

SAMUEL CHARLES COOK

Desrae Clarke interviewing Samuel Charles Cook beyond July 15, 1916

Today's date is August 12, 1994. Sam was the eldest son of Samuel Cook and Margaret (nee Bridge). Samuel Cook Senior came to NSW in 1903 working as an apairer with his brother Arthur until he was granted a homestead block.

Can you tell me about the homestead block grant?

In the years until 1914, settlers were granted a block of 160 acres which was known as homestead block for the fee of £1. The only thing that you had to do was to put a 3 wire fence around the boundaries and build a building of 3 rooms.

And apparently the family still have that property.

That is right, my three brothers still live on the property which is much larger now of course, as father purchased more land over the years and added to the original 160 acres and the total amount of land now is about 2,300 acres.

And is it still used for bee keeping?

Well it is farmed but bee keeping is the principle business, farming was only a side line.

What are the main sources of nesture that were found at the original apiary.

Well in the vicinity of the apiary which was sited at Dewars Pool near Coondle, the principle trees would have been York Gum, Eucalyptus, Flooded Gum, Eucalyptus Roos, some Acaciam lycabortrim and Acacia which is known as Raspberry Jam, the bees would have gotten pollen from the acacias but no nectar. The Eucalyptus of course were a great source of nectar and there was a lot in the vicinity those days because very little clearing had been done. The settlers only farmed a small amount of land at that stage.

You told me about the honey house, what was the honey house and where was it?

The honey house was situated about 500 yards from the residence on the 160 acre block. The honey house was used for processing the honey which was taken from the hives which were in the close proximity to the honey house cause in those days there was no migratory bee keeping, bees were only kept in the situation. In the honey house there was an extractor which was hand turned and the young chap inch container and the knives which were heated in a four gallon bucket of hot water and the heat was generated by a charcoal fired fire pot because the charcoal did not produce any smoke in the building.

The honey passed from the extractor through some strainers and gravitated into a tank outside the building. In the tank the honey was left to settle overnight and then drawn off in the four gallon tins.

What were the strainers made from?

The strainers would have been perforated zeech, the main strainer and the secondary strainer of very fine brass fly wire type of construction but very much finer.

The honey house was positioned from what I can gather on the side of a hill.

That is true, that is how the gravitation was achieved, that gave sufficient fall to allow the honey to gravitate from the extractor into the settling tanks.

And what is the use of the fire pot?

The fire pot was used to contain the charcoal to heat the water in the 4 gallon tin. To heat the uncapping knife cause it is necessary to have a hot knife to remove the cappings from the cones.

You said that there were no migration of hives in the early days, why wasn't that?

The means of transport were primitive compared to now days being either spring cart or horse drawn lorry. In the first instance, the spring cart was used which transported about eight hives, the distance traveled would not have been very great, we would only move around within the Coondle district to reach sites of York Gum and Flooded Gum.

There was great difficulties experienced with using the horse and cart wasn't there?

Yes, obviously the bees would sting the horse and they stung human beings and the horses became very frightened and aware of being stung, because I would guess they had received one or two stings and it was necessary when you migrated the bees to contain the bees in the hive by use of what we referred to as a Cook transport colour, that was a wooden lid you may describe it as with fly wire around the edges to give some ventilation. These were put on the hives before they were loaded onto the spring cart and then they could be taken off the spring cart and put on off onto a site and the horse drawn vehicle was moved away out of harms way.

When you called it the cook cover, obviously it had been developed by one of the family?

Well as far as I know, it was developed by Michael Arthur Cook and who named it the Cook Transport Cover, I am not sure, it possibly was I believe one of the P..... Brothers who were bee keeping supplier manufactures in New South Wales and one of the was over in WA and he visited Uncle Arthur and I have an idea that he probably named it as the Cook Transport Cover.

When did your migration actually begin, how long after your father began working from home?

Well I am not really clear on that, but I remember as a child, that would mean I would have been about 3 or 4 years old, our father moving bees from the homestead into Julimar Forrest which was approximately 8 or 9 miles north west of the homestead and of course that enabled them to get onto a different type of trees which was the Eucalyptus Wandoo which mainly flowered in the spring time which would have been September, October, November, December and mostly the yield was a fairly good quantity of honey, but sometimes a failed year.

When you started the migration of your hives, did you stay out overnight or over a couple of days?

I don't think father when he moved bees or migrated bees that would have done that trip within the day time, they would have probably loaded them onto the vehicle at night and then they would have moved to the new site during the early hours of the morning and put the bees on the site and then be able to return home cause they weren't covering any great distances in these early days.

When you did start to shift a little further from home, would you have taken provisions.

When large scale migrations began of course, you moved nearly all over the state, to Manjimup, Kojanup, Dongara and out to Coolgardie, you were away in the very early days of migration. The major migrations would have started in 1935 when I think my Uncle Arthur Cook was the first man to ever move any great distance and he took bees to the Karri at Manjimup in 1935, well they would have been away, well it took all night to get to Manjimup with a load of bees because you could not travel in daytime, you had to travel at night time because the extra heat would suffocate the bees.

And how was the honey extracted when you moved further a field from the honey house?

Well the same extracting machine was used, but it was a fairly primitive set up, they dug a hole in the ground which was about the depth of the four gallon tin and across the one edge of that a pole was placed and then the soil behind the pole was mounded up so it made a fairly solid platform and the extractor was placed on that, still bear in mind that they were being turned by hand and they would have advanced from the original four frame extractor to the six frame extractor, which extracted six frames at a time, one side each, one side at a time the machine was able to reverse the basket so the honey was extracted from one side and the other.

You had different size small tins to put the honey in, what can you tell me about the package of the honey.

Well very early on the honey was packaged in small containers up to 7 pounds it was sold a little to the shop keepers in Toodyay but mainly to Robert Harper & Co in Fremantle and Charlie Carter who had stores in Murray Street, but of course they don't exist now, they were taken over by Westralian Farmers a few years ago, but later on, well some was packaged in 4 gallon tins, but not a great deal and there was buyers for 4 gallon tins, but mind you the price was very high, it raised up to about 4 pence, 5 pence, 6 pence and a pound and that honey of course was very well clarified and all little bits and pieces of wax the settlers moved on before it was packaged in those containers.

The small tins were briefly taken over by larger tins and I think there is quite a story of the 4 gallon petrol tin.

Yes, when they invented the motor car, there was a need for petrol of course in some sort of container and it was packaged in 4 gallon tins, two to a case. The bee keepers used to buy the cases with the two tins in it for about 1 and six pence, the tins were washed with a mixture of very hot water and caustic soda to remove the taint of the fuel out of the tin and the cases were used to manufacture hives. The size of the end boards of the petrol case were the exact size required for a ten frame hive.

What waste would you have got in a 4 gallon tin?

They held 60 pounds and each one was weighed before they were sent to the buyers.

How would the timber, because it was soft wood, how would that have been protected from termites?

The bottom of the box which we refer to as the brood nest, that was the bottom of the box, the bottom was dipped in tar, after the boxes were made the timber was half an inch thick, the bottom was dipped in tar to a little over half an inch dip and that prevented the termites and also when the hives would put out into the apiary, they were placed on stones, one at the rear, in the center of the rear and two in the front at each corner and one at the entrance to enable the bees to get up of the ground into the entrance.

I believe they were painted with a mixture as well.

The rest of the hives, the walls and the ends were painted with a mixture of paint made from white lead and linseed oil with a little bit of turpentine to assist the drying.

And there are some of these hives still in use?

Yes, my brothers are still using some of those hives that were manufactured by our father well over 70 years ago.

What advances were there when you started shifting more than the 8 hives.

Well the first major advance was a horse drawn lorry which was able to cart about 40 single hives bear in mind these were single hives not like the future operation were you shifted two story hives and two horses, they were able to go up to 15 miles, that would have been about the maximum travel.

Did you have to take food and water for the horses?

Yes, not when you were migrating the actual hives, you were able to make that journey in a day, but when they went to take off the honey from the hives, they had to take food for the horses and water as well because mainly the migration would have been to the Julimar Forrest except in winter time of course there was no water although there was two or three sites that had permanent water and that gave water to the horses and also water for the bees cause bees need water in summertime.

You had some very prized apiary sites around the homestead and they had some wonderful names.

The nearest one to the homestead would have been called Sleeper Cutters Camp, there was a permanent water supply there and the name originated because many people used to have sleepers in that vicinity and the source of permanent water, there was also a little bit more history about that particular site too in that the settlers began to select the lands under conditional purchase agreement and to ring bark the Wandoo of course and that was taking the bee keepers source of nectar and it also alarmed farmers to think that all the wonderful timber was being destroyed and he communicated with the then Forestry Department which is CALM now and I think Mother wrote the letters, Father was fairly well educated, but Mother much better and she would have done the writing.

In the long term, people, inspectors they were called, came from the Forestry Department to look at the forest and they agreed it was a very wonderful forest, that is Julimar Forrest we are speaking on, and Father was told by one of the inspectors that you have an axe to grind Mr Cook because you want it for your bee keeper and my Father admitted that he really had great foresight, because the forest has now become a conservation park in 1993 and had it not been for Fathers pressure, no doubt a lot more of the land would have been taken up under conditional purchase.

What years were they that your Father was doing this.....

I would think between about 1921 and up until 1928 or 30 would have been about the time that it was made into a reserve, and eventually it was declared a state forest in the 1950's.

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here were some other names, such as Hells Gate.

Well that originated because the people that lived in Bindoon to get to Toodyay they had to come up a tremendous hill from the vicinity which is now the Great Northern Highway and they named that particular hill Hells Gate, but we had one of our apiary sites near the top of the hill and that is why the site was referred to as Hells Gate. There is a little history I guess about the site of Hells Gate when we were working what is known as Winter White Gum and over at that particular period flowered in wintertime, well Autumn to be exact. We went to take off honey and there was no radio to take to the bush, no portable radios those days and we were unaware of what the weather forecast was and it came up a lot of rain and we were sort of marooned there for several days running out of food, but eventually it fined up and we managed to finish the taking of the honey and extracting it.

When you said there wasn't a lot of water in the forest area, you apparently judged them well.

Yes, apart from the one at Settlers Cutter Camp which was maintained by Father, there was one in the vicinity of Bindoon Roads, we call Bindoon Roads Site, that was rather unique because it was just a very small hole down in amongst some rocks. That remained with water right throughout the summer and the other one would have been in the vicinity of what we call Mundgering and in the long term that was selected as a grazing lease and we lost access to that water, but that is not a grazing lease now, it was abandoned in about 1930 and it has all dried up again now.

With the area being a forest, there wouldn't have been very easy access.

There was no access whatever, only in the early stages by horseback to make surveys to find where you can put tracks through.

And how did you put the tracks through?

In the first instance, there was no access to Julimar whatever in the way of roads or tracks and Father would have made survey's on horseback to determine where you would put a track so they could get through with the horse and cart or the horse lorry and these tracks were fairly primitive of course you would have to wind in and out amongst the trees and Black Boys with the horse and cart, and in the odd case they would have needed to remove a Black Boy, but later on when they acquired motor transport, they had to make the tracks a good deal better to remove a few extra Black Boys but you did not remove any trees unless you had to. You also had to dodge around the stones etc and of course the motor vehicle did not take too kindly to going over stones.

There were also some other problems to, you had some problems with fire in the forest as well.

Yes, it did occur, we used to blame the kangaroo hunters for lighting fires in summertime, of course at the height of summer there had been a very fierce wildfire then it killed the leaves of the trees and that upset the flowering cycle. I admit that we used to hunt kangaroos too with the dog and shoot kangaroos, but we certainly did not light any fires in the height of summer but we did used to light some fires in the springtime to make a control burn to protect the trees.

With the shooting of kangaroo, I should imagine that would be for food?

Yes most people ate a good deal of kangaroo, we certainly did and the skins of course were valuable, they were worth about two and six a pound, the skin would have been a couple of pounds.

And what other animals did you hunt for food while you were away?

Well, there was only kangaroos and dog tail wallabies which we referred to as brush, but of course later on when a lot of rabbits appeared, there were very few rabbits in Julimar at any time, but we certainly hunted rabbits on the farmland.

And 28 parrots?

Yes 28 parrots, mainly they were shot to keep them out of the orchard, cause Father had 24 acres of orchard.

Your Father had his horse lorry until 1929, what happened after that?

Well Father purchased a 1300 truck in the end of 1929, I can remember going down to Perth to collect the truck and Father wouldn't drive in the metropolitan area and so a cousin of ours who worked for General Motors Holden drove the truck up to Midland and Father was capable of driving from Midland to Toodyay but we had tremendous trouble with the vehicle on the way from Midland to Toodyay and we managed to nurse it to Toodyay some how or other, there was some sort of a fuel problem and when we got to Toodyay we took it to the local agent and he was a fairly good mechanic, his name was Leon Peace and he found that the float in the vacuum tank, now that would not make sense to the modern day motors, but the vacuum tank was a vacuum device that allowed the fuel to gravitate from the fuel tank into the smaller tank that contained the amount of fuel that was sent to the carburetor and the float trouble was the float open and closed a valve to allow the fuel into the vacuum tank and because the float was had some fuel in it, it would not work, but Leon Peace punched a hole in it and drained it out and solved it up.

There were lots of advantageous with the purchase of the new truck and from what I can gather, breaking going down the hills with the horses was the main worry.

Yes there were incredible advantages, there was not the problems of having to put either a bush behind the vehicle or someone who used to walk behind with a pole jammed in part of the vehicle and pulled on the wheels for going down the big hills from the homestead to Coondle siting with loads of honey because there were two very big steep hills. Another great advantage of course was the motor transport was that you did not have to worry about a few bees escaping on the load when you were migrating so you did not have to nail the covers down like they used to when they moved them with horses, they were just the little tin strips that were used to tack them down were eliminated and the covers were merely put on the hive and if they did come off well the man might have got a sting but he had to put up with that.

Also the back of the truck, the body of the truck, was actually built for carrying your hives.

Yes it was especially manufactured by Martin Nixon in James Street, Perth to carry 48 single hives. Of course there was no cab on the front as we know it today with doors and windows etc, there was only a windscreen and a bench seat that went straight across and was open to the elements, you had to wear an overcoat to keep warm in cold weather.

Your Uncle Arthur branched out quite significantly in the purchase of a lovely new truck because he wanted to go to the forests in Pemberton.

Uncle Arthur was very much an advance of everybody else, he had been the first bee keeper in Toodyay that had a Ford Model T and then in 1935 when the great migration of Manjimup began, he brought a new truck to assist in that migration but he had had a fairly large truck and I recall going with him to move bees to Manjimup from an apiary site that he had out on Bindoon Road which he called Matthews which of course the man nearby named Matthews and the bees in those days were closed up before you could shift them you had to have the covers put on and the entrance, I think we called them out pieces, was put over the end to lock the bees in and that was tacked on with two nails and they couldn't be shut up until it was dark and the bees stopped flying and then you had to load them up and so we loaded them up and we would have left there at about 10.30 pm at night and we did not arrive to Pemberton until the sun was rising and it was a hair raising journey actually because it was only, that that truck was before the days of dual wheels and it rolled around all over the place and the road from Armadale to Manjimup was a gravel road that was very corrugated and very narrow and I had never been on it before in my life and driving at night time, but anyhow we arrived there when the sun was rising and some of Uncle Arthur's men were supposed to meet him at this particular site to tell him where we had to go and they weren't there, we drove around all over Pemberton trying to find them but it couldn't be done and we had to go back to that particular site and unload. Uncle Arthur was very upset because he thought there would be too many bees on the site which amounted to about 100 which was twice as many as anybody would put on a site those days, but anyhow they worked well and he got plenty of honey so there was no worries.

That was a great distance you traveled overnight at that time.

It would have been over 200 miles, about 240 miles roughly.

Around 1937 times were very hard financially.

Yes, it was very strange really because during the height of the depression, the sale of honey was quite good and the price was satisfactory, but owing to the migrations and extra good seasons, there was a lot of honey produced between 1935 and 1937 and it was difficult to sell and the honey pool was unable to take all the honey produced and I can remember Father had honey in 1000 gallon tanks for storage because it couldn't be sold and it was about 4 or 5 1000 gallon tanks full of honey and a good deal stacked in the sheds on the property, of course by that time the 1937, I would have been working with father and I started to work with father in 1933 so I had been actually working for 4 years in bee keeping then.

We had considerable trouble actually finding storage for the honey but you still went on producing it because you reckoned that you would sell it eventually which was the case because in about 1939 or just prior to World War II beginning, demand increased for honey and there was some export.

With the high financial times, how did your parents maintain you because you were one of 5 boys?

Mother I think was a bit of a genius with finding manners of producing food and so forth and of course we kept cows and mother made butter and the orchard produced fruit and Father always grew vegetables and there was plenty of rabbits in those days, they were in the vicinity of the house actually, they were a few yards away, you could just about knock them over with sticks, so we did shoot and trap rabbits of course, that supplied meat, and kangaroo was shot on the property and out in Julimar Forest.

Your Father had his orchard that came at that time.

Yes, the orchard certainly produced a lot of fruit of course it had been going for a long time, it had been going since about 1910 so it was producing well by that time and the price of fruit was reasonable. It was sent to Kalgoorlie to market mainly, though not very much at the time.

A couple of companies that I know did purchase your honey were Foley & Gibbons and Beards.

It was more a less on a barter system, you sold the honey and they credited us with the value of the honey and that went towards buying clothes and buying gifts because they were also a drapery with that sort of merchandise, and Beards was the same, but with also groceries.

What about Beavis Brothers in Northam?

Yes Beavis Brothers of Northam that was a grocers business in those days and they used to take some honey and we took the value in groceries.

What type of price did people pay you for the honey at that point in time.

Well it would have ranged with that sort of honey which was top grade honey, about sixpence and eight to four pence a pound. It was contained in the 60 pound tins of course which I mentioned before. But by that time a lot of them would have been brought tins especially manufactured, not really for honey but manufactured for honey and petrol and oil and all that sort of thing.

The honey pool was established in 1926 and in 1938 you were lucky enough to secure a United Kingdom Market.

Yes that is true, the 1000 gallon tanks that I mentioned before, they were still of honey at that stage and too our great pleasure the Manager of the honey pool came around seeking honey and of course we had plenty of it, but the price was not very high, the grade was not very high either, the price was about tuppence eight to a pound for the poorer grades and up to about three pence for the better grades and we had to work to get all this honey out of the 1000 gallon tanks, used steam with a tarpaulin wrapped around the outside of the tank and the tanks were perched up on small strips of timber underneath.

There was a very good reason for using that stand.

Yes, if you did not heat the outside of the tank first to melt the honey away from the sides, you took all the liquid away from the bottom without taking away from the sides, the honey tended to collapse and draw the tank in and breaks tanks, the honey would run out onto the ground shall we say.

Did you ever experience one of those traumas?

No father never did but I believe my Uncle Arthur did before they realised that you must heat the outsides as well as underneath the bottom.

Tom Powell was the pool manager, can you remember him at all or anything about him?

Yes, I remember Tom Powell very well, he was manager at that stage in 1938 but he was also manager up until, he was still manager in the 1940's, he was manager when I became a trustee of the honey pool, which I was for about 40 years actually.

Is the honey pool still in existence?

Yes, but it was converted to a limited company and became Westcoby Ltd.

When was that?

I think we had a date in about 1992.

Also there was a good sale for bee's wax.

Yes well generally speaking bees wax was always readily sold, the price was about 1 and 3 per pound and it was mainly used locally for manufacture of boot polish by Westralian Soaps at Fremantle and there was a certain amount used by chemists, Spalding & Co used to use it.

Just before the war, your father obviously realised that perhaps he might move to more distance areas with his hives and you now had your brother Harry working with you.

Yes that is true, in 1940 we went on a great tour looking for Jarrah because we had been told by Uncle Arthur that Jarrah was fully into flower in about 1941. Firstly we went and looked at the Jarrah at Jarrahdale which was near Margaret River because it was said that that flowered earlier. We did investigate it and it had a bud on it which you could see and we were quite impressed but when we approached the State Gardens Board for sites in the area, they disagreed that they would make them available so we gave that idea away and went to Manjimup and Pemberton, Pemberton mainly and we were able to obtain sites in the Pemberton area, some in Beedalup Falls National Park, some on the south western highway.

You mentioned the State Gardens Board, who were they?

Well they would have been the fore runner of the National Parks and Wildlife.

And now they would be CALM?

Yes, that is right.

In 1940 your father purchased his Ford Truck.

Yes after much thought and looking at various brands, we decided to buy a Ford V8 truck because it was said that they had more power and they could travel much faster than some of the other trucks. It was brought from Linus Motors in Hay Street, Perth and taken to Martin Nixons once more, the body builders to put a body on it, a specially built body for bee keepers, 14 feet long 7 foot 6 inches wide, capable of carrying 100 hives.

I recall going to get the truck and obviously I wasn't very experienced with a long body truck, I got caught up against the ramps of Millers Timber & Trading Co where I went to pick up some timber, no great damage was done.

What was the timber you went to collect?

It would have been some jarrah.

Oregon Pine?

Yes, memory is a bit faded, yes could have been Oregon Pine, yeah that would be correct, we were probably buying more soft wood timber to make some more transport covers cause we would only had 50 times and we needed 100 to carry the 100 hives on the truck.

And also you apparently picked up quite a few pine cases from a flour mill.

Yes they were cases that contained Cream of Tartar which was used in the manufacture of self raising flour and they were very good timber, we used them to make more hives and also the transport covers.

So how did you make the hives, apparently you had to do quite a bit of work without wood turning apparatus.

Yes there was no power source and saw benches those days, all the cutting of the timber to size was done by hand using a rip saw and there was a lot of small parts, particularly for the extra transport covers that had to be cut all by hand.

In September 1940 you went on your first long distance migration with 120 hives.

Yes, I think that should be 1941, in September 1941 we went with a 120 hives on the truck to go into the Beedalup National Park where we had been granted site. We were quite unaware of the state of the soil and believed that by the look of it it would be alright to drive on but when we got off the road and made into the bush to get to the site, which was only about 200 or 300 yards, we got about 100 yards I suppose and bogged very deeply on one side of the truck and the difficulty was to get it out as the hives were leaning over so much we had to prop them up with some lengths of wood we found in the forest so we could undo the ropes and lift them off and carry them into position. When we got part of the load off we were able to jack it up and get some timber underneath and drive it in, it was a lesson well learned.

There were further problems in that area with a plant known as the Diamond Bush.

Yes, there was quite a lot of it and it flowered very prolifically and produced very little nectar but copious quantities of pollen which made the bees build up very quickly and because of the poor weather conditions also at that time of year, they swarmed a great deal and we were really unaware of this being over 200 miles away and assuming that the poor weather wouldn't have done any work, but did not go to attend to them and when you did go and discover the swarming, most of the hives had swarmed and they become Queen less and we lost a lot of hives that way.

There is a great deal to learn of the understanding of the forest of those areas, especially if they must have been so different from the Julimar Forest.

There was a tremendous amount, the trees are very higher of course and Karri would be the highest tree in Western Australia and very difficult to see the buds and also to see what was flowering was taking place and also to determine the time of flowering because there would only be work in bee keeping 1 period before and we were obviously there too early in that particular vicinity and we did not obtain any honey, or practically no honey at all because of the swarming and also being there at the wrong time, so we moved onto the site that we got over on the vicinity of the South Western Highway and all other bees did not work in the early stages, they did get honey later on and it was a learning curve which was very useful in the later stage of the year because we waited and waited and we did not get much honey, and said oh well we will go home and give them plenty of time and we returned early in March and I have never seen so much honey and bees in all my life at that stage, it was virtually full.

What were the names of some of the areas that you left bee hives at around that area.

Well we had one we called Quinnanup, one was Sixty Five cause we had sixty five hives there, another one the Fifty Three and the other one was Beards cause that was near a property owned by a Bill Beard.

Did you take all your hives down there or did you leave some at home?

The majority were taken down there, we would have had somewhere around 600 to 700 hives.

So you returned home in the December from that first trip didn't you and your father had not done very well either.

Well actually we would have brought some hives back in late May/June of 1941, principally the ones that we thought the land might be bogged one of those being the site named Beards.

We did not have any trouble getting bogged but Bill came with a load of bees, he had left Beards with a load of bees on the truck and we had been there in very wet weather waiting to get the honey out of the set room and some how or other some water had gotten into the generator regulator device and he was not aware of this and the battery became flat by the time he got to fortunately that garage in had a battery and that got him home to Toodyay to unload the bees.

You find the honey is very difficult to manage in the cold and you must have had quite a lot of cold weather down there?

Yes, it was extremely difficult, the honey from the hives was very full and the honey was very cold and very hard to extract in the end, the draining of the cappings was very difficult too it meant that lifting the what we called the cappers, they were the vessels that contained the cappings were very heavy.

Trying to strain the honey through the fine mesh, that would be difficult?

Yes that was most difficult to we hit upon the idea of taking one of our square boilers down and placing it on a hole in the ground with a fire underneath to boil the water and drawing the honey into 4 gallon buckets, letting it heat up and then straining it after it had heated up which solved that difficulty.

Did you use the zinc mesh then or were you using a finer mesh?

Yes, we still would have used the zinc and the finer mesh as well.

Early in 1941 there was a dramatic change found in the karri forests when you returned, the hives were grossly over filled, what would have caused this?

Earlier on the bees weren't working very well and we were slightly disgusted and determined that we would give them plenty of time to fill up before we went down to extract again, and obviously the time was too long, we left them too long because they had been going to work a great deal better and they were very very full of honey and very difficult to move the bees from the hives and difficult to extract.

You had about 500 tins that time?

Yes it was a magnificent take, something we have rarely every heard of to get so much honey out of that number of hives.

And also to it seemed that you would have to take some of the honey back to Perth to the honey pool and then return with some more tins as you had run out of tins.

Yes we had run out of tins, we took a load of 200 tins (60 pound tins) to the honey pool in Perth and returned with empties to carry on with the extraction.

And then early April you took more honey from the east side road and the numbers were 65

Yes they had worked very well because the weather had not been very wet and we took a lot more honey prior to moving the bees from the east side back to Toodyay.

There appeared to be a problem with the bogginess of the ground down there so you had to work quite quickly after that didn't you?

Well we were determined to get the bees that were on the lower land because we thought it might be boggy later, to get them out before this occurred.

Going back to Toodyay you had four of you in the karri area and only 3 could fit inside the cab of the truck.

Yes, one unfortunate person used to have to sit up the back, we used to take it in turns to sit up the back while one sat in the cab and got warm, the other fella set up the back with an overcoat etc etc to keep warm.

It was not very pleasant I am sure.

No it certainly wasn't.

With winter approaching quickly you had to take the hives from the east and the others from Sutton Road and you had a minor accident in the truck.

Yes, when we were camped at D side, that is the side of it rained almost as soon as we arrived there from Toodyay and we erected the tent and it rained for about 2 days almost incessantly and there was a considerable amount of rain, I did not know what the rainfall was of course having no means of measuring it and there was water everywhere. I distinctly recall that there was a bit stump hole where a huge karri tree had fallen down a few years before and we were able to go there with a bucket and get water out for washing. Fortunately the ground did not get boggy and we were able to get honey out when the rain did stop and load the truck and to Toodyay was a load of bees but during the rainfall while we were waiting Bill had made a radio and he hoped to get it to work but it wouldn't work and he was putting a lot of trouble into with the bonnet of the truck up and obviously the water got into the regulator and caused some fault in that which we weren't aware of and he got as far Boyannup and the lights failed cause the battery was flat. Luckily this was fairly early in the morning and he was able to get a battery from the garage and that enabled him to get as far as Toodyay.

You had to battle also at that time with fog.

Yes that would have delayed him considerably because there was fog all the way to Boyannup, that meant slow travel.

Your dad wasn't so well around that time.

My father was over taken with prostrate trouble and he felt unable to go down to Manjimup so he was not with us and when we came with a load of bees, the second load, father was very ill and had to be taken to hospital.

Also there was a story about Bill's 21st during that wet period, he did not seem to have much of a ceremony for his 21st.

No we were occupied with getting honey out of the bees in between the showers of rain and also with the very cold weather honey is very thick and very difficult to extract and remembering that the extractor was still turned by hand so it needed a lot of manual labor.

With the long trip back to Toodyay with the hives because of the problems with the truck there was a problem with the bees as well, they were confined for a long period causing problems.

In those days the bees were confined as you say with only a transport cover on them to provide some ventilation but being stacked tightly in the load of course and for a very long time and it was very hot in the centre of the load and also the bees are very strong and some of them suffocate, I think about five hives if I remember rightly.

You also mentioned about the hills around that area, that they seem to be a lot steeper than you had noticed before, what type of terrain were you working in there?

Well the karri country in some places was fairly hilly and bearing in mind that the roads or not really roads they were the Forest Departments tracks for fire breaks that were traveling on and we were fairly used to working in reasonably flat country around Toodyay and else where and these hills were to our mind, very very steep and we had some difficulty getting up them at one stage.

And did you have a problem with your caravan any time?

This would have been later on because we weren't using caravans in 1941 it would have been about 1945 or 1948 and the studibaker truck which we had purchased not very long before was fairly highly powered for those days but it would not pull the extracting caravan which was fairly heavy up this great steep hill and we were forced to drop the wheels of the caravan and unhitch and bring the ford truck back down which was able to pull it up the hill.

So therefore the tracks weren't improved in that area at all?

No they just really on went through the forest and then graded a little bit at once, they couldn't be could roads, they were just tracks.

In 1941 you brought the old Chev because you had so much honey to take back, you brought the Chev to help with bringing it back, so you therefore had two trucks working.

Yes that is right, we had the old Ford truck which father had got years before, we drove that down and it was fairly slow and of course no cab to keep the cold and wind off us etc etc and we had a problem with the broken axle in the Chevrolet truck, we were towing it with the Ford truck going down a huge hill, going down into Quinnup Brook, the brakes wouldn't hold on the Chevy, so they were sufficient to hold it back and with it being towed by the Ford and Harry was walking on the ground and he threw a big log under the Chev's rear wheels to try and hold it back and it just went straight over the top of that and crashed into the back of the Ford, breaking the headlights.

And the Ford was fully laden and the Chev was fully laden.

Yes the Ford was probably full of 200 tins of honey and the Chev would have had the extracting gear in it.

So what was the end result of that little accident?

Well it continued the tail when we got it down the hill somewhere down the hill, I don't remember how really and we took it to Breedy Ranch which was an old farmhouse or an abandoned group settlement and we took it way up the honey pool and purchased a rear axle for the Chev and put that in.

Did anyone live in that little house?

Years and years before until this present time in the early 1930's when a lot of the settlers abandoned the land and they were still in the agricultural bank which is the R&I or Bankwest now.

So Bill was left behind while you and Harry took the honey?

Yes solitary time at Breedy Branch, we had been away 3 days I guess.

And by mid June it was very very wet and you did get bogged down and stayed there for a few days and you had a lot of problems with the damp and the cold.

Yes well we were able to get out of the bog fairly easy but we still had a lot of honey to get out of bees and the cold made it difficult to get honey out of the hive because they were very full and also difficult to extract and very difficult to drain the cappings which were cut off the cones prior to extracting. Maybe I should explain, the cones have a sealing capping over them which you had to cut off with a heated knife to cut the cappings off so the honey could be extracted and then the cappings had to be drained and of course it was very very cold and honey is very thick and did not drain out very well.

It wasn't very comfortable so you depended on your camp fires in that area?

Yes it would be very cold in the morning and very damp so the scheme was to have a big fire at night time and put some more wood on it and cover the wood over with dirt so in the morning you uncovered the dirt and hopefully it would still have some more coals to get another fire going.

And you stayed in tents in that area?

Yes we stayed in tents.

What type of food did you take with you and how did you replenish that?

We would have taken a large number of loaves of bread and some fresh meat for two or three days, no refrigeration mind you and no ice boxes, you relied on the meat to keep which it did to my amazement, I look back now and think by joe I cant take meat anywhere without refrigeration or an icebox, but the meat kept alright and we used to fry meat over the open fire and when supplies would begin to run out someone would go into Manjimup with one of the trucks and replenish the supplies. Manjimup was about 30 miles.

And you were using two new sites there, Quinnup and Risers, and you left your some hives over winter.

Yes we decided that it was so wet that we might get bogged in trying to get them out and that we would take a chance and leave them there and they were relatively dry sites and the bees survived remarkably well and we brought them back to Toodyay in about October before the Spring.

You were leaving the Karri forest for a while?

Yes, Karri in those days flowered about every 4 years and we were waiting for the next flowering which was several years away.

What did you feel were the advantages of going to that long distance away from Toodyay for your honey?

Firstly, there wouldn't have been any honey flow in site in Toodyay district or any nearby places, also the Karri was reputed to yield massive amounts of honey or had done in the past and you had to do it in order to get honey where ever you could to make a living and also karri honey was sought after by honey buyers because of its high quality and extra good flavour it had too.

You must have learnt a lot because it was a completely different terrain?

Yes, a different sort of forest and different terrain, climate, everything was different about it and also the long flowering period which would have started about early Jan and continuing right around the winter.

And the market was very buoyant at that stage?

Yes honey was very sought after because the United Kingdom wanted honey because honey was a fairly well concentrated sweet and did not take a lot of space when shipping, that was sought after and large quantities of export honey in 1941 or later on, wouldn't have been until about 1942 or 1943 when really large export quantities took place but that was the beginning.

What type of price would you have been getting at that stage?

Would have been about three pence or four pence a pound

The next great period of your life and your families life were the war years and in July of 1941 you began your universal Military Service and that was for a 3 month period.

Yes, between the ages of 18 and 45 were called up which was called National Service now days and I did 3 months training at a camp in Narrogin. It was a complete change from ordinary work of course. We learnt a lot.

And Bill left home as well?

Yes Bill joined the RAFF and he was posted to a town in Victoria, the name escapes me.

So who ran the farm and the apiary while you two were away from the property?

Well during the 3 months that I was at Narrogin, Harry was at home and there wasn't a great deal of bee keeping attention required and I returned home in August and we were able to carry on bee keeping until end of December early January when I was recalled because that was the time Pearl Harbour and I was called for service.

So you were very busy when you got home at the end of your initial training, you had to get all the hives from the karri area.

Yes there were still some hives left down there which we brought home for the White Gum in Julimar and that went fairly well and we had to take honey off and we actually needed labor because Bill was in the airforce as I said and we were able to get one person and he was just waiting to be called up into the RAFF and he was called up about a month or so later and we had another man who was fairly elderly and he worked for a while but then the work became too hard for him and he left so we were on our own again and then I was called up but by the time I was called up at the end of December, we had got all of the honey out of the bees and Harry was left to battle on his own.

It was a very sad time with your father passing around that time.

Yeah father died in January 1942, so he was only 60 years old.

You did mention that honey was very sought after by the United Kingdom and obviously that would have helped alot with the getting rid of so much honey that you had stored?

Yes, during the middle 1930's and just afterwards it was difficult to sell a great deal of honey, we had stored a lot in tins, but also some in 1000 gallon tanks and probably because, well before war time actually but the demand increased unmeasurably and we were able to sell all the honey that we had.

It was classified as a non perishable food?

Yes, honey has great keeping qualities, actually reported to be found in the Egyptian tombs and still in an edible state.

With the loss of your father and with you and Bill being away, Harry was having a difficult time running the property alone.

Yes of course there was a lot of bees that we had, about 1,000 hives and it was impossible for one man to care for them, he was doing his best and he even had some of the hives replaced at the house which he had sort of forgotten about and they swarmed out and they were lost and then some people were being discharged from the army to go back to work on the farms and I was one of these and was allowed out to go back to do beekeeping and I was able to render assistance to Harry and we got things under control ready for the flowering in the Jarrah which would occur in December 1943.

And that was an extensive flowering that year?

Yes it was a most magnificent year with honey from Jarrah that I have ever seen in my days of beekeeping. It started to yield immediately and began to flower in early December and yielded right through until the end of January and early February when the Red Gums started to flower and the Red Gum yielded very heavily as well and we got a large quantity of honey.

We were assisted of course by my brother who had finished school at that stage, Syd, he came to work in beekeeping so we had three people working on the beekeeping and the Red Gum yielded right up until the end of March and the flow was so good and so quick we weren't able to cart all the honey out of the honey pool as we took it off, we had to stack it up in the bush and cover it over and go and cart it down later on.

With the fact that Jarrah is a very uncertain honey source and the Marri flowered so well, what reasons could you give for that excessive honey flow that year?

Well I have thought about this over the years and we have never come to any dry conclusion, it just appeared to occur. You would think that the weather but that hasn't proved to be so, because some years there has been plenty of rain and there has been no yield and other years when there has been less rain and slightly different climate, it has yielded very well, it is just some feature of the tree itself I think.

And you had a cyclone in that March following that heavy yield?

Yes a dreadful wind, we were quite unaware at the time, we well had radios but the weather forecast , well there was no forecast given and there was no inkling of cyclones occurring and in the night a tremendous wind came home, we were home at the time, and I can recall hearing the garage door banging in the night and getting up to shut it and the wind was so great that I couldn't walk standing up straight, I was bent against the wind.

Did that do a lot of damage to the trees?

Yes, at our home in Blue Down, a large number of Acacias that would have been about 35/40 feet high and all through the forest there was a tremendous amount of trees blown down and of course alot over the tracks we used through Julimar forest, it took us over a week just to clear away the tracks to get onto the beekeeping, mind you there was no chainsaws etc etc, we had a crosscut saw and an axe.

The lifestyle that you led with going out the hive sites was quite spartan, can you describe this format?

Yes we would have been in the bush about 5 days, we took what fresh meat we though would keep for 2 or 3 days and then we would have lived on tinned meat. We were able to take butter with us and we had a special idea for keeping it cool, we had it in a billy can which was wrapped around with some cloth or toweling and set into a small container of water in which kept the cloth moist and that kept the butter fairly well.

What about bread?

We would have taken sufficient bread for the week would have amounted to four of five loaves of bread and it would be fairly stale by the end of the week. You made toast in the morning over the open camp fire and for the rest of the day you ate stale bread. No great hardship really.

In the autumn of 1944 there was a great shift of hives back down the Karri.

Yes you could see that going by past years it was decided that it would flower about December so we moved the hives down to Manjimup using the Ford truck with a gas producer on it because during the war years petrol was rationed even for commercial vehicles and they reduced the power of the truck by about 50% which made travelling very very slow, we had enough petrol to do some of the big hills and it used to take about 10 hours to get from Julimar forest to Manjimup.

One episode along the way of course, was that we used to have to carry charcoal for the gas producer. Bags of charcoal were stacked in a compartment at the rear of the cab besides the gas producer and one bag apparently had fallen over against the hot exterior of the gas producer and had caught alight and I was driving at the time and I glanced in the mirror and I could see flames leaping up the side of the hives and there was consternation and we pulled up on the side of the road as quickly as possible and one man grabbed the fire extinguisher and I grabbed the water bags and emptied that over the fire. We got it out, it only charred down side of a couple of hives.

You also had a problem with tyres on that trip?

Oh yes, dreadful problems, somewhere part way through the shifting of bees we had a blow out of the tyres, they were always very much overloaded of course and one blew out just near Harvey and we put on the spare which wasn't very satisfactory and we were able to get down just past Harvey and there was a considerable amount of bush there at that time and we pulled off the road and unloaded the bees off the truck and drove back to Perth seeking another tyre. The tyres were rationed so we had to apply to the ration authority for a tyre for the truck and never all in my life have I gone through such procedures and red tape etc etc in trying to get a tyre and I spent all day with the person in charge trying to convince him that we couldn't possibly operate without a spare tyre, well actually a new tyre.

And then around 4.00 pm we said why don't you come back in the morning and I went back in the morning and he still declined to give a permit for a tyre, but I was still arguing and he excused himself for a moment I will call someone and he didn't say who on the telephone and anyhow after about a minutes conversations he turned around and said you can have the tyre. How it occurred I have no idea, but he wrote out the permit and I went around to Goodyear in Murray Street and there was stacks of tyres in those buildings, there would have been enough tyres to last for goodness how long and yet they wouldn't give you one tyre to carry on your business, most amazing.

Did you only get the one tyre or were you able to get a spare as well?

No only the one tyre.

With the long trip back down to the Karri forest with the hives was there a problem with the bees once again being suffocated for being so long on the vehicle.

Yes I think at one stage we had a bit of a slow trip and we didn't arrive until probably until about 10.00 or 11.00 am and of course by that time it had gotten fairly warm and some of the hives suffocated. They were still being moved with transport covers.

There seems to be quite a problem that year with the flowers on the trees and Tom Powell, the Honey Pool Manager was a very worried man because of the exports.

Yes, Tom was very concerned because the buyers were wanting honey and the honey people had no honey to fill the orders.

With Tom being so worried about the honey production, he sought advice from Les Blair, the Government Apiarist at the time, what was it that Les diagnosed as being the problem.

Well Les thought it might have been a shortage of pollen on the Karri flowers, he went down with us to experiment by feeding the bees a mixture of skim milk powder and some soy bean powder. The bees certainly took this, we put it out for them and they would go at it, but it didn't make any great difference to the working ability and I think about it afterwards, I don't think that was the problem, there was more a concern that there weren't enough flowers on the Karri at that particular period.

It was a very late bud set, the bee's worked well after that apparently?

They were on especially when some rain fell along the end of February early March they began to work and we did get a reasonable amount of honey out of them over the period from March to June.

Was this March 1945?

That would be right.

There were significant improvements that were made around this time and there were the power view with the nine frame extractor, how was that set up?

Well the power you would put on the removing the hand turning unit, the hand turning unit had a handle and a shaft and a driving cog and all that was removed and a special type of clutch arrangement and that was driving by an engine. The engine was mounted on a platform on the ground and one other thing that was an innovation in beekeeping, these things had been heard of prior to this but thought it was too much trouble to use under portable conditions was a capping reducer which was a system of bars which steam was passed through the cappings and as they dropped off the frames and onto the bars, we were able to determine that we could cart a portable steam boiler around made out of a portion of a 44 gallon drum for the capping reducer and also for steam cleaning the uncapping knife so you didn't have to keep it in boiling water as it was constantly hot of course because of the constant supply of steam.

It must of made things a lot easier?

Oh yes, down in Mandurah, the amount of cappings that could be done was just wonderful because the knife was hot all the time and also the cappings being reduced as they were cut off the frames and separated from the honey and the honey was drawn off because the bees wax as it melts on the honey separates on top and you draw it off and it was mixed in with the other extractor honey and the wax became a block of wax, there wasn't a market for bees wax, that was refined afterwards but it was concentrated prior to that.

And was the frame extractor, was that a heavy piece of equipment?

Yes it would have been fairly heavy, it had nine baskets which took nine frames, known as semi radial type extractor, and well two men could lift it with a bit of an effort, you had to have a bit of a knack about it in a special way to shift it and position it to lift it on the truck.

When the honey was transported to the honey pool from the Karri areas, you had to return the gear and bees wax and it was a very wet year that year.

Yes it was 1945 and it was certainly a very wet year when we went down to collect all the extracting equipment and some bees wax that was still stacked up and other odds and ends and by the time we had all this loaded up it was approaching 4.00 or 5.00 pm and we decided we would carry on and get as far up the road as we could heading for Toodyay.

But you left the bees in the Karri that year?

Yes most of the bees were left down there, it got to late to really shift and we thought we would try and leave them there.

And the Toodyay Clackline Road was under construction at that time.

Yes it was under construction, but I think it was very very wet weather and it was almost impassible and we were afraid to go that way with a load on the truck so we went up the Great Northern Highway and came across the Bindoon Road.

When you went back in September to shift the hives, it seemed to be very little pollen and nectar after that wet winter.

Yes Karri hasn't a great deal of nectar or pollen, so the bees at that stage were fairly weak and only doing very very little.

A great decision was made around that time in looking for further sources of beekeeping areas.

Well we had always known about the southern wandoo, which is Eucalyptus Wandoo over in the Cranbrook, Kojanup area and we went over there to see a friend of ours who was a farmer and a beekeeper in Cranbrook and he said that there was a good call of buds on the White Gum and it was just starting to flower and he recommended that we move our bees over from Manjimup which we did.

So what was the flowering period of the White Gum?

It would flower from the end of November to the end of March a fairly long flowering period.

The bees were already working over in that area when you went to visit and the dams were full of water for the bees.

Ray Lawrence's bees were working probably on some scrub as well as a bit of wandoo and he showed us around the area to a degree. We had never seen so much White Gum in our lives really on the farms and his farm was very co-operative and said we could put bees on the farm and I recall one particular person named Irvine who came out and we approached the house and we told him what we wanted and he said there is a dam down there you can put your bees down there and there must have been hundreds of acres of White Gum that had never been cleared or touched, they just ran sheep on the land, but it was never cleared.

So you obviously got your bees over from the Karri area as quickly as you could?

Yes we moved a load every night from Manjimup to Cranbrook and it was a very exhausting job but we managed to get it down.

You had a very severe winter and left the hives in the area, but you found it didn't affect the bees at all.

No they had survived relatively well and they worked very quickly on the White Gum.