fences repaired. He's right by a pine plantation, that's where they are living and they come out at night and they

- tear his fences to pieces. Out near Guy Giblett's. They used to be as bad on the netting fences.
- LK I know they are an awful pest, but we were very grateful for kangaroos from an eating point of view. As far as possums went they were a good way to make pocket money. You could sell the skins in those days, so from very early days we trapped possums by the hundred.
- GB How did you trap them?
- LK A steel trap or snares. A snare made out of special snare wire wound with twine, on a pole leaning up against a tree, about half way up. Its amazing how they go up a pole, rather than climb a tree right from the bottom. If there was a pole leaning up against a tree they would go for the pole every time.
- GB They sold them in at Bailey's Tannery here?
- LK Probably, I can't remember. We sold them long before the tannery was going.
- KW The last time the season was open, it was open for a fortnight. I'd go around my snares and be back in time to start the engine for the dairy.
- GB What were you paid for the skins?
- KW They were graded.
- LK About two pounds a dozen.
- KW There was one buyer here in Bridgetown he came out and offered me twelve pounds for my even skins.
- LK I used to remember in latter years two pounds per dozen.
- KW When I was a boy they used to be 7/6 per dozen. I reckoned I was a multi-millionaire. Possums and rabbit skins.
- LK Rabbits, they were a pest. After WWI they nearly drove us off our properties.
- GB Can you remember when they weren't there and when they were there?
- LK Not suddenly, you could just say they increased.

- KW People ridiculed the idea that rabbits could be here, they said they'd never come.
- LK I realized I would have to get rid of the rabbits or leave the property myself.
- KW On two hundred acres, I put out two kerosene tines of chopped up apples with strychnine, and I went out the next morning and picked up one thousand, four hundred and sixty five rabbits.
- LK Phosphorus was the thing that worked, you wouldn't see ten percent of the rabbits, they would go back to their holes and die.
- LK They used strychnine for a while then phosphorus, until myxomatosis came much later. We used arsenic for a while. Phosphorus mixed with bran and pollard was the most effective then. You'd run trails right around your property, and keep your sheep out, the sheep would pick up the bran and pollard. Then they brought in 1080, that was a special poison they mixed with oats and very effective, I think it killed the foxes too.
- GB I was going to ask you about foxes too?
- LK They followed the rabbits over from South Australia, there was no doubt about that.
- GB Were they ever a real pest around here?
- LK They didn't worry us very much.
- KW I only had the occasional one, my experience I had a big loss one year, with lambs. The following year I put the ewes in a clear paddock right close to the homestead. The previous year I was losing twenty or thirty lambs a night. I poisoned and poisoned the foxes. From the top of the hill I could see the whole paddock and I sat there one evening and I watched and saw one come through the fence. The next night I waited where he had come in and I shot him. They'd eat the dead lambs, but they loved chooks and turkeys.
- GB An bad years in terms of floods and fires?
- LK I remember, February 1955, was the worst flood, that was in summertime, it took our bridges away, the Winnijup bridge away.
- KW Took half my sheds away. Half the sheep yard and the dairy yard.

- LK We only had four and a half inches at Winnijup but they had over eleven inches over at the Arthur River.
- KW When people at Winnijup rang and told me it was coming down the Blackwood River, I said the time it gets here it won't be so high, the river was lower than I had ever seen it that year. I thought it had to fill all those big pools and it's a long way from here, from Winnijup Bridge to here, it winds and twists I was very much mistaken.
- LK It was ten feet higher than the 1917 winter, it encroached on the farm lands.
- KW Before that the highest we had seen it, it was four inches deep on the shearing shed floor, that year it was on the roof of the shearing shed.
- GB Did you have any bad fires?
- LK We had three, out at the Mayanup-Winnijup area I think the worst was not so very long ago. About half a million pounds worth of damage, thousands of sheep were burnt, as well as houses and bales of hay out in the paddocks. It came through in December, I think, before Christmas. Sheep, some cattle, houses, sheds and bales of hay. It was really a disaster.
- GB How did you organize against such a disaster? In your area did you have a volunteer fire brigade?
- LK Yes, we had a fire brigade. You always get the odd silly person who will do stupid things. Those bad days, you get one about every five years, when the temperature is over 100 degrees and there's a gale blowing from the north-west, we have been burnt out three times on that sort of day. The fire will start somewhere and will jump two miles and will be lighting up two miles in front of the main fire.
- KW The worst fire we ever had in our district, I was away at school and it started down at Southampton Bridge about ten o'clock in the morning, and by dark it was well on its way out to Winnijup. Old George Stevens, he lost his big haystacks. He was at "Melrose Estate then, and he had a stud, Shropshire. He lost the lot. We didn't have five square yards outside the house, the garden and the house, that wasn't burnt. We did save our sheep, just through luck. A neighbour had bought a block, just handy to us, he'd cleared twelve acres ready to plant orchard and burnt it early. My father and the boy that he had mustered all the sheep and put them on the twelve acres. They went back to look for the stragglers and when they came back they couldn't find the sheep on the twelve acres, they just couldn't see them for smoke.

- LK One of our worst fires in Winnijup started on Jayes Road. It had to burn through two thousand acres of bush country. All the farmers were waiting at the end of the bush country for it to come through, the sparks were flying over their heads, lighting up the farming land behind. The first thing I knew about it Winnijup was burnt out before they ever knew, you couldn't see anything for smoke. That was one of our worst fires.
- KW We had a very bad one that started out the other side of Hall's in 'Kandalee' country, further on than that and before the fire was at our place it lit every hilltop between us and Hall's. We were just helpless. All we did was fill everything we had with water, that was around the sheds and house and patrol around as a spark landed chuck some water on it. We didn't have knapsack sprays then.
- LK Bracken fern was some of the worst, of course the temperatures would be so high, they would burn in the air. They would continue burning for up to two miles.
- KW Well the worst we had from that fire, Geoff Hester had two hundred acres of jarrah country that had been rung for eighteen months and he had it fallen axe handle high, the wind was picking up the burning bark and bringing it over. It did some good, and it did some harm, to the fences anyway. Old Geoff was very pleased, he went on to, he could go straight on clearing.
- LK Some of the old timers used to rush around with a fire stick with nobody looking so they could get some fresh feed. When the scrub was burnt off, everything was edible.
- KW Sparks and dry bark off the dead trees, off the dead Jarrah trees are the worst thing in fires. They blow for miles.
- GB Agricultural Shows, can you remember the shows? Did you come into the Bridgetown Shows?
- LK Haven't missed one since 1904.
- GB Tell me something about the development of the Agricultural Shows.
- KW You know Wesfarmers, Moyes and all that block, that was the Showground. It had a split jarrah, slab fence around it, that's all I can remember about it.

- LK From the railway line, Wesfarmers there right up to Roe Street back to the gully behind the packing sheds, that was the Bridgetown Showground. They started about 1888 through to 1905, I'm not sure, 1903 or 4.
- LK I just remember one show on that ground and then they moved up to the other. The horses were the main thing, you didn't get many animals, dairy cows or anything like that. It was all horses then. Gentlemen's hack and ladies and that sort of thing was the main attraction. There was the odd side show.
- GB What sort of side shows were there in 1904?
- LK There was one thing that sticks in my memory early in the new ground. The man was selling glass and he had all these different coloured glasses, he was banging them on the table as hard as he could hit and he said "When you buy glass, buy glass". That was Venetian glass and I've got some here that I bought in Venice in 1970 when I was away. This was up on the show grounds about 1906 of course its many, many years since you could buy Venetian glass in Australia. It was wonderful material. It's supposed to be unbreakable. But that was one of the side shows, you had boxing tents, some of the local boys would come in and sometimes the local boys weren't so local. One thing that always stuck in my neck was the "Wild Man from Borneo", you paid one shilling to see him and you'd go in there and he would be eating a great bowl of beef, raw. Later on we saw him walking around the showground.
- GB Any more memories for you, Mr Walter?
- KW The most vivid memory of the first show on the present ground was the death of a pig, John May's, Bert May's father. He brought this big pig into the show, it died from overheating. It was a very hot day. Being a kid, it was one of the things I remembered most vividly.
- LK It was quite a joke, everything that happened about that time was so many years before or so many years after the death of John May's pig.
- GB What was the set-up there? They had ring events?
- LK Yes, the horses played a very big part, very nice horses too.
- GB Did they have exhibitions set up around the showground?
- KW Oh yes! Agricultural produce, a sheaf of hay or a bag of chaff.
- LK Later on they had fruit shows, they used to have two shows here, one in November, the Agricultural, and the fruit show in March. A dozen apples

- for every exhibit, out on stands. There would be hundreds of entries of every variety. Quite a sight but a terrific amount of work. Not only every variety, they used to have three inch Jonathans, two and a half inch, every size. Same with Cleos and Dunn Seedlings. Then they used to give a prize for the biggest apple shown. That was on the showground too, yes ... there were no fruit shows on the other (early) ground.
- GB Talking about the fruit show, both of you were involved in orcharding. Could you tell me a little bit about what sort of fruit you had. Just apples?
- KW Cleos were the early days of orcharding here, commercial orchards. Cleopatra was the main apple and Jonathans were popular for export. There were quite a lot of Dunn Seedlings. The big Dunn Seedlings did well on the Hamburg market, they were more a cooking apple. The Jonathans ... (Cleos were dual purpose) an eating apple.
- GB The Granny of course didn't come out until after 1916 or something from my memory.
- LK After WWI we started planting Granny Smiths.
- GB You did your picking and packing on your own?
- ANS Yes
- GB Tell me something about the method of packing apples.
- KW They were graded by eye.
- LK I learned to pack off a table about twenty feet long, you'd have your packing case on a trolley. Your rejects on your left hand side, and you picked your apple up and wrapped it. You'd start off with your size and by the time you got to the other end, you'd have your case full. You'd begin again and start on your next size. The trolley ran on rails. Little wooden rails.
- GB You'd pack them all in boxes that you made?
- KW We made the boxes up ahead on the farm. They were cut by the sawmill and we made them up.
- GB What did you do with them, did you take them from there to the railway siding?
- KW By horse wagon, into Bridgetown, load them into a railway truck a closed van, and they were your brand name.

- GB Yes.
- KW We would have our name on the case. In those days your name was on the case, not a number.
- GB These were export apples? Mr Klopper, could you tell me about the very first export apples that you sent away about 1915?
- LK We sent before WWI, we started sending apples to London. But it must have been early 1915 that we sent a lot away that the ship was torpedoed, I think we got some insurance on it, not very much. But then, they didn't take apples, they were considered a luxury, the shipping was used for more important things. We didn't send any until after the war.
- GB Can you remember prices for cases and transport and that sort of thing? Prices you got for overseas market and local market apples, pre-war and post-war.
- LK Pre-war 10/- or 12/- a case sterling in London, I can't remember what we netted on that. They were worth growing, anyway.
- KW Of course 10/- went a long way in those days.
- GB How much were you paying for a case in those days?
- KW I think they were 6/- a dozen, you made them up and they held a bushel of apples, they were supposed to hold 40 pounds of apples.
- GB That 6d. a case was part of your cost, there were transport costs on top of that. Transport to Perth, and then transport to the ship, and London.
- LK The shipping freight wasn't very much in those days, so you were making a good profit. Worth growing, specially Cleos and Jons. Of course, the exchange was in our favour by about 25%, I can't remember what it was, but some years later it was 25%. So 10/- over there was 12/6 Australian currency.
- GB Did either of you get any use from the cider factory we spoke of last week?
- LK No, I can't remember any of ours being sent in.
- KW I think some of our windfalls. They'd get plenty from around the town without going out into the country. They had to get them cheap. They started the cider factory during the war when it was hard to get shipping

- space. I was away then. I reckon cider is too strong. A lot stronger than beer.
- GB Certainly farming times have changed. In terms of nearly everything we have spoken about, terms of clearing, terms of animals per acre, fertilizer, fencing. When you retired from your farms things were much, much easier than when you started off?
- LK Yes, much more mechanized. Nearly all the jobs were done with tractors instead of having to yoke up the old horse team every morning in the winter when it was frosty, the fingers were so numb you couldn't put the horses in the plough, you'd have to go and warm them up by the fire. With the tractor there was no problem, you just went and started it up.
- KW You had to go down and feed them at night before you went to bed, rain, hail or snow. Early next morning you had to feed them before you went to work.
- LK Dad always got up at 5 o'clock and fed our horses, the first job, he'd go back to bed after that, I think. We'd have to water them when we got up and dust them down.
- GB Times have perhaps become easier for the farmer in lots of ways.
- KW Oh, yes! Transport, if you wanted to come to town, you had to drive the horse in, or the wagon, now you just go to a vehicle and hop in and out as quick as you like.