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COMMUNITY LIFE

Library Oral History – An Interview with Jim Hull

An Interview with Jim Hull

Interviewee: Jim Hull

Interviewer: Pauline Curby

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Q: Jim I thought we'd start by perhaps you telling me where you grew up, where you were living when you were a child. You were born in the Ryde area in 1934 and we were going to talk about your grandparent's orchard but perhaps you could set the scene by saying where you were living when you were a child.

Well I lived Pauline in Twin Road just west of the intersection of Badajoz Road and it's now called number 28, and in those days it was the third house from the corner, not that they were all adjoining houses, there were blocks of land in between so it's now about the fifth or sixth house I think from the corner of Badajoz Road. I lived there as a child and as a teenager until I married. So I spent my whole life living in that house up until the time I married and moved to Folkard Street, which is only about a mile away anyway. At that time of course, apart from those odd scattered houses of people who weren't employed or owned farms of some description, either orchards or vegetables or flowers, they went to whatever work those sorts of people did, but they tended to be, when I was a little kid, generally in the minority of the total number of people who lived in North Ryde. And it was a very pleasant place to be.

Q: So it was more of a rural area than

Very much so. And even those who went off to work as my father did they had usually either relatives that were part of the regional farming community or had been themselves in for whatever reason, had sought other employment, as was the case with my father.

Q: Now could you just fill us in and tell us what your father was doing and a little bit, just briefly on his background.

At the time - we'll work from when I remember him, going back before I was born. At the time that I was born he was then working in the retail trade and he worked for Grace Bros. He was a middle manager at Grace Bros. He was responsible for a number of departmental areas. But prior to that he had been a part time farmer out in Paul Street, North Ryde. Now Paul Street, there's a north and south Paul Street, the reason for that is that the Epping Highway –

or the Spooner Highway – as it was originally called, cut Paul Street in half. In fact that was the reason that he gave away being a farmer because the majority of the five or seven acre block on which he had an orchard was consumed by the highway, and in fact if you roughly – in that, where there is an overhead pedestrian bridge, where that lands is basically where part of his farm was. I wish he still owned it.

Q: Ah! So he had land there – what are we talking about when was it resumed?

The 1920's. Oh no, well it was resumed in the – I imagine the late 20's probably after the depression and he had been affected by the depression, he'd started a business, an importing business and he'd been to England and a couple of his agencies and it was apparently going on very well and then the depression hit – phawt – and that was the end of that. So he – I don't know whether he sold the farm or it was under resumption and he sought employment in the retail trade because he'd had some background in that years before.

Q: So in attempting to enter the import business was this in conjunction – while he was running the orchard or after? What can you tell me about what you've heard of his orchard?

It was a mixed orchard as a lot of them were. Peaches and plums and nectarines and stuff like that, but because of its size he was probably able to go and do things as well as run an orchard.

Q: How big was it?

I imagine it was probably a five acre block and probably not all under cultivation and his mother lived there too, he looked after his mother.

Q: So it had been in his family?

Very briefly. He hadn't had a long history because he'd come in – he was born in Windsor, then he lived in Bathurst. His father had been a master saddle maker and general leather worker, made a place up there. And he ultimately came to live in North Ryde and bought this farm. He was also a Councilor on Eastwood Council, I think for two terms at that time when he lived in Paul Street. So! And in fact the house that had been on that farm was moved, bodily, they cut it in half and moved it to the block of land next to the family home in Twin Road and so the house that's immediately east of 28 Twin Road, while its been slightly modified was the original timber home that had been on Paul Street.

Q: So he had a semi-rural background as you say. And I have a feeling, was there inferior land over there in Paul Street, it's hard to pick up from people but I have a feeling that maybe it wasn't such an orcharding area.

It might not have been except that one of the very best orchards in the district was Stuarts, and that's on that land that's diagonally opposite El Rancho which there are now several older blocks of home units and part of that, what is becoming notorious housing commission flat area of – what's the name of the street? Can't remember it. But they were built in the 80's and it's becoming a social problem in the area. Well, Ted Stuarts orchard ran from Herring Road down to Terry's Creek – not it's not Terry's Creek. Shrimptons Creek. And Ted had also been Mayor and a Councilor on Eastwood Council for quite a period of time and he had a very good orchard. Now my father's orchard was just across the creek, about 100 meters further east. So! That sort of sets where we – I grew up and immediately opposite was the 120 acre block.that the Hicks family owned. Now my relationship to them was through marriage because Fred Hicks married Mabel Stanbury who was my aunt and she was known as Manie. And they had a very comfortable house directly opposite and I can pick where the houses were because not-with-standing the re-development of that for the hospital there are parts of the original gardens – like palm trees or bougainvillea bush, that's been made into a standard magnolia tree. Those current flowers that flower and they immediately fall off – gardenias and – come on – you know them.

Q: (Laughs) So some of those old plants are still there?

Oh yes. In fact I can – and I hope that now that we own it as North Ryde Common which I was very keen to see that we called that area, it's about a third of the total area – has been handed over to the Council under care and control for the next 99 years and I was desperate for that to be called North Ryde Common because there's no indication of the old Field of Mars Common left and to call it the Field of Mars Common wouldn't have captured anybody's imagination, and to call it Macquarie Hospital Park wasn't all that marvelous. Ultimately there was a bit of a plebiscite held by Johnny Booth and of all the names that was the one that most people said would be appropriate and even though some people said, oh it had connotations that weren't Australian and so forth, it is a Common, it is not to be developed, that's part of the deal with the Health Department and so anybody can walk on and off it.

Q: So it's part of what was the Hicks's land.

Yes. And where the Xmas carols are held and there have been a number of concerts and things held there, and so that has been gazetted as North Ryde Common. Now that we have it – and I've been meaning to take David Robinson who looks after our natural heritage and parks and things and Karl Cotter, and say whatever you do boys these funny looking shrubs or trees that have survived for the last 40 years on their own are to be absolutely preserved, claimed – because they indicate where very significant places were a part of our history.

Q: Cultural plantings, as they call them. (Laughs) That's a joke. Oh that's interesting.

And so you can see Harry Heard's where it was because – what are those two funny looking old palm trees there and a couple of – they're not gardenias, they're just coming into flower now.

Q:I don't know. (Laughs)

Sasanquas

Q: Oh how am I supposed to know that? (Laughs)

Some of those trees would be a hundred years old. And then you go down and where Fred Hicks's mother and sister and his father obviously, had lived, and you can see where part of their garden was. And I know where the well would have been because of the trees that were there and I can remember as a child, I'd been told not to go too close to thewell. And in the case of Fred Hicks's place the only thing that remains there that to me immediately builds back the picture in my mind, is a vine that was all over the packing shed and the cow bales and somehow or other it hasn't been ripped out, but instead its been trimmed back as a standing tree and that actually signifies where the right angle bend was in the driveway – the driveway went down from the Twin Road and there was a right angle turn to get into the packing sheds and the garage – or the shed that they put the car in the cow bales and all that sort of stuff. And then further down Badajoz Road there's a few remaining pine trees, they're not Norfolk Island pines, they're pine trees, they had big pine cones like little pineapples and they – they were very closely planted as a windbreak from the south because there was a citrus orchard there and citrus apparently are very prone to not liking windy conditions. And there is only one or two of those trees left.

So a lot of my childhood was spent either down at my grandparent's house which was called 'Ida' and that's Ryde spelt backwards (laughter) – quite get the idea. (Laughter), with their dog Rover and he was a black retriever and – or across at my aunt's place - and farm and creek. Wehad a creek. It was you know, part of growing up.

Q: Now what's the name of that creek? Is it still there or is it just a - ?

It's part of Kiddies Creek.

Q: Right. Sort of a tributary, or a branch.

There's two and they come together and flow down into the river. And so life as a child was very pleasant and it revolved around doing the things that you like to do as a child, or I liked to do as a child. And we were talking before this got started about odors and smells.

Q: Yes, I'd like you to tell me about the early smells you remember when you were about say four or the earliest memories you have.

Now thinking about Uncle Fred's place, Fred Hicks's place. An instant smell is chaff being cut. Now a chaff cutter is a very dangerous bit of gear. It's got these blades that rotate and they feed the corn – green corn – down a chute and some fellow's just winding the handle and it's going chuff, chuff, chuff, chuff – like this and the chaff comes off in chunks and you've got to keep pushing this in. Well if you pushed it in too far you'd lose your fingers. So there's constant warnings, as a child, keep your fingers out of the thing, but there's also a great encouragement to keep feeding it. And so you remember those admonitions but you remember this beautiful smell of corn being chopped up. So next time you get some sweet corn and you strip the – if you get it so that you can strip the outer covering off it.

Q: - the husk -?

- and smell it. And it's a lovely smell.

Q: M'mm – so Fred had cows?

Yep. Well he was a champion breeder of – see a lot of these orchardists did other things because there were periods of frenetic activity and there were periods of lack of activity. Like right now.

Q: The fruit crops weren't real good either.

No they weren't and you could have a hail storm which seemed to often happen and wipe out a years work, so they often had pigs or – not a lot – or a small herd of cows, or they might have chickens. Or they might have done something else.

Q: Market garden veggies?

But I didn't know too many that market gardened and were orchardists at the same time, they tended to leave that to another group of people.

So then he had Jersey cows and Snow Drop was the line. Snow Drop one, two, three, four sort of like prize babes. And he used to breed these cows and exhibit them and carried off major prizes even a grand champion at the Sydney Royal Easter show. So he was a recognized breeder of Jerseys. And Jerseys were used to enrich the milk of dairies. You might have a whole dairy of Holsteins or Illawarra Shorthorns or something like that, that were massive milkers. But to get the butter fat up you'd put a few top Jerseys or Guernsey's into the herd. I don't know what they do now, they probably clone them into the system and they don't worry about it. So, he had these several cows and a bull and this produced these – and if they were bull calves they went off as weaners or whatever and he nurtured these others on and sold them off. And so this was a hobby and another income source.

Most of them tended not to have just peaches, but have some lemons or they had plums or nectarines. And in those days there wasn't – it was just emerging as they were getting out of it – the fruit fly was becoming a problem. About the only thing they had to really worry about that I can recall was fungus and what we now call copper oxy chloride was blue stone. This blue stone – it was a blue crystal and you mixed water with it and I think it was copper oxide and they used to spray that all over the trees and some of them used to paint the tree, the major trunk with lime I think. You'd see some orchards, all the trunks, like about the first meter, would be painted white and it was just to keep the bugs and the wogs off.

Q: What about woolly aphids? Do you remember them at all?

They did and I don't know whether this blue stone might have done something for that too. But – like DDT hadn't even been invented in those days so I don't know what they used. They used to dust something on them too sometimes. They used to pump that on. You had two men on a handle that went up and down and there was a tank of stuff and they'd pump it on. And they used to wear a handkerchief – a wet handkerchief over their mouth, which would have been next to useless, (laughs) but they did it. And away they went.

So! Round about now they're getting into pruning, because a lot of the orchards - in May and June - because they started to flower in July. A lot of the peaches in North Ryde were early peaches, first of the season. There was a peach called the Rennie and that was developed by the Rennie family and that was a very early peach, it was about the first peach on the market and nearly all of the farmers had a section of their orchard in Rennies and then they'd have some other group, then there was another one called 'The Aunty Beck' and that was developed by one of the Hicks family. It was a beautiful peach. It was a white slip stone and it had a pink center. And that came in just about Xmas time before the later peaches, the yellow peaches came in after Xmas.

Q: And people have mentioned the Bells November peach to me as well.

That was a relatively early peach too.

Q: Now, thinking about your grandparents for a moment. I checked in George Redding's history of North Ryde. He said that they came – they settled in that orchard in 1919 and of course your grandfather, Jim Stanbury had been a world champion sculler. I'm just interested to – for you to think about what made him go into orcharding. He did not have a rural background I believe and your grandmother Dolly had been the daughter of a publican. Did they think after, in the post war years that this was a viable enterprise, that, you know, did you hear them talk about it much, why they went into it?

I think it's because it was the sort of thing that he could do. And you say, well he didn't have a rural background, well in a sense he did because he came

from Saltwater Creek in the Nowra district. Saltwater Creek doesn't exist as Saltwater Creek any more it's called something else, but it's to the west of Nowra, about half an hour out of Nowra. It's still a dirt road apparently. And his father, James Stanbury had a farm there and as a late teenager he came to Sydney because he'd shown some promise as an athlete. So I would think that his education would have been absolutely minimal.

Q: As the average persons was in those days.

Living in the scrub basically. He was obviously a very powerful young man. He'd got involved in some rowing races or something on the river, on the Shoalhaven and what we now call the talent scout said: Son get yourself to Sydney. And that's exactly what happened. So he came and he met my grandmother because he stayed at the Steamboat Hotel, which Samuel Jordan was the publican, the owner and Dolly was his daughter. And so he stopped rowing in about 1906 when – he won the title back in 1905 after he'd been out of the game for about five or six years and there's a very interesting newspaper account of that race which I have. I'll let you read it one day.

Q: I think I've seen it in the library.

You probably have, it was in the Parramatta and –

Q: - Cumberland Argus and Fruit Growers Advocate.

(Laughs) Yeah (Laughs) Advocate – what a name. And so he got married and landed a job. He went to work at the recently formed Royal National Park and they lived there for years.

Q: Down at Audley

Right. And in fact the foundations of the house are still there. As a kid I was taken to see the house and then a bush fire in the 50's or something burnt it down.

Q: He was doing a sort of ranger type job?

He was – and general labouring work.

Q: Did he have any contact with Elias Laycock who was down at Cronulla who was also a world champion rower? I wonder if that's how he got the job or was it a contact there?

Could have done. And had something to do with it too.

Q: Yep – on the board of trustees who ran the park.

He was the superintendent. I got the impression that there was a sort of a very significant social divide between (laughs) – I think that might be the most delicate way of saying it. (Laughter) So my mother grew up there. Born here in

Ryde and they lived – it's no longer there because of the road widening, but they lived in a cottage that was on the corner of Victoria Road and Devlin Street on the high side, next to those couple of old shop type buildings, there was a cottage on that corner, and that's where she grew up and that was just down the road from the Steamboat hotel which was on that bend in the Road where Wood Coffill funeral parlour is. And in fact I can remember that building. It was still there up until the time that Wood Coffill built. And you could still see in the rough stone, if you looked hard enough you could still see the name the Steamboat Hotel, on the side of it, sort of painted in a bit of semi-circle.

So! He worked down there until – I would think the reason that they came back to Sydney was the need for the improved education of their children. They went initially to Helensburg Primary School. The eldest child was Beatrice. She was the second child really because the first child, a boy, and he lived till he was about 18 months old and died and Beatrice was therefore the eldest member of the family. Now she was a very bright student, went on to become a high school teacher and principal. And so there was this – and Dolly had been certainly better educated than Jim. She was very good with words, she wrote poetry not to the point of being published but she would always write you a poem for your birthday or something like that, and I think there was this feeling that there was a need to come back to Sydney before it was all too late, because it was difficult obviously going from Waterfall to Sydney.

Now by 1919, I can't remember how old Beatrice would have been but she would have probably been going to teachers' college by that time and a number of the rest of them took up business careers. My mother didn't. She was the third child and she tended to be the one that stayed at home to help her mother on the farm and catered for the rest of them I think. Which was in some ways good and in some ways I think had limited her because I got to believe in later life that there was a lot of things about my mother that had been suppressed. I think she would have been a very good business person. But because of the era in which she grew up, she was a dedicated house person and mother. But she was always prepared to take a risk and never did to any great extent because there was always this sort of holding back. But there was those sort of indications, that she never had that opportunity. She may not have sought it because sisters either side of her did and went on to be secretaries or work in business of some description. Some of them held , you know, quite senior positions in government departments or the Shell Company and things like that.

So! They came back to Sydney and the orchard – don't know whether it included the orchard or it was already in existence.

Q Any idea who he bought it from?

I think he bought it from ----. Not sure about that. One day I'll look it up in the records. But it became again – he applied himself totally to the task, and it was often used as a demonstration orchard for students. I've heard that story

– I'm sure it wasn't just dreamed up, because of the way he ran it. He was a tireless worker.

Q: Because it wasn't the only one he started. George says in his book he was 51, so that's – yeah – taken on a whole new career.

I can remember him as a child being a very big man and there's a picture somewhere of me as a kid of about two and my cousin Fred who would have been about five or six and each of us are sitting on, between his wrist and his elbow and his hands out like that, standing up, and we're sitting there on his hands. Now, I don't know that you could do that for a minute, let alone – so even at that stage he was an incredibly powerful man. They always refer to him as big Jim Stanbury but he was no taller than I am, so he just must have been one of those people that were immensely strong.

So! They had this lovely farm.

Q: How many acres was it?

I think it was about seven. Seven acres. There was no bush on it. It was all orchard of some description and a very nice house garden which grandmother looked after.

Q: So they had side-lines like chooks or pigs, or cows?

Righto so they had the orchard. They grew mainly peaches?

Some plums and some citrus. But not oranges, mostly lemons. And nearly everybody had a few lemon trees, they might have had – oh I don't know, 50 lemon trees or something like that. They did have some nectarines down there. Shentons was the next farm and there was some nectarines down there, but it was mostly peaches. The other thing that I can remember as a child, and it's probably because of the car he drove, and it might have been a latent thing that was going to be developed anyway, love of motor cars. But it was a Morris Cowley and I was down there one afternoon and I don't know, I must have been about four or five and this car came up the driveway and it was just a rough drive up from the street and the house would have been – oh, a couple of hundred feet I suppose off Twin Road a good drive, so you had the house set back and there was part of the orchard, you had a house garden and then part of the orchard to Twin Road and then more orchard around the house and then there was the big sheds, the packing sheds and the machinery sheds and stuff like that. And it was Chris Nielson. Now it was not till later that I understood the importance of Chris Nielson and the friendship that existed between Chris Nielson and Grandpa.

Q Who was Chris Nielson, Jim?

Chris Nielson was a boat builder.

Q: Oh right – on Parramatta River.

Right. And he was renowned as a builder of very fine boats of all descriptions apparently. Pulling boats and sailing boats and so on. But particularly sculls. Now he would have been a very old man then. A very old man. And there was this lovely little old two seater car. So – I have often said to my kids you know, everything you do, try and do it as if it's the last time you'll ever do it, because when you look back over life lots of things are the last time you've done it and when you did it, if you'd have known that that was the last time you did it you'd have really done it a little better. Whether it's talking to someone. Whether it's enjoying an experience or just a part of life, because you never understand, particularly as children the importance of some of those things. So I met this guy and I was probably introduced to him and chatted to him probably. But it wasn't till later that I realised what a significant part, he claimed, in my grandfather's career and the friendship that they had and I've sort of thought about it, even as a teenager I'd have tried to find out more about him.

Q: (Laughs) You wouldn't. (Laughs)

How do you know? I mean, when was the last time you enjoyed a swing in a park.

Q: M'mm, This is - I'm interviewing you. (Laughs) Not you, interviewing me. (Laughs)

No, but I mean – and so – god! if I'd have known that was the last time I'd ever been going to do it I would have been really over the top. (Laughter).

Q: Your grandparents. Did you have the feeling – you know – you were only a child, but did you have the feeling that it was a successful orchard? As you said, people came to look it as a demonstration but financially I get the impression maybe it was, because to have a car in the late 30's was not common for working people. It certainly was uncommon.

And they – I'm sure it was successful. And of course I suppose at 50 odd they had – they were very proud people. I don't think they would have, if they would have been able to get what was then the old age pension, I don't think they would have applied for it. Because it wouldn't have been in their mind set to have done it, unless they were really destitute. They built a small fibro cottage and moved out of 'Edyr' in the forties. It would have been built just before you couldn't build houses any more so it would have been in the early days.

Q: What do you mean? Without Council permission?

No, no. Because of the difficulty –

Q: - oh, shortages and the war – yes. Materials.

It was just this little two bedroom cottage – it's still there, it's had a verandah put on it and it's the first cottage as you go down Twin Road after Ryde East school. Now that was right up in the top corner of the property and basically by that time I suppose grandpa would have been in his late sixties, he'd retired and his son Jim has now taken over the orchard. Jim married Cath Martin and they took over the house and the orchard. Very quickly Jim started to transform the orchard into a poultry farm.

Q: Right. Now do you remember why? What's your understanding of what was going on at the time?

Two things, I think the age of the trees, because they don't last forever peach trees, they get all sorts of things in them. Some trees might last for a hundred years but to be a good bearing tree – but I think the principle reason would have been.

Q: - we were talking about the peach trees. You were saying that when your uncle took over the orchard they were getting a bit old. I was just thinking if we're talking about the late 30's they'd be about 20 years old, so this is the time when normally they'd be replacing trees?

I suppose so.

Q: And of course if the fruit was good paying you would assume he'd plant more and continue with it, but he thought poultry was a better option.

It would have been a continuous cash flow and I would also think that the increasing prevalence of the Mediterranean fruit fly and other pests were becoming a bigger problem for orchardists in what was then becoming an urbanized area, whereas chooks, provided they're kept fed and healthy, they're laying eggs all the time. So progressively the orchard became a very big poultry farm. And then that probably only continued for fifteen years. Anyway, and then the next financial imperative was the value of the land viz a viz a sub-division.

Q: We'll come to that later I think. Let's go back for a moment to those early childhood memories. You were saying before we started that one of the smells you really liked was the wet earth and the peaches that you can still smell. Could you tell me about that when you were really little going to your grandparent's orchard?

There were several things that I remember. There's the smell of wet tilled earth. It's just like that smell when rain comes on a summer day. It's a particular odor, very, very pleasant. And the feeling of that tilled earth, it's lovely to feel it. It's not cloddy and horrible it's soft and this smell of wet earth. They used to flood irrigate the peaches.

Q: Could you explain what that is?

Around the tree itself, with a radius of about a meter and a half. They would rake out the dirt to form a dam, if you can imagine that. Like a little earthern wall in a circular around the tree.

Q: So you'd have –

- your tree sticking up there and you'd pull the earth away, not to expose the roots and so it would be a shallow dam. There'd be this little dam wall all the way round. And they'd do that to quite a number of trees each night and they'd flood it. They'd put the big hoses on and bring that water right up to the level of that dam. As soon as it was full they'd move the hoses on.

Q: So you'd have a big sprinkler system?

Well they had in the orchard – they weren't sprinklers, they were mains running through the orchard. They might have been – in two inch pipes I suppose. And they had stand-pipes like hydrants which were big taps instead of an ordinary half inch tap, these were inch and a half taps. Big taps and then a piece of hose off that and that would be able to sort of do maybe four or five trees on that side and four or five trees on that side. And so progressively they'd water the orchard and this was at the time when the peaches were coming on because you had to really pump the water into them to fill them out.

Q: So is this spring?

Yes, late spring. And so, I can remember that smell. I wasn't old enough I suppose to do anything about it. And I can smell the peaches themselves because when the leaves start coming on in spring time they give out a smell. You can pick it up, like tea tree, if you walk through tea tree, you brush against it you can pick it up and the peach orchard has that peachy smell which is quite distinct from the smell of peaches themselves when you bite into them. It's just that there's an odor about them, this beautiful smell.

Then there was the packing shed. The principal part of that that I can remember, the odor from the part that was the machinery section where the – there was a couple of pumps there that were mechanical pumps that we used I think to power the sprays. The powered rotary hoe which was quite something to have in those days, instead of having a horse to do it all you had a powered rotary hoe and over the years the dirt floor of this shed had absorbed oil and kerosene and petrol and there was always a 44 gallon drum of kerosene on a stand with a tap on it and I think that always dripped. And so there was this – coming together with all these odors on dirt, and it always seemed to be cool in that shed for some reason or another, it instantly brings your memory back, a pleasant sort of a smell, some people would think it was an awful sort of a smell but I thought it was a lovely sort of a smell.

There was a horse but I don't know that they actually owned a horse, I think they used to borrow the horse when they needed the horse. I think it might have belonged to ---- or someone I don't know because I can't ever remember the horse being always there.

Q: What would you use the horse for?

Well I think that was used to bring the peaches up out of the orchard.

Q: Like with a cart, horse and cart?

Right – so they'd have people picking and they'd put these into the buckets and just tip them gently into containers and they'd bring these up to the shed where there would be people packing and later on they had a grader which used to grade the peaches but that was very late in the day. Uncle Jim put that in.

Q: It was hand grading of course.

Oh you picked it by eye and you might have two or three boxes going at once, one packer. And they were usually the girls and so you'd have a double X if you like which might have been the big ones and every now and again you'd find one of those and the majority would be the middle one and then the others and so they'd pick them and they'd pack them like in alternate rows and they'd put wood wool in the cavities so that the peaches were supported by each other but protected from the edge of the case with wood wool. Whereas now you've got those beautiful things that just have one thing in each little plastic socket.

Q: Was your mother a good packer?

Yes I think so.

Q: Did she do a lot of it?

Oh yes a lot because she was at home. Manie was helping her husband and the other daughters by that time generally had married and moved off to other places.

Q: So even after your mother was married she'd go over and help pack with your grandparents?

Yes she did, or get their meals and all that sort of stuff, and work for her brother.

Q: Did she ever get paid do you think – or was it just for family?

She might have got an extra box of peaches to – which was more work too because you had to peel the damn things and put them in Fowler jars –

Q: - the preserving jars? Fowler – is that the trade name?

Fowler – yes and it was a system. They were jars and there was a rubber gasket and a tin lid that just sat on it and then a spring clip and the object being that you cooked – you put the fruit or the vegetables in it with the juice, and then you either did them in the oven or did them in a boiler for a specific period of time and the heat drove all the air out and then as they cooled the vacuum was formed and they were vacuum packed. And to get them open you had like a spatula sort of thing that you passed up between the edge of the bottle and the lid and allowed air to run in over the spatula as you just eased it slightly and once you broke the vacuum the lid just popped open.

Q: Women had cupboards full of those things in those days didn't they?

They did because you had to – waste not, want not. If there was an excess of tomatoes you bottled the tomatoes. If there was an excess of peaches you bottled the peaches.

Q: Did you get the job of peeling them sometimes? I bet, I can tell, yes. (Laughter)

Oh! (Laughs) And today you wouldn't peel them.

Q: I was just saying you'd have them with ice cream but maybe you wouldn't because of ice chests. Did they have ice chests?

They did, we had an ice chest but aunty Manie that was across the road – because of their milk – and we used to get our milk from them and they had a cream separator. They used to make ice cream because they had a gas Electrolux refrigerator. We had an ice chest until very much later in the day. And so there was ice cream. Not always, custard more likely. (Laughter) Anyway so that was grandpa's farm and he was – I suppose – he was about 80 when he died I think, or in his late seventies, so he'd have been in his late sixties in my earliest recollections of him and he seemed an old man but a kindly sort of a person, whereas grandma was a sprightly, thinnish sort of a person and would always be – she was always trying to encourage you to speak correctly and write properly and have fun with you too. Whereas he was a very, very, taciturn sort of a bloke.

Q: People have got a lot of different memories of grandfathers actually, it's quite interesting. Would you say you got on well with him, even though he was taciturn?

Oh yes I think so. It wasn't that he didn't have any time for children. He just didn't say a lot. Whereas grandma was – chatty is not the right word, she was lively and she was more focused than a chatty sort of a person. There was always an object to what she was speaking or talking to you about. She was a very interesting person.

Q: Now what about their house, the original house – 'Edyr'? Could you describe it to me, was it weatherboard?

Oh no, it was a brick house.

Q: Had they built it when they moved there in 1919?

No I would think that it had been built before that. I think it existed. I don't think they built it. I could be wrong and I don't think Council's records would show what was the situation there. But I would think that that house was older than 1919. It might not have been very much older. But I don't think they built it. If they did I'm not aware of it. It was a brick house, it faced Twin Road up a long driveway. It had an iron roof, it had an open front verandah, which was tiled, I can remember, like in a pattern and it had one of those bull nosed roofs. The verandah was used a lot. There was a big lounge room straight off that verandah. There was a hallway which really was only a means of separating the bedrooms which were on the western side and there was a big kitchen, and there was an electric stove in the kitchen as well as a – and it was a Hotpoint. Now that's another smell, as soon as I said that.

I don't know whether you've ever smelt an electric stove. When you turn the electric stove on. But there was a smell about an electric stove. And it wasn't from what you were cooking on it but as the elements heat up there's some sort of smell comes out. And it had big white switches that you clicked into a position to turn it on and it had three or four. It was a big stove and they had a fuel stove as well. But that was only ever used in the winter time.

Q: How many bedrooms would there have been?

I think there would have been only three. And then I think they added to the place. I think they put another part on it because they had –living at home then. Beatty probably didn't live there long because she would have been off teaching. But there would have been Manie, Amy, Nelly, Dossy, Chrissy and Uncle Jim.

Q: So Jim was the only boy?

Yes, surviving.

Q: Oh yes, the first child died.

The first child was a son and their last was a son and there were, Beatty, Manie, Amy, Nelly, Dossy and Chrissy – six girls. Six girls and one boy.

Q: So the question never arose of sub-dividing? Some families in the area were actually sub-dividing quite small properties for sons, or a number of adults were trying to live off fairly small orchards. So that never arose, because the tradition was women got married and moved away – yes – I'm wondering about labour. When you said people were packing. Did they – outside people come in and be employed or was it always just the family?

Just our family. I can't ever remember other than family working there. There may have been casual contract labour used in things like picking or pruning, that's a hell of a job. And we're talking of hundreds of fruit trees. You're up on a ladder – and you've got to do it right because if you don't the damn things don't fruit properly, so the cycle was, after the fruit season's finished autumn comes and things become dormant and then you prune it and that brings on the flowers (indistinct) so you've got to prune the whole tree. Then it flowers and then the flowers form peaches, but they form too many peaches, if you want good peaches, so you've got to go and thin them out, or rub them out. So you got to go right round every damn tree.

Q: What's the term they used?

Rubbing it. Because it's like that – they do it before the peaches, they're very tiny.

Q: Between the thumb and the forefinger, they squash the bud?

Yeah, pull it off.

Q: Oh! – no one has actually told me that before.

It's at the point where the flower has fallen away and you've got this tiny little peach.

Q: So you get too many peaches, they'd be too small. Like thinning out trees in a forest.

Exactly, same thing. So if you look at the way the flowers are, if you let all those form you'd have little clusters of peaches. Well the object of the exercise is to maximize the quality and the number at that quality. So you've got to go and rub them out. Or thin them out. And then you've got to then spray them and then pick them ultimately. The picking has got to be done everyday because you've got to take off that part of the crop that's ready. Now today you'd probably just strip the whole thing and you'd let it get to the point where there was a wastage because there were too many ripe and there'd be some that would be too green, but they just sweep through and do the lot – probably – I suppose that's what they do in the big irrigation areas and things. But then they used to pick each day.

Q: Very labour intensive.

And it's very subjective. So you need a good eye to know, - like its got to have the right colour but it can't be too ripe because it hasn't got much shelf life in those days. Like they'd pack them today and Jack Quested would come and pick them up in his truck -

Q: - I've heard that name -

- at dusk. I'll show you his house in Putney on the corner of Tennyson Road and Morrison Road. There's a couple of shops and there's the Quested place a very nice brick home. He used to come round and pick the fruit up. He'd go to umpteen farms I suppose. He had the contract to do them. He'd take them into the markets and that was in the railway and they'd have agents.

Q: Which railway? Central?

Yes, that's where the markets were. The fruit markets. There was the Haymarket down in Sussex Street, but up at Central railway, Quay Street – in fact you can still see the names of a lot of the agents because they've kept the facade. If you are going down to the end of town you'd see them from Her Majesty's Theatre – down the road from Her Majesty's theatre was where all the fruit agents were. So the truck would take them in there and each of these agents had like a small stall, permanent thing with a roller shutter in front of them and the truck would unload them to your agent or several agents if you had several and then the fruit shops would come in to buy their – like at 4 o'clock in the morning and then take them out to where they had to go.

Q: Now did your grandfather have one agent or?

I think he had two, don't ask me their names.

Q: So the guy that picked them up was just the carrier, he wasn't the agent? Don Rennie said his uncle had two 'to keep the bastards honest'. They often had problems with agents, some people. They never went in and sold them themselves? They never had a stall themselves? - which was a tradition in some families.

Don't know about that.

Q: The Heard's had done that. Maybe it was earlier.

Heard's had a truck too. Harry Heard had a truck.

Q: They'd been doing the markets for 80 to a hundred years, or whatever.

Yeah, they had a much longer – the Hicks's – if my cousin was still alive I'm sure he'd know, but he's not.

Q: Well you can't ask him Jim. (Laughs) Okay now Jim in what I've – you know, I want to get your memories, but I also want to question some of the things you're saying. In what I've done so far in the interviews and the research I've done I've found that this was the last stand of the orchardists at this stage. Orchards were going out fast in the area and there were a number of problems but there seems to be people in the industry who didn't seem to know enough about it. That's the impression I've got, in some cases. So people coming in you know, without that background, but – you know – the pricing, there was all sorts of problems. But – and because most of the people I've interviewed have just got childhood memories, they don't realize that they're just seeing the death knell of the industry in the area, you know, they don't sort of understand that, that it was very different in the past. So did you have a feeling that there were people who were going out backwards? I mean I grew up in a dairying area where the industry was declining, we were aware of that as kids, but was there an awareness or was it because your grandparents were quite successful?

I can't ever remember that being the case. All I can see looking back they were being robbed of their birthright almost – in the case of the Hicks's by government intervention of taking over.

Q: Yes, explain that to me, in the case of the Hick's. I can't understand that.

The Hicks's had over a period of a century built up ownership of a big chunk of real estate, in North Ryde.

Q: They kept dividing it amongst a very big family.

Oh yes they did, but nevertheless it was there. And they may not have been a total – looking back, and I'm only just thinking about this. I'm sure that they were all close as a family but when it came to the business of the next step which was to sub-divide it, I don't know that they probably had unanimity there and that probably cost them dearly.

Q: So you're saying that when it was taken over – the land was resumed for Macquarie Hospital, all that happened after the Second World War –

- yeah but before that happened –

Q: - had been resumed by – well CSIRO had used it.

The writing was on the wall that not-with-standing the fact that North Ryde was a community unto itself within Ryde. Down the road from any high point of which there were many you could see the skyline of the city of Sydney. You could still see the T. & G. building, which is no longer there, and the AWA tower by far the tallest structures in Sydney. The T. & G. building was on the corner of Park Street and Elizabeth Street I think. And every city in Australia

had a T. & G. building that was exactly the same, some of them were a bit taller than ours, but they were all exactly the same building, and you could see them. Now it didn't take Einstein to realize that all this very lovely real estate, undulating hills and valleys, so close to the city of Sydney had to be developed because the city was developing around it. Bankstown was roaring ahead, the Illawarra line was starting to go ahead. The Sutherland line and the East Hills, it was all going bang, bang, bang. The war put a hold on it but at the end of the war the County of Cumberland had come in and it had developed the County of Cumberland Plan and if you don't know much about it, find out about it because it was a great –

Q: - I know about it. (Laughs)

It was a great scape.

Q: It was to re-organise the greater city metropolitan area in a rational

So at the end of the war there was this incredible pressure to I think change North Ryde because it had been left behind. And you have this traditional attitude of the people that have lived there for generations and some not so many generations, to hold on to what was theirs. And there'd been rumours that the housing commission were interested in all these acres. We had change in local government where the place was becoming more and more urbanized and therefore the people in the council were more of that thinking than might have been the case in the past. And so looking at the Hicks' property particularly I can't ever prove it but I've heard it that often around the table, that they were encouraged to lodge sub-division plans for that whole block to thwart it being taken over by a government department of some description or other.

Q: Who encouraged them? Did you ever hear that?

Yes, Clive Bondfield.

Q: He was Mayor at one stage.

And a relative

Q: Oh I see.

A cousin.

Q: A relative of the Hicks's or yours or both?

No a relative of the Hicks's. He was a cousin. Now he was a very progressive councilor and Mayor and he had almost pleaded with them to lodge a subdivision plan for the whole area. And they thought I think that he was going to get something out of it.

Q: To do it together, to get together and put in a coordinated approach?

And when you look at that block what a magnificent sub-division it could have been if it was properly developed, not just grid patterned streets but –

Q: -yeah, but how they did them then, at least you've got some public land there now, and you've got a hospital.

No, no – but we did not want it – at all.

Q: You didn't want the hospital?

No.

Q: No I'm sure you didn't but you've got to put it somewhere.

Not a psychiatric – I mean that was, that was the pits to have been – the government of the day and I don't seek to be political but it raped - North Ryde – absolutely raped it.

Q: - now when are we talking about, the early fifties, or the late forties?

The late forties

Q: So it's a State Labour Government we're talking about.

McGirr was the premier. There were two sites for that hospital. One was near Bankstown aerodrome and all that big flat land which was a lot of poor farms. And the other site was North Ryde. And apparently McGirr was the – and this is the yarn – he was the –

Q: - hot gossip (laughs)

Yeah – he was the member for Bankstown and there were pressures from Bankstown Council for all that land out to Georges Hall and all out there, to be sub-divided, and he requested not to have it resumed. And there was nothing to stop the resumption of North Ryde and while there was arguments about its lack of accessibility because there was no real public transport into North Ryde apart from a couple of private bus systems, whereas Bankstown out there wasn't all that far from Bankstown station and it was a lot quicker. But that was chosen and Bonfield maintained that had they had a registered sub-division it would have elevated the value of the land even though they may not have implemented the sub-division immediately, but it would have been re-zoned and I think the re-zonings were a lot easy to accomplish then, than they are today. Re-zoned for housing, then it would have cost the government dearly and they'd have changed their minds.

The council didn't want it because they already had so much unrated land within the Municipality of Ryde and this was another one hundred and it was

going to cut the guts right out of North Ryde, absolutely, like pshwa right out of the center of it. However, for whatever reason the family did not take – I'm sure they took it seriously and it must have kicked in its top gear, but it was too late and the next thing was, they resumed it, lock, stock and barrel.

The other story was that they paid 1939 valuation for it which meant that each of those members of the family got a relative pittance and Fred Hicks who I loved dearly as an uncle and as a person got enough out of it to buy a block of land and build a nice two bedroom brick house on Epping Highway, which wasn't the mad race, place it was now and then got a job as gardener at the gas company over at Mortlake. He would have been in his fifties by then.

Q: Jim you were fairly young when this was going on. Are these the sorts of things that were being said in your family?

Yes.

Q: Right. Okay.

There was always a lot of discussion around the table about things politic. Generally whatever was going on, it was a discussion table. And it was not infrequent that we shared meals with Fred and Manie Hicks or Jimmy and Cath Stanbury either at their house or our house. The family met as a group. On card nights they used to go from everybody's house. And so all these sorts of things of change were being discussed.

Q: Now I don't want to sort of get into the Hicks' family history but from what I've found so far, in fact some members of that family had walked off the land earlier. There were parts of that 100 acre block that were just not even operating as orchards.

No they weren't.

Q: It was all totally productive orchard that you remember?

Oh no. There was Fred's orchard and he I think ran part of what had been his father and mother's place which would have been enough – he'd have done that to have provided an income. See he had a disabled sister, Lucy. She was – oh I suppose you'd say a mongoloid today and she lived quite – there was Fred's mother, his sister who was unmarried and Lucy another sister who would have been the youngest and I suppose his mother was quite old when she was born. I can only remember Mrs. Hicks – like granny Hicks as being a very severe person. A very foreboding sort of person to a kid. She was always severely dressed and she had – she always wore lace-up boots – fancy remembering that! (Laughter) And I don't think she was unkind but she wasn't outgoing to a child in my recollection. She might have been a great lady but –

Q: This was Fred's mother?

Right. Now he had a sister Nell who always had a car. It was a Vauxhall and there was Lucy who was the younger sister. And whereas mongoloid children I think then probably were lucky if they got to 20. I would think that she'd have been well into her thirties when she died. Now they lived 150 - 200 meters up the road in a very lovely weatherboard house parts of which, the garden which is still there and I think they lived on maybe what they had in the bank and the outcome of some of Fred's work on the remaining part of their orchard. Uncle Ben Hicks lived in a magnificent brick home right at the top of the Estate where the administrative offices of the hospital are. And its got a 180 degree view. A beautiful place!

Now he was a pretty old man when I remember him and he had a car also, a Nash, which was like a big Sedan. And he lived there and I don't know that he was farming either but he certainly – he didn't live in penury. He had a very big stand of local trees and that was up on the where –part of the North Ryde common is now on Wicks's Road. I think Fred and some of his relatives used to farm that for him. Now on the Cox's Road side there were a couple of houses that they owned but they were tenanted and they weren't farmed at all. Down on the Badajoz Road side there's another smell immediately when I think about it. That was mostly citrus down there, lemons. But there was a farm worker's cottage and it was a single bedroom fibro cottage and it was unlined. It was like some of those places you see on the Central Coast, they are built inside out, the frame was on the outside and the lining is the weather proofing and it just had a bedroom and a kitchen/dining room and I think it had a laundry cum bath place I suppose. Nobody lived in it when I was a kid but it was used when they worked that part of the farm, they used it as a place to have morning tea or lunch or whatever. And I've often been there with them when they were working around the farm and I can smell that house now. Not an unpleasant smell at all. The sort of smell that's residual from a fuel stove. Sort of smoky without being acrid, it was chaff. Now I think one of the Whitfields had lived in that house as a worker on the farm.

Then there was Marvin Hicks and he lived in a house that was near the road into the hospital off Badajoz Road. And then there was Fred and Manie. Now there's was a very active farm. They had the cows and they had that and he also leased – when he had the place taken over they weren't paid out for years and they had deducted from the final pay out the rent while they stayed there. God! I tell you. It was because they fought them you see. And while all of that was going on they remained there and because he thought, well it's too late and he leased land. Cleared the advanced trees and got another orchard up and running which was on the corner of Waterloo Road and Wicks's Road and that was ultimately sold to an open theatre, a drive in theatre and by that time the game was over and he went and sought employment and he was the gardener to the major people who lived – there was a big Mortlake gas works and the works manager and the works engineer and there was about five cottages that these senior people lived in on the site if you like. And the company maintained their gardens and so forth and he became a gardener.

Q: So in that sort of orcharding family was that regarded as a step down in the social scale?

Yes.

Q: Right.

Well – but it was also a pride thing. Like you'd been your own boss, you'd run your own race ever since you were born and here you were sort of – but you needed to get an income. What else could you do?

Q: I find with the Hicks that may have been the case but so many of the families I've found out about in this project that's in fact how they were living. Most of the people in the district, except for a few families were actually in and out of paid employment, so a lot of these properties never actually supported them. They sometimes had a job, sometimes a contract. You know they were in and out of that sort of –

- it's a ---- to be big enough.

Q: No that's right and there seemed to be – and the Hicks's were an exception and a few families that were an exception that the orchard supported them but -

- and I don't know all about all the Hicks's either. I mean I know about the ones that I've just mentioned and I know by osmosis almost about Chad Hicks and others and then there was – another family – whose name I'll remember in a minute, that were associated with them too. But I would think that the Hicks's by and large – well as I said Nell Hicks had a car always. Uncle Ben had a car, Fred always had a car, my father didn't get a car until 1952. He learnt to drive a car again, he hadn't driven one for so long and he was about 61. So I don't think that they were wealthy, but they were comfortable. And they only did it from what they did to work and so as I say - there's pictures I've seen of Fred and Manie in a very nice horse and sulky. As a little boy they had Triumph Tourer and they had a Singer Sedan and then a Morris Oxford. So they always had a car.

Q: So after the resumption of the land there was a feeling of being cheated, was this a general feeling?

Very much so.

Q: This was amongst the Hicks's. Was there a feeling in other families in other parts of the North Ryde area?

I think so because what wasn't taken over by the Health Department in this grab – there was a huge resumption of land by the Housing Commission. The fact that the vehicle park during the war, and I don't remember who's properties that was because I can only remember it totally as a vehicle park.

And the Wells's had a house there but I can't remember what they did. And the Frews were just opposite in Wicks's Road, so I can never remember any discussion about that other than the impact that this army camp had in a sense and more particularly the migrants that moved in at the end of the war and they were mostly British migrants that lived in the – probably would of only been 100 of them I suppose, but they lived in the accommodation that the soldiers had occupied.

But the big big problem was, not only the resumption of the land by the Housing Commission for monies that I'm sure today would be challenged in – and so forth. But it was the social change that took place as a result of it. Because a lot of those first people that came in to the housing commission were from the slum areas of the inner city. Surry Hills, Strawberry Hills, all there. And those people – to them it was like being left on the moon. They'd been used to just strolling down the street and being in the city and walking to work or riding their bicycles to work in Alexandria or Saint Peter's or around there. And suddenly they were out in the boondocks and the boondocks it really was because you went to Ryde or Gladesville more particularly and caught a bus. And if you missed those busses it was a long haul to get out to North Ryde. And so they didn't want to be there and the people of North Ryde didn't want them to be there. So you had this tremendous tension. I remember as a kid. And those kids were streetwise, street smart and whereas that's not to say that there weren't larrikins and things within North Ryde but they were just a totally different culture. And it took a long time for that to settle down, a long time.

And the school, the North Ryde Public School. Now I didn't attend North Ryde Public School because at this stage it was only a two teacher school and if you lived on the wrong side of Cox's Road you went to Gladesville school. But I grew up with kids who went to North Ryde school and I played with kids that went to North Ryde school and it went from a two teacher school to something like 1100 kids in a matter of three or four years and so it just went boom – had kids in the school of arts, they had them in the ball room, they had them on ---- front verandah opposite the school until they got – it just – it exploded.

So you had these two groups of people and they wanted everything done the day before yesterday and then you had the War Service homes being built at a great rate and a different group of people again and they were more a community because of their common bond. But it took a while for all that to settle down. It really did.

Q: Now would you have been about 20 when this was happening?

No, earlier. See this started happening – like I remember I had a particular mate, Johnny Aldridge and he was an English migrant and he joined the scouts and I was in the scouts so –

Q: - straight after the war?

That would have been about '48. And that's when it all started to happen. Now if you talk to Ross ---- - I think you probably have, he'd give you the story about the Housing Commission too, and I mean – and ---- ---- and all that mob that – they were ready to sort of barricade the streets almost. And it's hard to do.

Q: He told me about the North Ryde the best way. He explained how they, a group of them, I think you're included in it, I'm not sure got together and successfully lobbied and actually prevented the subdivision of the Smalls Road area at a time when it seemed to be the main motivation really that his parents were still running a market garden and they wanted to continue doing that rather than move out and they were successful at that stage and I just wonder if political action similar to that had been taken early with the Hicks's whether they could have managed to sit it out?

They might have. But see their advice from Clive Bondfield, as I understand it –

Q: - was to put in a sub-division plan.

Was to put in a sub-division plan which would have in a sense, set a new bridge plan and if the Council had approved it, because the Council were keen to see bridge sub-divisions implemented. And in fact it was Greenfield's Council who promoted the idea of the Ryde housing scheme and it was very far sighted and every one of those estates that they developed were even by today's standards, very well done. Curbed roads, planted streets, no front fences generally, all that sort of stuff.

Q: So in your family was the Ryde Housing Scheme regarded favorably?

No. It was seen as an incredibly socialistic act and something the local government should not have been any part of. And in that context with Clive Bondfield advising the Hicks's to lodge a sub-division, they might have even seen that it was a blackball of the Council getting their fingers on the property. I mean these were suppositions 50 years down the track, we're just looking back on it.

Q: So did Clive Bondfield did he have any legal persuasion?

He might have by today's standards, he might have been considered to be right wing labour.

Q: But he wasn't a labour man? I mean did the Labour Party –

- I'm not aware of it - I'm not aware of it. It was interesting because I think he was deposed by Ken Anderson, and it was over the housing scheme and the free libraries. See, that was another thing. There were a number of lending libraries in the district. I think there was one at Ryde but certainly one at Gladesville.

Q: Privately run little operations?

Yes. And this ---- at Gladesville for example and I think there was probably one here at Ryde, although Ryde was a backwater as a shopping center compared to Gladesville.

Q: And at Eastwood too, so people say. (Laughs)

Oh no, no really it was. There was just a few shops. It was – Top Ryde was not – not a good shopping center at all.

Q: Did they say Top Ryde in those days?

Yes they did. Always. In my memory there was Ryde and Top Ryde. West Ryde railway station was Ryde railway station.

Q: But did people say Ryde?

It was Ryde. West Ryde when I was a kid it was Ryde. And this was Top Ryde because it was on the top of the hill. There was probably a bigger center at West Ryde then there was at Top Ryde. There was just a few shops in Blaxland Road opposite, around the Post Office, up Church Street. It was sort of – didn't ring together all that well. And the thing that really kicked it off was the regional shopping center.

So! You've got this huge change taking place, and it's a huge cultural change taking place and it's suddenly being escalated at increasing velocity from a quiet, mind its own business sort of a place. Everybody on the bus you knew, suddenly there were groups of people who knew each other and you didn't and so there was this – it took a while for it to blend. Some of it never did.

Q: Yes, it was almost a cultural shock because it was so quick and people of your age remember something entirely different.

And they weren't people that necessarily wanted to be there either. And so they were angry. You know?

Q: Which makes it even worse for you because you think well we don't want you here, and you don't want to be here. Yeah.

And so – like we had a – there was a North Ryde younger set that got going by some people who came in, in the forties. They were new people and they saw the need for putting dances together, and it was great, it was like what my mother had talked about when she was a teenager. And it worked very well for about four or five years and there were lots of people that were just – lived around North Ryde for most of their lives who were now in their early teens. And we used to have like dances and go on picnics and all that sort of stuff and then these other people came in. And like they'd bring – suddenly parents came to dances because these blokes used to turn up with – you know – bottles of beer – would you believe – (laughter) Which to them I suppose was all the go. But it wasn't the thing you did at a dance at North Ryde – younger set (laughter) in the school of arts. (Laughter) And I can remember Tom Maloney frog marching a bloke out of the hall because somebody said that he smelt like beer. It wasn't run by the church, it was just run by – just a small committee of parents. But – and it turned out that he did because he'd been drinking out on the footpath and he was like – you know – a smart alec sort of a young fella and somebody complained to Tom and he grabbed this bloke and marched him out. Now if you did that today you'd sort of be arrested for assault or something, but he turfed him out.

And that was symbolic of the change and that's not to say that some of the local lads didn't get up to all sorts of –

Q: - but did you as a kid, as a teenager feel this separation? Like at Cronulla my kids sort of look down on the kids that come – you know – on the train, you know this sort of silly stuff. Did you feel it too or was it just something your parents felt? Did you feel an antipathy for the new people?

No. Not only an antipa – or whatever you said (laughter) but it was an alienation from your own, that you were –

Q: - you felt this as a kid?

M'mm

Q: Right.

And I suppose it's because you knew everybody. And if somebody new came in – as people did – you got to know them because it was in a small block. And suddenly pshaww! They were dumped on you. And they didn't really want em there, really. And anything that existed there was this feeling that they wanted to change it, and probably they did. And they didn't necessarily – they started – oh! all sorts of things changed.

Q: Give me some examples.

Well – I suppose it was mostly the social interaction took a long time. The tennis club – we were always looking for members, or the North Ryde Cricket Club, being going forever. But they either wanted to start their own thing or they didn't want to do it at all. And the kids – and I think probably the kids might have blended in a bit quicker than maybe teenagers did and by that time I'm moving on anyway because – well because you develop at a pretty fast rate once you hit your teens and get into all sorts of other activities. But there was always this feeling that these people were different. And it was exemplified on election days. Whereas you knew who was going to vote labour and you knew who was going to vote UOP or Liberal as it became and everybody would wander up to the polling booth and you'd know the workers and so – but suddenly the labour party was a big force. Couldn't understand it. And it changed the voting pattern.

Q: Righto.

So in amongst all this – so you then get to a stage where I'm sure that they accepted that this change was inevitable and it was happening and you couldn't turn the clock back. And while the War Service homes were being built, but they weren't being built at the same rapid rate as the housing commission was being built. And I don't know over what period of time we're talking, but it was probably within a ten year span. It went from being rural to urban – bang. With all the pressures that creates. Now throw into that, a developer unnamed that wants to take a chunk of land from the War Service homes and build a regional shopping centre and that was to be on the corner of Epping Highway and Wicks's Road. And it was land that was considered at the time to be less then appropriate for houses because it – there was a big creek running through it and it was low and developers have since built houses all over it, but I mean it was a concern. And there was this plan for this regional shopping centre. Now ---- also approached the Council to re-develop and take over a paddock at the back of the shops at Top Ryde. So the Council was very much in favour of that because it would have given – like a civic shopping and so forth, precinct and this new thing called the Regional Shopping Centre. And I will never forget the meeting that was held in this school of arts. Anything that happened – any single event had its genesis in the school of arts. Whether it was romance or whether it was – bloody change.

One of my aunts had an architect that night in the hall (laughs). It was a very hot night and the school of arts was packed. Harry Mitchell was the Mayor.

Q: (indistinct)

Richard ---- ----

Q: So we're talking about the early fifties?

Yes. And there was a very significant group of people who said, 'right – in North Ryde – that's where it's going to be, now that we've got all this other happening we might as well have this.' And there was a feeling that ---- Council wanted to make themselves big fellas and Top Ryde was to be the go. And then there was others that said, well, you know this is adding to the destruction of North Ryde getting a shopping centre and who was ever going to use it anyway out here in the middle of nowhere? My father being involved in the retail game was up to speed with what was happening overseas and these shopping centers were being built on the middle of nowhere in a sense, particularly in America, and to a lesser extent in England. And because of the motor car –

Q: - ah!-

- which was then becoming something in everybody's driveway that was what happened. So anyway they could not and would not name the applicant - talk about disclosure.

Q: The Council wouldn't name the applicant?

No, they said that they didn't know. It was just a – like a solicitor or somebody had said – it is a proposal. They wanted to keep it quiet. Whereas this other one was on the table and Benjamin's who were then the principal retailer in Chatswood, a very big emporium. They were there well before Grace Bros, in a major sense. And they were the developer, proposed. Anyway they got the nod in the end and Top Ryde – it lifted Top Ryde, you know, from the bottom to the top. And it started to signal really the death of ---- because it's a long strip shopping centre. So that decision was made by the Council against the wishes of some people in North Ryde and lots of others.

Q: So who was the applicant for the North Ryde Centre?

Don't know.

Q: Oh, you don't know. I thought it might have been Benjamin's as well.

No I don't think it was a dummy thing just to create confusion or to keep the other mob out. It was just some other – it might have been just a developer that saw the idea overseas and thought that's a good idea and he could get the land cheaply from the War Service because they didn't want to develop it. They finally did. So the Top Ryde Shopping Centre was not any good. It was probably only about two thirds of the size it is today. It might have even been less than that. By today's standards it would be a piddly little thing, but it was hailed – and it wasn't the first – it had just been beaten by Chelmside.

Q: I think there was one in Melbourne too.

I don't know about that, but the one in Chelmside I think opened just before it did, so it took away its possibility of being the first.

Q: Now Jim I don't want to take up too much of your valuable time –

- no I'm enjoying this.

Q: (Laughs) The railway that never happened. Was that talked about much in your family? Ron Freeman told me that that was the big issue in his family that they really felt cheated of this railway. He said that they used to reckon that the Sutherland to Cronulla line was built instead of the one to North Ryde. Was this something that was talked about amongst your family?

Very much so. And it was considered that it had held North Ryde back and it had been a promise and that – now I don't know what the root of that was, but I've been given to understand the reason that Eastwood Town Hall was built in the middle of nowhere was because that was where the railway was coming passed there.

Q: Or the tramway, there was going to be a tramline and then –

- and then there was the sub-division at the bottom of Twin Road, the Dress Circle Estate and it was always called it – even when I was a kid, like the Dress Circle Estate, it was no more an Estate than I am – it was just bush. We'd ---- a ---- in it. It was because of the train line that was coming through - that didn't happen. And a poor substitute was the Spooner Highway. That was considered to be – they didn't build a railway, they'd given us a road that nobody's going to use anyway. And I remember walking down with my mother and father and my little brother in a pram from Twin Road – or like Cox's Road and ---- Road and all that, I remember walking down that highway before it was open. And they hadn't put the last bit of the bridge in over the Lane Cove River, and picking flannel flowers, a bunch of flannel flowers down near the river. That must have been in about '38.

Q: Okay. Presumably the orchardists, they wanted the railway to come through, it would have been easier to get their produce to market cheap etc, but obviously if the railway came through as usually happens in suburbs developed round the station. So didn't they realize that this was going to destroy their way of life, or were they really hoping laws would come through so they could sub-divide it and make some money?

That might have been the case. I can't ever remember anybody thinking that it was a bad thing that the railway happened. People talked about the fact that the railway didn't happen. Now I've read various stories that it didn't happen because the railway out to Sutherland –

Q: - oh you've heard that one too –

- Yes, I have.

Q: Oh I see. (Laughs)

And that it was a complete and utter waste because it went from Sutherland to Cronulla and what the hell's out there anyway but sand hills and beach. But it was all part of the grand plan obviously. And why didn't it go? Was it because of the depression? Because a lot of – the rail and electrification happened in the twenties. So, did the grand plan of interconnecting them fail because of the depression? And then they weren't able to get it up and running because after the depression they barely could ---- - went into war, in fact the war helped to ultimately kill the depression off and provide all that employment and clean off the people and put em in the army. And then there was a whole new set of problems after the war of urban development, and instead of keeping the County of Cumberland Plan, which would have been a saviour of Sydney the governments of the day buckled and allowed progressively the green belt to be used up. So right all through Bass Hill and areas like that would still be open space if it hadn't been for bad decisions that were made for the wrong reasons. Sometimes looking back you wonder why on earth they made them. And one of the last parts of the green belt to be taken out was North Ryde, the industrial area.

Q: The County of Cumberland Plan and the green belts, it was really a labour idea of planning your family. How was this regarded?

It was considered to be not a bad thing. Because it preserved in their eyes maybe, the status quo, but – and once people accept a plan, then to change the plan is another change and that requires this mental shift of attitude. It might take a while to get people to accept it but then that becomes the concrete. And to change it then, they've got to through the whole process again, so I can't see that that was a bad thing. It was a bad thing that was broken up and looking back and you talk to guys like I've got to know pretty well on this Council, like half sided sort of town planning people like, particularly John ---- who you may not have met, but he's now a strategic planner for Sutherland. They really laud the idea of the County of Cumberland Plan, but it was destroyed by the labour government too.

Q: Yeah. Created and destroyed probably at the same time.

And I suppose Ryde had something to do with it because one of the significant planners that was involved in it had a role in the Ryde Council. I can't remember his name. But I will. And he was considered a very far sighted person too. And he wouldn't have this, almost unplanned sprawl today because we're heading to be the Los Angeles of the South Seas. Now that might not be a bad thing but it's – because everybody resists urban consolidation, but it would have been automatic if it can't build other than in there – and then you can't – and you've got to leave that alone, and then you

can't build other then in here. So if you want to live here you gotta either consolidate or go somewhere else.

Q: A good public transport would allow that to work probably.

And it would have happened, because you would have had the concentration of population. And Sydney will never have a viable public transport system that people will use by choice because it's – even if you create it under the basis of a social cost, and forget about the fact that it's going to cost you ex millions of dollars, billions of dollars over and above what you collect in fares and you write the rest off as a social cost and that's not an unreasonable thing to do. But it would be too great a burden because the concentrations are not there to give you the patronage that you need to make it work. And the reason it works in the eastern suburbs is because you've that density of people and so the car ownership in the eastern suburbs is very much less than it would be say, in the Hills district. Why? Because you ---- ----. And you just walk down the street you don't even worry about a timetable because there'll be a bus along or a tram as it used to be, or a train as there is now.

Now you go to places – and they're still allowing sub-divisions to occur further and further and further out. The eastern to the north western part of Sydney out through Rouse Hill, again it's designed only for motor cars. There's no private bus system or anything out there and we've got these hundreds and hundreds of lots being created. 650 meter blocks, 22 square meter houses – it's a big house. That's the requirement and how are those people going to get around? They use the M2 – that's why it was built, one of the reasons it was built and – the car.

Q: Jim could we just go back to the amalgamation of the two councils.

In 1949

Q: Yeah. Was this initially discussed a lot in North Ryde? You were of course part of Ryde Council.

As far as we were concerned in North Ryde - the significant thing about that before it happened. Lane Cove Road basically went as far as Twin Road then. And that bit that goes from Twin Road around the back of some houses and down the hill, that was put in about 1960 and the main road into Ryde from North Ryde was Wicks's Road. Wicks's Road what we now call ---- Street which was ---- Hill and then it picked up on to Lane Cove Road there and there was a chunk in the middle that didn't exist. And so – and the reason - it was never really done much, it was being the dividing line between –

Q: - the two Councils.

And you knew which was the Ryde's – and everybody that had to travel on Lane Cove Road from Twin Road to wherever, traveled on the Ryde side because it was the only bit that was trafficable. And even that was a dirt road but it was stone cobbled whereas the Eastwood half of the road was rutted and sandy.

Q: One road with two distinct – oh god!

Yeah. Well but you see Eastwood was always all but broke. I don't know why it was, but they never had the temerity probably to up the rates. Before rate picking came in, there are clauses against rate picking, well one of the major advantages of rate picking is it takes the politicization out of setting a rate to run a business. Because in the old days when the Councils set the rate, they were always reluctant to put the rate up. And until they had to put it up. And then they put it up and got kicked out. So they were never really game to put it up and justify it to run the business properly, and Eastwood suffered from that very badly and mainly because I think it was run by farmers.

Q: And – well – it was small too. They didn't have the population.

And they didn't want to – and yet if they'd have looked at it, if it was more urbanized, there'd have been parts of ----. A lot of Eastwood was very urban before the fifties.

Q: Well about Eastwood itself, but –

- and fairly valuable properties even then.

Q: (indistinct) But there was –all that Marsfield –

- no that was more ---- than ----. So, all they were inheriting - a lame duck. It seemed to be that. And not only that we had to have this huge Council for a period of several years to the next election I think, and then it was reduced and it was reduced again. And of course we took away the power of some people like Ted Stuart. He tried to be a power in the new Council and that caused a lot of ruckus. And so this all this is happening – like you've got the taking over of land by the commission, the building of the – or taking over the properties for the building of the hospital. The amalgamation of the Council, the shopping centre. There's a huge amount going on. The Ryde housing stuff. All this is happening from the end of the war in 1945 till '55. Before it all started to settle down a bit, so it's a –

Totally breaking off this – on a day like today we used to have holidays in September. Spring holidays. And spring things like daisies. The day that you made daisy chains to give your girlfriend, came out. And they were just a weed. But on a day like today I can remember clearly being down in the paddock behind the orchard, there was bush around the creek, then there was

a paddock and then there was the orchard and I'm talking about Fred Hicks' place, uncle Fred. And by the end of the winter grass had grown up and to lie on your back looking at clouds forming and hearing ground ----. Now these were birds that nested on the ground apparently – I've never ever seen one, and they'd fly right up high and stay in the same place and call. Tweety, tweet, tweet, tweeting - and I don't think you could do that today. There's too much background noise from traffic and I don't think there's any ground -----

Q: That was living was it Jim? (Laughs)

It was part of living- yeah – part of living, but it's the sort of things little kids do, or flying a kite down there. Anyway. So all that's gone. And I took my eldest grandson who is only just coming up four. I made him a kite and it wasn't all that successful and so I went and bought one and I took him out to the hospital – on to North Ryde common to fly the jolly kite. He thought it was absolutely marvelous. Now there's this low tech toy, compared to some of the stuff that he's got to play with and he still got fun out of it. So I thought well, there's hope for the world. (Laughter)

Q: Well on that note we might finish things Jim. Thank you very much for the time you've given me and you've given to Ryde's Oral History project. Is there any other – anything else you want to say before we finish?

END OF INTERVIEW