

AUSTRALIAN GARDEN HISTORY SOCIETY

NATIONAL ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

TASMANIAN BRANCH



Photographer: Rhonda Hamilton August 2024

Interviewee:	NEVILLE McKINNELL
Interviewer:	Jean Elder
Date of interview:	16 August 2024
Place of interview:	Evandale, Tasmania
Length of interview:	67.30 minutes
Restrictions on use:	Nil
Transcriber:	Kaye Dimmack
Quotations:	Extracts from the interview should be verified against the original spoken word.
Acknowledgement:	All uses of this interview should acknowledge the interviewee and the Society: Neville McKinnell, Australian Garden History Society, National Oral History Collection. Interviewed 16 August 2024 by Jean Elder.

[JE] This is an interview with Neville McKinnell recorded jointly for the Australian Garden History Society's National Oral History Collection and the National Trust, Clarendon Oral History Project. I'll be speaking to Neville about his life at and around Clarendon House at Nile, Tasmania, and, in particular, his knowledge of the property during the ownership of Walter and Kathleen Menzies, 1942-1962. The interview is taking place on Friday 16 August 2024 at Clarendon House. The interviewer is Jean Elder and our recorder is Rhonda Hamilton.

The Australian Garden History Society and the National Trust acknowledges Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia. We pay respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island cultures and to Elders past, present, and emerging.

But before speaking to Neville, I'm inviting Scott Carlin, Managing Director of the National Trust, Tasmania, to introduce us to Clarendon House.

[SC] Well the Clarendon Estate was granted in 1816 to James Cox, who was the son of William Cox, who built the road across the Blue Mountains in New South Wales. Probably James received the grant as acknowledgement of his father's achievement in New South Wales. James received between 2000-3000 acres, and by other grants and purchases, essentially owned the whole valley between Clarendon and Conara, further south.

The Trust has always been interested in all periods of its houses lives and I'm hoping that this interview with Neville, well I'm pretty sure this interview with Neville, will fill us in on the archaeological richness of the place because buildings have come and gone here, tank stands have appeared and disappeared. Clarendon has always been a rich man's plaything and we were very grateful that Mrs Menzies chose to give the house to the National Trust in 1962. Neville's kept an ongoing life with the property, as our neighbour and we see quite a lot of Neville and it seemed time to get his memories down on paper so that he's part of the history of the property.

[JE] Welcome Neville. Can you tell me – we're starting at the beginning – what year and where you were born?

[NM] I was born in 1953, in Launceston in the QV [Queen Victoria Maternity Hospital] and I was brought straight out here to start my life off.

Right, in the Nile area?

At Clarendon House. That's where I came, straight from hospital.

Ah, Clarendon. So your parents were already here?

Yeah. Mum and Dad; Dad come here in 1946 as a farm manager and then they got married. He met my mother, they got married and then they moved into this house. Then I come along and so this is where I started off, and my sister too: she was a year later.

And your parents had grown up in the Nile area? Tell me a little bit more about them.

Dad grew up in the Nile area. His grandfather was brought out from England by the Camerons to work; that was Jimmy McKinnell, then his son Blue, which is Dad's father. Then he had, I think he had five children and they were in the Nile area all their lives.

Mum was a Binns. She started to grow up out at opposite Ormley, because her father was a tin miner and then Mum went to work in the woollen mills in town. Then later on Mum come out as a maid for the Boyes', over at Lochmaben, and she used to come over here and do the of washing up for the Boyes', when they owned Clarendon House, back in them days. And I think that's where Mum and Dad ...

So that began their association with Clarendon House?

Yes.

What was your father's role in Clarendon House?

He come here as a farm manager. He just looked after the stock and the cropping side, if there was any cropping, and he done the burial details too and all that sort of stuff, with horses.

So they had stud horses?

Yes, the Menzies had a horse stud.

We'll come to talk a bit more about that a little later. Your mother then – once the two children were there – did she work on the property too?

No, Mum was just a bottle washer, a bed maker, looked after us kids, yeah [laughs].

Tell us about the early life in the house. Where did you actually live in this enormous, great house?

Well this room here was a lounge.

I'll just explain to listeners, we're sitting in the front, formal drawing room. So when you grew up ...?

This was the lounge room, there wasn't much furniture. The room across the hall was my sister's bedroom and my bedroom was a little room just up the hall there. Yeah, so we just lived on this particular floor.

Where was the kitchen?

The kitchen was the first room on your left, as you walked in the back door. That wasn't an original kitchen: that was put in after they filled the house up with sand and ...

Tell us about that. When did that happen?

We reckon that happened back in the Cox's' day, because yeah, the house started to move because it's on very shallow foundations, and so they pulled down the portico out the front, they pulled that down, they

took all the sandstone blocks down off the top of the roof – the parapet – they took them down. Some of them are still out there in the garden today, and they filled the house up underneath with sand and logs – anything they could get their hands on – to stabilise the house.

Because it was sinking, essentially?

I don't think it was sinking, it was just moving. Like the side, it was just moving about. Anyhow once they got it stabilised, before they finished down there, they pulled the stove and everything out – anything that was salvageable they pulled out and brought upstairs. So the kitchen was in the first room on your left as you come in the back door.

7.23 Was there an inside toilet, bathroom?

Yes, there was a toilet upstairs and the bathroom was on the same floor as where we are today, over the top of one of the stairs that goes down under the cellar, it was just a single bath, a single cold-water tap [laughs].

No hot water?

No hot water. Mum had to go down to the outbuildings outside and boil the kerosene buckets, two kerosene buckets and she'd bring them upstairs. She tipped them in the bath where my sister and I was, and by the time she got back with more we'd played round with the cold-water tap [laughs] and we're sitting there freezing [laughs]. So that was our bath.

Tough childhood compared ...?

Well we didn't know any different, honestly, didn't know any different.

The house, when your mother's caring for you children and doing your cooking and cleaning in Clarendon, which would have been quite onerous, given no hot water in the house, but was there a garden? Where the lovely walled garden is now, was that still a vegetable garden in your time?

No the walled garden was just like a little paddock where we kept the dogs and Billy the sheep and that was all. The main garden was where the sundial was. Dad used to dig all that garden up, that was the vegetable garden, where the sundial is, all around the sundial.

Did you grow all your own vegetables?

He grew everything.

Did you have chooks and ...?

Yes, we had chooks and we used to go down the river and get a few rabbits, or a couple of wild geese and gawd knows what [laughs]. We mostly grew everything. We used to go down the Nile in an old motorcar. Dad used to have an old, I think it was the old Ford Coupe, and that had a dicky seat in the back and you'd pull the thing out the back, and my sister and I we used to sit in the back and we'd go down to Nile. Because

that's where Dad's parents were, she had the shop at the Nile, Amy McKinnell, and we used to get their bit of tinned stuff or whatever they needed and we used to come back.

How often would you do that trip?

Oh that was once a week, because they always went down to visit Dad's parents.

10:00 Coming to the Menzies family, I understand they didn't actually ever live here. So did they ever sleep overnight or did they just host afternoon parties?

No, they never slept here overnight. They just used the grounds, and a picnic table down at the stables, and the little roundhouse that's there, they used to use that, they used to bring people out from town. And sometimes they used to bring a party of people out to go native hen shooting or ferreting rabbits and that, and then they used to have a picnic. They never lived in the house, they never entertained in the house.

And they had the roo and deer park there. Dad used to have to go and get the roo and deer of a Sunday morning. He had a dog called Turps, he used to send Turps out across the river and the next thing Dad'd come in the house and say, 'Come on Mum, grab the two kids, we'll go down and watch the deer and roo come back'. We used to go down to the stables there and watch the dog bring all these deer and all these roo back across the river – these big Foresters and that – and put them in the deer park, back in over the fence that fell down, back over there. And Dad and Mum, we used to stand the fence back up, just in time for Mr Menzies to come out with his entourage – all these people, and they'd walk around and have a look and go off and do what they had to do and then come back and have a picnic. In later years, it was just Kathleen and Wally Menzies: they used to just come out themselves with a picnic basket and we used to have a picnic with them. They never had any kids at all, so they treated my sister and I as their own.

So you were kind of their children?

Yes, they treated Mel and I as their own.

They were quite fond of you, and you of them?

Yes, they were real good.

You talked about the deer, where exactly was the deer park?

All out in front here. All this out the front, yep. From the entrance, all the way down to the back of the paddock there – nine acres I think it was.

Through all the parkland, through all the existing trees then?

Yes.

Was that fenced in any way?

Yes, that was fenced. I think there was a seven-foot fence. I know it was high because we couldn't get over it as kids [laughs].

You couldn't get over it?

No. [Laughs]. We were trying to climb over it, you just couldn't, it was too high.

We started talking about the horses and the stud, the Menzies had a stud property here. What can you tell me about that as a horse stud? Did they make some changes to the property?

Yes, he made a lot of changes. He put up a lot of sheds and that, foaling sheds, around the place. He done a lot of post and rail fencing, he done a lot of double fencing where he planted macrocarpas and [indistinct], and a few pine trees. Everything was double-fenced. Even right round the house here, it was all fenced off.

So there were horses everywhere in them days. That was Legislator and then there was another stallion called Dapper. When those two got together, it wasn't pleasant to watch them fight. Mum knows all about that.

How do you mean, what was the story there?

Oh, Mum seen them fight real bad and she reckoned she never wants to see two stallions fight again. I've only seen stallions fight once, but it's not a pleasant thing to watch. They're pretty brutal.

And the stallion Legislator. Do you remember him?

Yes, and Dapper. I can remember those two real clearly, yes. Especially Dapper because he used to live just out here in the park here. Well, Dapper did, and Legislator was over the other side there.

Correct me, were they the two that fought together?

I doubt it. I couldn't be 100 percent sure.

Do you remember Mr Ted Mooney, as the Stud Groom?

No, I don't remember Ted Mooney but I do remember Eric Fox and Keith Evans. Keith Evans, I think he was before Eric Fox. Because Eric Fox had two children, Michael and Patricia, and we knocked around together as kids.

15:00 They lived nearby, Eric?

He lived in the chook house. Where the fly fishing museum is. We always called that the chook house because all that along there was all the poultry place, where they used to keep the poultry, when they first settled.

So, apart from you and your sister, there were other children?

Yes, Michael and [Patricia], but in Allendale, which is up where the cottage is, that was another farm, and there was Max Cowdery and

Alison Cowdery there and they used to live, well Max used to live with his grandfather there. We used to knock around a lot as kids, right up until we left school. We had a lot of fun.

With the stud, was the carriage loop – the carriageway – was that used as part of the stud property? Were the horses used on the carriage loop?

What are you talking about, the carriage loop? Oh, around the park?

Yes.

That wasn't there. No, no, that wasn't there at all. That was put in, probably in the late '70s or '80s, that was put in there. The first person that graded that up was Jerry Wise, from Relbia. He come in with a little grader and put that in. In fact I'm pretty sure that was in the '80s. That was never a road round there, never ever.

Were there other buildings that the Menzies family altered or changed?

Yes, there's a lot of buildings that they had here and there's only the one (no four) still standing on Clarendon: that's the tin shed, just down here; and there's a shearing shed down there that I own; and there's a shed at my place that I use as an oil shed; and the hay barn (no, the hay barn's not there anymore, we just put a new hay barn up there). So, there's only three existing sheds that Menzies put up. But there were sheds all over the place but they all got pulled down after the horses got sold off, because there was no need for them anymore. And building material, they just pulled buildings down to rebuild something in those days [laughs]. They didn't waste nothing, even the nails. I can remember straightening nails out, that was one of our things we were told. 'Get in and straighten those nails out'.

You would have remembered Clarendon without the columns and portico?

Yes.

We talked before the interview, the columns or the stones weren't anywhere in the garden, that you recall.

No, the only thing that was in the garden was the sandstone blocks off the parapet. The columns were gone, no one seems to know where they went, they're gone. And they would've been sandstone columns, in those days, they would have been in certain blocks, stacked up, they wouldn't have been in one length, they would've been cut and stacked. Whereas these ones here today, they're solid concrete.

Do you remember where the iron conservatory went?

No. When Murray McKinnell, my cousin (Dad and his father were brothers), Murray and I, we helped to dig all the house out underneath, and there was one room blocked off. After a while, when they got the doors open, it was full of old furniture. I mean, this furniture was old, there was nothing fine, that was chunky stuff. So in later years, that tells me that it was damn old this furniture, and there was a lot of stuff, and

the conservatory was in there, all pulled down and all stacked away. I still can visualise it and it was white and, sort of, archy looking stuff, and glass and everything. Everything just disappeared, virtually overnight.

What era was this, roughly?

That would have been early '70s, around about '72, '73, I think. I'm just trying to think when Murray and I started work: this was our first job, was here. But everything just disappeared and we've got an idea it went to Hobart, that's the last we ever heard.

20:09 Where did that kind of idea come from?

Oh just from word, word-of-mouth. You know, there was a lot of stuff disappeared from this place.

Would that have included the original iron kitchen range? Did that disappear as well?

The stove: yeah, that went. Them days it didn't worry me or anyone, really. The attitude in those days was totally different to what it is today, when it comes to stuff like that. Like, if you see that today, you're going to grab it, because it's worth a lot and you won't see it again.

The National Trust acquired Clarendon's outbuildings from your father in 1988 – can you tell us a bit about that? How did that come about?

Well, Mrs Menzies only gifted the house and nine acres to the National Trust and she kept the chook house, she kept all the outbuildings. Anyway, when she passed away in '85 [1983] ... There was ... Cyclone Tracy went through Darwin [1974] and wrecked everything, and building material was worth a lot of money, especially bricks. So Dad, and a couple of others, and I we decided we were going to run a wire rope round these outbuildings and yank them down and pallet all the bricks up, because they were worth a dollar a brick!

Anyhow the Trust got wind of it and slapped a Heritage order on it and then they tried to make Dad start doing painting and fixing the roofs and doing all that. So Dad said, [laughs] 'Well, bugger you, you can bloody well buy them off me'. And that's what happened.

Great story: love it.

Yeah. Because you can't put machinery in those old buildings, they're hopeless for farming enterprise. Alright for running a horse stud or a winery, but when you've got big machinery and a lot of stuff, they're hopeless, and the floors were falling in in one of the stables. The only original stables are here. The only thing that's still original – is the middle stables – they're the only one that are still the original, everything's still original there.

Your father made changes, like the Clarendon Station building, that went to the Great Lakes?

The house did. Yeah we pulled the house down. We pulled it all to bits and then we rebuilt it up home, in a module form, and we took it up to Arthurs Lakes – that's where that's gone.

The goods shed that was there, we pulled all that down. That all got used as building materials and everything round the farm. The railway station, we don't know where that went. Someone else bought that and took that.

And the skillion from the back – the east side of the stables – that iron was reused somewhere else?

Yes, all the timber and iron, all that's up the road here, only about a kilometre and a half up the road, yeah. That's all in a shed, still there today.

Still in a shed there now?

Yeah, still there in the shed.

The changes that happen.

Yes. I've seen a lot of changes, and a lot of changes that should have never ever have happened. That's architecture-wise and that sort of stuff. What I get really annoyed about – because I've been here so long – is people inventing history and that really gets up my neck.

Can you give me an example?

Oh, well one bloke reckoned – he was telling the tourists and that – that (because they asked why there were two front entrances to the house) and they said, 'Well, all the portico, all the front, was facing the river and they picked the house up and turned it around'. I thought [laughs], 'This is bull'.

It's like they changed the door on the stables down there – they put a window in there. Well, that was always a bloody door there. I can remember the bloody door and we used to play there as kids.

If I had a bit more time, they just change it. Some of the stories they try to say that all the bricks and everything come from over the river – made over there. But they weren't, they were made down here in the lagoon, where they dug all the clay out. You know, there's a 40-foot hole down there, full of water now.

25:16 So the bricks were made locally?

Yes, they were made on the spot, yeah.

Can you remember the day then that Clarendon was opened to the public, after National Trust took it over? Was there a special day of celebration?

No I can't remember that.

But I can remember back in the mid-'60s, they used to have fairs out here, pretty regular. And we used to like the fairs because they were old-type fairs, the old ginger beer in the barrel, you know, and the bloke goes

to belt the tap in and the bloody tap flies out and there's ginger beer going everywhere. And all us kids are laying on the ground trying to soak up this bloody ginger beer. They used to have – there wasn't any refrigeration in them times (well there was but they wasn't portable) – so they'd come out with square blocks of ice, and at the end of the day they used to leave the blocks of ice on the ground so, us kids, we used to get them and we used sit on 'em and slide down the bloody hill, down the back down there. We spent hours and hours carrying these bloody blocks of ice up the hill and sit on them and slide back down the hill again [laughs].

Great fun.

There were old canvas tents and the chocolate wheel, there was a lot of stuff there or sale.

Was that something the Menzies family organised, the fairs?

No, that was the Trust.

The National Trust.

Yes, that all came through the Trust, yeah. I suppose for raising money. Fundraising or something like that. They had a traction engine bogged out on the bloody lawn out here – that was funny. And chaff cutting. No, they done a lot of fundraising stuff here over the years.

The house – when you were living in it – was there any furniture, or was it very simple? There were no furniture or fittings much left.

No, no furniture whatsoever when Dad moved in here. The only furniture we had was supplied by Menzies and that come from a factory called Henry Bills and Co. which was in Lindsay Street in town, and Mr Menzies owned that. He had a furniture factory and so he built all this furniture and he brought it out here for Mum and Dad: wardrobes, lowboys, beds. We were setup, there were no problems.

Where did Mr and Mrs Menzies live in Launceston?

1 Lime Avenue, Elphin Road. And her mother lived up Lime Avenue, next corner up Lime Avenue, her mother did. And she wanted her mother to move out here to live and her mother said she wasn't going to live out here in a cold place, so they stored all her furniture upstairs in one of the rooms, (which we never as kids, or Mum or Dad, never ever got to look at). It was always locked.

What happened to all that furniture?

That all went when Mr Menzies died, and Mrs Menzies got it all moved out.

Is that the furniture that I understood the Pitt family bought complete rooms of, for their Longford house? Is that where some of that went?

I wouldn't know. I couldn't tell you anything. The only thing Mrs Menzies took from this place when she handed it over, she took that mantlepiece

there, she took that and she put that in 1 Lime Avenue, and she said when she passes it's got to come back. And it come back, yeah. Because she loved it, she really liked it. So she put it in 1 Lime Avenue, in her place.

29:06 Did you ever go to the house in Launceston?

Yeah, oh yeah. We went in there a lot of times for afternoon tea and God knows what. It was pretty starchy, you know what I mean, them days, everything was starchy [laughs].

So you had to be on your best behaviour and scrubbed up before you went?

Yes, Sunday School best [laughs].

Do you remember that with trepidation or ...?

Yes, I haven't forgot a lot of those sort of things. Even going to Sunday School every second Sunday, you know, we had to go to the Nile and dress up in Sunday School gear. That was all Mum, she was proud that we all dressed up neatly, my sister and I, but after a while we're get in under the house and come out with cobwebs all over us but we still had to go to Sunday School [laughs].

Tell us a little, if you can, about the garden, because it was originally (when the Cox family first established a beautiful parkland garden), when the Menzies were there did they employ a gardener?

No, there was no garden. Everything was run down when Menzies bought the place, literally run down, and all he done was just all the fencing and ...

I don't know whether he put the bath or toilet in, I couldn't tell you. There was very limited maintenance done on anything. It was just all horses.

So your father's job – how did any of the gardening happen?

Dad just dug the bloody garden – all where the sundial is – he just dug all them up and put a vegetable garden in. There were no roses, there was nothing, just a bare yard.

The garden had gone.

Yes. We more or less just lived here. We didn't, nothing was looked after.

And the elm avenue?

The elm avenue only had one lot of elms down one side: the ones on the left going out. I think they might have been planted there probably in the '80s. That used to be a fence along there and there used to be a lot of elm suckers along there, and gawd knows what, and all round the parkland there used to be all pine trees. They took them out in the '80s – they took a lot of trees out in the '80s actually. There used to be a big pine tree in front of this house here, huge big pine tree, there's photos of

it there (there's a photo there of it), and they couldn't pull it over with a bulldozer. They had a bulldozer backed up to one of the oak trees out there in the paddock and they had this big cable on it and they still couldn't pull it over. But, a young bloke, me, playing with matches got a fire in it once and virtually burnt it down [laughs]. So they got it down.

So that burnt it?

Yes, once the fire got in it they realised, oh yeah, the fire's gonna drop this tree, so they kept stoking it up and they got it down. I was only a little bit of a kid then, but I knew how to play with matches [laughs].

I'm coming back – when you spoke about the sundial just earlier – the sundial today is not the original one is it?

That's correct.

Do you remember the original one?

Yep it had Father Time on it, Old Father Time with a sickle. But I can't give you all the details, as I say I was only a young person then, but Dad can remember everything and, when they come to (I don't know whether it was a ski ball or [*indistinct*] ball, the people were here), they had to replace it, so Dad give them all the information, what was written on it and I'm pretty sure that's the one that got replaced.

When we were talking earlier about the stud farm the Menzies had and the stallion Legislator, there was a plaque I understand? And it's disappeared? Any idea what happened to it?

Yes, that went the same time.

As what?

Theft.

When a whole lot of the other things disappeared?

No, those two items disappeared when they used to have the balls and everything here, ski balls and everything. A lot of young people around in them days, so that's when they disappeared. Because I always remember Dad was going crook – he was mental over it, and he knew where they went, yes.

That was in the 1950s?

No, no, that was in the late '60s, when they used to have the ski balls and that here, the Trust and that, for raising money. It was like, a lot of these people, a lot of them are in that book there, photos and everything of them all dressed up in penguin suits and gawd knows what. It was something like Rural Youth today, you know, all young people. They just run riot around the place.

Now we haven't talked much about the farming that happened here, and you as a farmer. In your father's time here, there were both cattle as well

as the stud horses, and Corriedale sheep and some crops. Is that correct?

That's correct. Yes, they used to grow a lot of oats and that here, for the horses, when the horses were about; and a bit of hay for the cattle; Cormo sheep – and that was Dad's job, to do that.

34.58 Where were the crops on the property?

They would have been anywhere because they had to alternate the paddocks and that, for crops them days. Them days they would have fallowed paddocks: they would have ploughed paddocks up in Autumn time or early Winter and let them fallow until Springtime, because it was worth a bag of super [superphosphate], leaving ground to fallow.

Explain that to me: worth a bag of super?

Well they didn't have to buy a bag of fertiliser to put on. It was just the mulch and everything breaking down over that time, that was the difference.

And your Dad introduced Merino sheep?

He introduced the Merino. He went and bought some Merino rams from Kelvin Grove and he put them over the Corriedale ewes, which bred what they call a Cormo sheep, and from there on Dad kept putting a Merino over Cormo until it came back to a full Saxon Merino – superfine – and that's what I run here now – superfine Merinos. Which, wool's not worth much at the moment, it's gone down to buggery [laughs].

When the Boyes owned the property – before the Menzies came – do you remember much of what your parents talked about the Boyes family and how they lived at Clarendon?

No, there was very little conversation about them because no one knew anything about them, other than Mum. And all Mum said was that they were just party-goers, and the place was dolled up. Because Mum was a maid for the two sisters that lived over at Strathmore and Mum said they was a funny lot of breed, but that was all. Mum never spoke too much about them.

They were just known as party-goers?

Yeah.

Now I'm going to move to talking about the flood in 1969. What happened? Did that impact Clarendon badly?

The farm – oh yeah, it totally wiped the farm out. We lost five and a half mile of fencing.

And stock?

No, we never lost any stock. They used to get a warning when it was coming. You used to get about a 30-hour warning but since the 1929 floods I've seen that many floods that I've lost count. In 2011 I seen six

floods, and four of them were big ones. I think I lost about three mile of fencing out of one of those. Every time I put up a fence we'd get a flood a couple of weeks later, wipe it out again. And then we'd get a lot of other little floods in between, and in 2016 we got that big one that come down. Well, most of our floods come from a place called Mt Victoria, which is up towards Scottsdale area: that's where the floods come from. Normally it takes about 30 hours to get down to here.

So you've got time to move stock higher up?

Yes, but this one done it in 14 hours, for the simple reason because a lot of forestry work clearing the hills and logs. Because that didn't hold the water up. Because when the forest holds water up it gives all the lower streams the chance to get away. Well it didn't, and that flood caught up with the South Esk and the Ben Lomond River, which was still here and that turned into a huge flood. And that was only 500mm lower than the 1929 flood.

Devastation.

Oh yeah. I was really lucky. I brought all the sheep up on the Monday night and then I went back, just on dark, to shift some more sheep and I thought, 'No, I'll bring 'em up a bit further', because we wasn't expecting the flood to be here late Tuesday afternoon. When I looked out the window Tuesday morning, she's already here and starting to go down, and I had to go and shift one lot of sheep but, well I had a panic really, because I thought it was still coming, until I went down to the railway bridge and had a look and she peaked at midnight, Tuesday morning [laughs]. She'd peaked, and I could've lost 500 ewes, if I hadn't had that thought. You get that when you're on this river, because it is a river flat, it's flood prone country and we're the lowest on the South Esk River. I was only left with 35 acres, out of 670, and I had to run nearly 1200 sheep on that. If I'd undone the back door, they probably would have come in [laughs].

40:31 While we're talking about your property Neville, which the Menzies family gave the property to you – when was that?

'85 she died, and she willed the farm to Dad, yeah.

We're wondering whether the ponds, on your property, were they part of the previous orchard or kitchen garden?

Yes, that's where the original orchard was, down there. And the other part of the pond further down where the deep water was, that's where they dug all the clay out to build all the buildings and everything. And that was filled up with water, after everything was finished, then back in the late '60, early '70s they decided to turn the old orchard into a lake: water storage was important in them times. So we put up the banks and everything, so that's a big lagoon now, full of lilies [laughs].

You must have seen a lot, as a farmer, changing weather patterns through the years and the impact that's having on water availability?

Well, in my younger days, you could drive down that Nile Road and you could look out towards Ben Lomond and you wouldn't see Ben Lomond, you wouldn't even see the foothills, for trees.

So that's all gone?

That's all gone now. I can remember – back in the late '50s, '60s – when we used to cut hay in January and sometimes, when you got round in certain places, and you look on the foothills, it was shining. There'd be glitter everywhere and that was water coming out of the foothills, shining on the rocks and that. And we used to get bogged here in January, cutting hay, and you don't see that anymore. We used to get late storms, like late Spring storms, they used to come through around about half past four or five o'clock in the evening, they only lasted about half an hour, cold as anything, and they were like little mini thunderstorms. After the '60s and '70s we haven't seen them for years and I noticed in the last few years we've been getting them back. And even back in them early days, March was the hottest part of the year. I mean, it was hot, but we haven't seen that for quite a while now.

The climate's changing isn't it?

Yes, but it's coming back round. What I seen 40, 50 years ago, it's coming back round. And you try and explain that to the younger generation – because they haven't been there they don't understand.

Did you keep rainfall records over the years?

No, gee I'd fill this house if I did [laughter].

I do keep charts, actually. I've got a chart and I just write them down, I do. I even keep flood records now, I've been doing that for quite a few years now. When there's a lot of rain, there's a flood coming, I clock onto Llewellyn Flood Station and I print that out, and I've got that in a folder, so when it peaks at a certain level I know exactly what it's going to do down here and when it's going to get down here. So it gives me plenty of time to shift things.

Now Neville, we're looking at your scrapbook and a map of the Clarendon grounds, and it's fascinating to think about all the changes that have happened over the era. When I look at the Clarendon grounds, as we know, the house in the centre here, wasn't the first house: there was another house built a lot earlier – a beautiful spacious wooden house I understand – where was that?

That was behind, off where the shearing shed is, (well, the railway line wasn't there at the time), and that's where it was. When the main house was finished, they pulled it down and put the woolshed in. Of course, the original woolshed was further back east of Clarendon House.

There are some old brick paths near that first house.

Yes, there's some old brick foundations and paths and that there, and there's an elm tree growing at that spot and it's growing up through a ring of paths: there's a big ring of bricks and it's grown all up through that. I

tried to unearth it here, quite a few years ago, when Jennie Chapman was running the place and that, they were going to do an archaeological dig, but it never eventuated.

In front of the main house now, as we know it, Clarendon, there are two very old elm trees and they date from the Cox era?

Yes.

Because we have an 1869 photograph that shows those two elm trees. The other old trees are in the northern area that we call the parklands area, so there's some old elms there and some oak trees that are quite old as well.

Yes, there's a couple of old oak trees there and there's elm trees there, not as old as the ones in the front of the house. A lot of these old elm trees down round there, a lot of them are suckers. Because down along the drive there, it used to be gum trees down there, and they took the tops out of the gum trees back in the late '50s – that was some idea of regenerating trees – but only the one survived, and he's still there today, but all the others died.

In the parklands area too, in front of the house, right along the now carriageway, are the hawthorn hedges. Now they're very old, aren't they?

Yes, the ones on the boundary, they're very old, and the ones internal are the old hawthorn hedges. The internal ones have been looked after in these later years, by the National Trust.

There was a pond, an island, in that centre at one point?

Yes, there was a pond, probably about 40 metres from the front of the house, and that contained Cape Barren geese, swans, we had guinea fowls, we had peacocks, ducks, everything was floating about there in them days.

So that got filled in, in the '80s?

Probably in the '70s that got filled in, when we cleared all out underneath the house and all that. A lot of stuff got filled in and disappeared.

That was part of the excavation of all the sand in the foundations, once the house was stabilised?

Yes.

There was an aviary, was that right beside the ...?

Yes, the aviary would've been about 10-15 metres out from the conservatory, under the elm trees.

Was that there at your time?

Yes, that was there at my time. I can remember, as a kid, going there and we used to be looking through the wires at these little birds and that, yeah.

When did that end, the aviary?

That all disappeared when Mr Menzies died.

Now we move to where the old orchard was. There was a tennis court too in that part, wasn't there?

Yes, there was a tennis court out the west of the house.

On the western lawn?

Yes, on the western lawn: it wasn't in my day but it was a tennis court, because Mr Menzies turned that into where he used to keep his horses, like the stallion and that.

You've got to remember that when Mr Menzies bought the place, it was all run down. Everything was just run down and when he got it, he just turned the stables into lucerne boxes and done all the fencing all round the place. And that was a tennis court there, because I remember Dad and them often talked about it.

49:46 So they played on it?

No, they never played on it. See, Dad grew up in the area here and we used to have another bloke used to come in, in the late '60s, by the name of Frank Colgrave, he was from Evandale and he used to come in and do fencing, and he was in his seventies then when he come here and he was full of information. He could tell you a lot of stuff about the place because he used to come here as a young bloke working on Clarendon, long before I even set foot on the country.

There was an old orchard in that area?

Yes, that was an old orchard down there.

Beyond where the tennis courts were?

Yes, just behind the macrocarpa trees.

Do you remember what plantings were there?

Oh, there were a lot of fruit trees there, a lot of fruit trees. In my day they were all dilapidated and falling down. It was never looked after. I don't reckon Boyes' ever looked after it, because everything was just falling down.

Then the stallion paddock was somewhere behind the gardener's cottage?

No, they used to keep the stallions one on the tennis court, that's a fair paddock. And the other one, Dapper, they used to keep him out here on the front lawn, in that paddock there.

It was all fenced?

Yeah, everything was fenced. All this out here was all fenced. There were fences everywhere, even down here, just down from the main

entrance where the water crossing goes. There used to be foal sheds there, there were foal sheds everywhere.

The pine trees around that boundary – did they get removed when fences went in?

They were removed when the National Trust took it over. A bloke by the name of Alistair Cowdery – he was a sawmiller and a logger – and he come in and we took all the pine trees down. He took them down for the trees and he didn't charge the National Trust or anything, he just wanted the trees, because they were so straight and solid, so they made good timber.

They weren't in the 1869 [1969?] flood?

They were Boer War stuff. Because they were planted close together they just grew straight up.

In the area of the guard house, the convict and the coach house, are there changes here?

The only change was the stables down here. They used to be convicts quarters and when Menzies bought it, he pulled all the chimneys out and he turned them into lucerne boxes for the horses. That, what we call a sick bay, that little brick shed, back in convict days, that was a sin bin. That was like a little mini gaol, and I always can remember the door, they used to keep the door in the stables there. That was what that was for. But when Menzies bought it, he turned it into a sick box for his horses. These stables here, everything's still original in No. 15 there.

Do you remember where Legislator or Dapper were buried?

Dapper was buried down in the gravel pit, but I don't know where Legislator went. I haven't got a clue, but I'm pretty sure he died on the place, because he was a pretty old horse.

Now we're moving to 16, 17, 18; the stone barn and the cottage and the woolshed. The changes here, this is paths and fences that changed over time there. There's a well, I understand?

There's a well down near the river there. They dug down to river level and the water come in through the stones and they pumped that up with a windmill and that was all lead pipes, run across to the house.

The windmill was down near the well then?

Yes, it was on top of the well. Yes, they pumped out of the well: the windmill.

The stone barn hasn't changed in my time, it's still the same. Which is a credit to the way that they built it because it's the only building here without spouting (apart from the shearing shed). These other buildings, they put spouting on them, and they started to move so they had to put rods from one side of the building through to the other and that's why you look at old buildings around the state, they've got 'S's and 'X's on them: that's to hold the walls up. That's what they were for. So when they put

spouting round it dried the clay out, because everything was built on shallow foundations, so they depended on the clay to keep everything stable. And once you dry clay out it starts moving. The stone barn: it hasn't moved, apart from that wall there because there's a couple of blackwood trees which I'm trying to get the Trust to shift. They're the ones that caused that wall to crack. So they had to jack that wall back up, on the end of the stone barn. But other than that the stone barn is in damn good order.

The cottage: yes, that's had about three back skillions on it since I can remember. The fireplace has gone out of it, which it shouldn't have ever went. What they done to that building is a bloody disgrace to the architect – he didn't have a clue what he was doing.

The shearing shed: they changed the door to a window, which was wrong, but everything else in there's pretty much the same. So it is still the same, but that was built after they pulled the original house down, because the railway line went through there.

The timber building, that was put in after '46. This cottage and the shearing shed and across the railway line was 400-odd acres. That was the Soldier Settlement. This was separate to Clarendon, after Cox's, after it was split up, that was put into a Soldier Settlement. Alan Cowdery had this place here.

That was the timber building?

Yes. Dad's brother put that up. That was put up in later years, so that's got no heritage value whatsoever.

But it's part of the history of the house?

Yep.

This tank stand: tell us about that. I'm now holding a photograph of you in front of ...

Yes, that's me. Yes, I was dressed up in my sports uniform at Evandale Primary School. We used to have a blue team and a red team and a green, remember those ribbons. That was me in ...

Fine looking lad. Tell me about the tank stand?

The tank stand was right beside the back entrance into this house. You've got to remember all the moat and everything wasn't there, it was all filled in, in my day, and the tank stand was sitting on top of that. And the stairs that went down underneath. We didn't even know that was there, apart from the doors under there. We knew there were doors, but we didn't know there were stairs. And that tank stand supplied the water. I suppose the windmill pumped up into there, but I don't think the windmill did because, in my day, over in these stables here (No. 14), there was power onto that and there was a Godwin water pump down there and that used to pump water to the house, to wherever it had to go. That was a double-piston Godwin pump, and that laid there for years and years and years. But I don't know what happened to it now. But that

pumped it up into that big tank, and the tank itself, that's up home. Dad pulled that down and got the timber and all that, and the tank's up home, covered in brickwork at the moment. So, that's the only surviving thing of it.

Now we're in the scrapbook and we're turning to a photograph – dated 13th November 1961 – and this was the stud sale. Tell us about that?

Well I don't know much about it. I would've been (what '61) I would've been eight years old, so I would have been at school when all this was going on.

But it was the final sale of all the ...?

Yes, everything was sold up on the day that everyone was there. But there's no records. I can't see no photos of horses or anything lined up. I don't know how they done it.

We're looking at another photograph now, the same day. Tell us about Bambi?

Bambi, oh a nice looking little deer, but he'd let you in but he wouldn't let you out. He kept butting us away from the gate all the time.

I can see the huge deer fencing.

Yes, that's right.

[background discussion, indistinct]

60:00 We're looking back at the sundial – there's the base. Is that the original base?

Yes, everything's original except for the sundial itself.

So it was the sundial that was replaced?

That's right, yes.

The chimneys are not there these days: they pulled them down, because it was all collapsing down in the cellar.

We're looking at a photograph here, probably when, 1940, roughly?

Yes.

That shows the original base of the sundial and chimneys on the roof.

Yep.

Ok. And here are ...?

That there is the railway station, and when the railway line was put in, they put a road in from the railway station straight to the Nile Road. Fred Littlejohn was the first bloke to plough the first furrow to put the road in – don't ask me what year that was. But they're sheepyards and cattle yards for the railway. There used to be a sidling there and they used to shunt the trucks, load up, people used to bring all their cattle and sheep,

or get their fertiliser off the train, all from round the Nile district. And that's when the railway first went through. Yeah, I can remember all that. We used to play in the super trucks, as kids.

Covered in white superphosphate powder?

Yeah.

That was the power pole.

We're looking at a photograph, probably 1940. What are we looking at?

They're all the outbuildings, out here.

Are they still existing?

Yes, you were in there.

Oh, that's walking through those ones, yes.

Yes, servant's quarters.

[SC] Do they pre-date this house or are they contemporary?

Oh, I don't know. That would've been back in the late '80s when Dodson was moving out.

[JE] Tell me about that. Was he the glassblower?

Yes.

He lived in the house [where the fly fishing museum is now] and he wanted somewhere to start up because he'd been all over the world learning, James Dodson, and got to know Dad and so Dad said, 'Well, you can have the tin shed and start your business in there'. And that's where he started and he was in there for a few years, till he bought Breadalbane: the big shed at Breadalbane. Now he's not there anymore now, I don't know where he's gone.

Now, we've got some more photographs of ...?

There's the round shed there. You can see all the trees all about here everywhere. A lot of those are all gone.

That's about 1961.

Yes, they're all gone now.

And lots of fences at that time, everywhere.

[SC] Whereabouts are we looking?

We're looking from the river, up towards the house. The house is just in there behind the trees and that's the roundhouse, so we're looking up towards the roundhouse. And the stables are there.

[SC] Which is sometimes referred to as the gardener's cottage?

Well we don't know what it was for, honestly. We haven't got a clue.

Because it's round the wrong way for a gardener's house. It's round the wrong way – I don't know what a gardener's cottage looked like – it's pretty bloody small, like you couldn't swing a cat in there. So, we don't know what it was for, unless it was a paymaster's stall/shop, someone kept a bit of bookwork while the house was getting built?

[JE] We're probably coming towards the end: we're just looking at a very old photograph. So there's 1869, which shows very clearly the original columns and portico and the two beautiful old elm trees, is that right?

Yeah.

And a wonderful lawn.

Yes. That lawn out there had daffodils and snowdrops and all those sort of winter flowers, but they were all done in circles and when I questioned Mum about them years later, she said they was designed to be something to do with the Sun and the Moon. I've gone on the Internet to try and find out about patterns, in England, because it would've come from England, the idea of how they arranged those sort of things, and what it meant. But Mum said it was something to do with the Sun and the Moon.

[SC] Any of this fencing?

No, the only bit of fencing you'll see of that type of fencing is down at the Nile Cemetery now. It's down there.

[JE] How would you describe that fencing, Neville? Is that timber posting and wire?

No, it's a steel H-line dropper ... and you step those two pieces into the ground, and they were wrought iron. I've got some wrought irons up home but I haven't got the posts: they disappeared.

We're looking here at the photograph of the original house and it is showing on the right-hand side (facing the house), 1869 probably, some of that original, unusual fencing.

[SC] It's called Estate fencing. I wondered if there'd been more of it on the property?

No, there's nothing here.

[JE] Do you recall any of that fencing at all on the property.

Yes, some of it used to be around the front, round here.

It went right across.

Yes, that's right.

[SC] Did it go down the main drive.

No, that was a big high fence down the main drive: a big timber fence.

[JE] Well thanks Neville, I think we (unless there's any other photographs we want to pick up on) ...

[SC] Is that the Shepherd's Cottage?

Yes, that's the back of it, yeah.

[SC] Which is interesting because it says that there's a skylight in the roof.

Yeah, Morrell [architect] put that in there. Do you notice the chimney's still there.

[background discussion, indistinct]

[JE] Well I think we might finish up.

Neville, I want to say thank you so much for your time, on behalf of the Australian Garden History Society and the National Trust, and your stories bring to life memories of a past time and a place at Clarendon and you've done it in a really informative manner and we much appreciate being able to add this to our archival collections. So thank you again.

Recording ends: 67 minutes 30 seconds

Interview ends.