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**SIR W STEWART BOVELL**

**EARLY LIFE**

**EDUCATION**

**CAREER AS COUNTRY BANK MANAGER**

**MILITARY SERVICE**

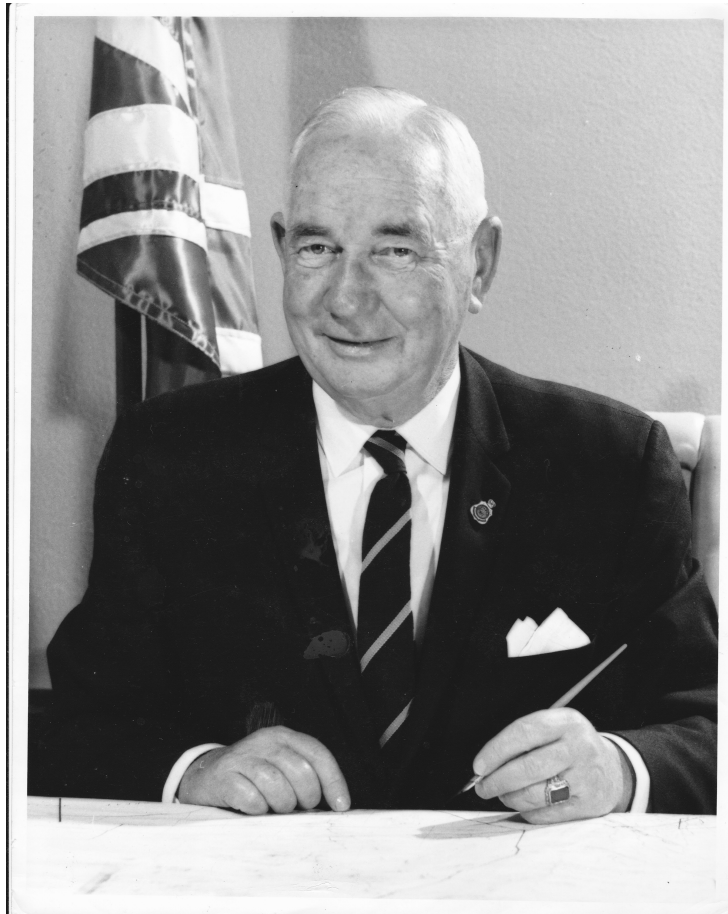
**COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENTS**

**PARLIAMENTARY CAREER**

**AGENT GENERAL FOR AUSTRALIA IN UK**

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Sir W Stewart BOVELL

**EDITED TRANSCRIPT**

Sir Stewart Bovell was interviewed at Busselton, Western Australia for the Battye Library Oral History Programme by Jean Teasdale on 10th June 1977.

Sir Stewart is a member of an old Busselton family. After working as a bank officer he served as an officer in the RAAF during World War II, returning to the family firm in Busselton at the end of the war. In 1947, on the death of Mr W H F Willmott, he became the member for Sussex in the W.A. Parliament. With the redistribution of seats the following year he became the member for Vasse. In 1954 Sir Stewart represented all States of Australia at the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association's General Council Meeting at Nairobi. From 1959 to (19)'71 Sir Stewart held the portfolios of Land, Forests and Immigration. On his retirement from Parliament in 1971 he was appointed Agent General for Western Australia in the United Kingdom, a post he held until 1974. He now lives in retirement at Busselton.

The background noises on this recording come from the log fire burning in Sir Stewart's study.

**TAPE ONE SIDE ONE**

BOVELL I am William Stewart Bovell, born at Busselton on 19th December 1906, the son of Alexander Robert Stewart Bovell and his wife Ethel Williams. I am the eldest son of a family of five, all of whom, (that is the family) are living at the present time. I have three sisters and one brother. My father was the youngest son of Joseph and Jane Bovell. The Bovell family migrated from Port Glenone, Northern Ireland, to Western Australia in the year 1859. [Sir Stewart says 1950s on tape]. Official records, from advice by Ulster Scot Historical foundation I quote, 'The search data would suggest that two, perhaps three Bovell brothers from Scotland settled in County Antrim towards the end of the Seventeenth Century and that the families living in the parishes of Abergill, Port Glenone and Bally Scullion in the Nineteenth Century have stemmed from these brothers. Further, the record of English names shows the name Bovell descended from Humphrey D Buivile and this name is recorded in the Domesday Book of 1086.'

We, of course, cannot trace our ancestry to that date and perhaps that's just as well! My father, Alexander Robert Stewart Bovell, was the youngest of eight children of Joseph and Jane Bovell (née Burnside). Joseph and Jane Bovell came to Western Australia in the 1850s. Also there were three other members of the family. Three brothers remained here including Joseph. Those three brothers were in the Colonial service and all were engaged in the colonial mounted constabulary of the times. In my grandfather's family of eight there were James William, John, Thomas, Joseph, Henry, Anne, Eliza Jane and my father.

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All lived in Busselton the whole of their lives, were buried here from the historic St Mary's Church of England.

I am one of five children of Alexander Robert Stewart and Ethel; the eldest son. I have three sisters: Alexandrina Marjorie, Strella Ethel and Annie Lorraine and my brother Reginald Eustace John, all of whom were born in Busselton. We are all still living and enjoying good health for our present ages.

I was educated at the Busselton Government School to Junior standard. The bank manager of the Western Australian Bank, Busselton, at the time, Mr Hedley Stuart Taylor, asked me if I would care to join the service of the Western Australian Bank. It was necessary in those days, whatever qualifications one might have from an educational stand-point of view, to pass the bank's own exam. I sat for this exam at the then premises of the Western Australian Bank, now the Bank of New South Wales, and for two days I was occupied doing this examination. I passed it evidently, because I was taken into the service of the Western Australian Bank and commenced my service in 1924.

I might say at this stage that I owe quite a debt to the headmaster of the Busselton School at the time. When I was being educated it was difficult for country children to obtain an education beyond the sixth or the seventh standard, but a Mr Wilfred George Longman, who only recently died (in the last two years I think), helped me very considerably to a higher education standard than was possible in the country districts of those days.

JT Did you have to do correspondence or were you actually able to do classes at the school?

BOVELL It was just private tutoring, and in those days in the country, in Busselton anyhow, there was quite a lot of tuition privately because of the standard of education that was not available publicly.

After a few months in the bank in Perth I was transferred to Katanning and spent the rest of my life until 1940 in various parts of Western Australia; firstly in the Western Australian Bank and later in the Bank of New South Wales. Some of the districts I lived in at that time were Katanning, Bunbury, Albany, Tambellup, Wyalkatchem, Toodyay, Moora, York, Narrogin, Geraldton for almost six years, Morawa, and Mingenew. My first managerial experience was at a place called Beacon. This was at the commencement of the war and the branch was later closed because of manpower requirements for the war. I was then transferred as a manager of the bank to Mingenew. I closed that after two months and was then transferred to the Administration staff of the Bank of New South Wales for Western Australia in Perth.

JT Now during this time you were at what town during the Depression period?



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BOVELL I was in Geraldton and Morawa during the Depression period and at the end of the Depression period 1938, '39 at Beacon and later Mingenew, but that was towards the end of the Thirties, just at the commencement of the war.

JT And what can you tell me of the Depression era as a bank manager?

BOVELL The Depression era was one which I think, I hope anyhow, that Western Australia or any place or country should not have to go through experiences of that kind again. However, the fortitude of the people overcame the difficulty. Some of the problems, especially being in a bank, were quite evident to us. People showed great fortitude. Often they had to wear (on their properties) bags, old sacks, for clothing, eat boiled rice and experienced other difficult aspects of trying to live. But they coped, in what I think is truly an Australian characteristic way. In an emergency, in a crisis the great majority of Australians will respond.

JT Well what about anyone who just couldn't pay the next instalment of what was due on their property; would you foreclose or how would you handle that?

BOVELL The bank was very considerate and I'll just tell an experience of my own. I won't mention the district because it may not be fair to the people concerned but this instance was that one poor farmer was so harassed that he decided to burn the bank down and he built a bonfire outside it. There was no policeman in the town, it was a small country town. We had to telephone a neighbouring town where there was a policeman, for him to come, but by the time that this man, a very good man really, had built this fire he'd sort of worn out his enthusiasm for burning down the Bank.

JT But why did he do this?

BOVELL Well I think it was frustration. He couldn't get anywhere. The bank allowed so much a month sustenance but it was hardly enough to exist on. However, the police came and he was charged and fined in the court, in the local court, by a local Justice. There was no court in the town, it was in the neighbouring town from where the policeman had come. He never had the money, (it was a small fine, ten pounds I think which was quite a considerable amount in those days), but the bank paid the fine and any expenses associated with the offence. Or rather the bank didn't pay it, it allowed him to draw the money to do it. So the bank was not inhuman in many ways. It had to deal with the exigencies of the time and I give this as one experience of some of the difficulties and some of the times when the bank did have compassion. The bank was not as hard as perhaps some historians will record.

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JT Did you have many in these districts walking off their properties and just finishing?

BOVELL Yes. In one town I was in, the local storekeeper, who was usually financially involved with people who might leave, would come and tell me that so and so was loading their furniture at a nearby railway siding.

I, as bank manager, was left with the property with stock and plant and we had to make some arrangement to have the stock cared for. It wasn't an easy existence but the community generally co-operated despite the fact that they may have thought at the time that the bank was rather hard. Many of them afterwards (who weathered the storm of the Depression), became quite well established and their families are today carrying on the property which their parents had worked through these most difficult times.

JT When somebody abandoned their property would you then be able to re-negotiate that property or did you have to hold it for a period of time in case that family became financial and could take it over again?

BOVELL No.

JT Or how did you do that?

BOVELL One of the essential services of operating the bank's policy was that we were to never go into possession. It was still the same name, in the name of the person that held the property and as far as making arrangements for looking after stock, this had to be done through a stock firm or some other avenue which could look after it but not the bank. It was only as the last resort that the bank went into possession and sold the property.

JT But this would happen would it and you'd re-negotiate the farm?

BOVELL Well it would happen. The stock would have to be sold, perhaps, and proceeds credited to the account of the person concerned and by negotiation later with owner, if the property was to be sold, some owners came back again. If the property was to be sold then it would be done by negotiation with the owner and any surplus would of course go to him or her as the case may be. In the Depression years, of course, costs were a great factor. Wool, top fleece, was sold at ten pence a pound and wheat at one and threepence a bushel. This of course did not provide sufficient finance to enable farmers in many cases to engage in cropping in later years.

I myself, as accountant at the bank in Morawa, was receiving three hundred and twenty pounds a year. My subsequent salary as a manager at Beacon and later at Mingenew was four hundred pounds a year. I had to run a motor car as the best I could and we were given, for official business only, one shilling per mile and

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we had to account for every mile that we were engaged in conducting the business of the bank. As a member of the bank's administration staff for the State I received four hundred and sixty pounds per year.

JT I was going to say, what about housing at Morawa; was that included in your salary?

BOVELL I was only accountant there so therefore I didn't have a house. As a bank manager in Beacon, I was given a residence there attached to the bank which I occupied and at Mingenew there was no residence and therefore one was given a house allowance for payment of rent or accommodation wherever, whatever the case.

JT Do you remember what that was?

BOVELL I think it was a hundred and twenty pounds a year. It was, to all intents and purposes, quite a liberal allowance if you weren't occupying the bank's house. I would make special mention to the good companionship and fellowship that existed during those Depression years, especially in small country towns. I was occupied in many social enterprises, e.g. the Toc H movement which did so much to help the people who couldn't help themselves at the time. There was a wonderful community spirit in regard to sport. We had to use facilities that would not be tolerated today but we enjoyed ourselves as a community. At Beacon we only received one church service a month. The service was held Sunday afternoon once a month and there we would have a social gathering after the church service. People would come and the denomination did not matter. We would each attend whatever church service it was and have good fellowship and I believe that we received encouragement from the service that was conducted at that time. It was because of this fellowship that lots of people there were able to withstand the deprivations with which they were confronted.

JT What about Toc H was there a local branch in the district?

BOVELL There was at Morawa; there was a local branch at Morawa which was active. We also went to places like Bogeada, Perenjori, Caron, Mullewa, Geraldton; in fact, all round the district and this was a wonderful service for young people. I, myself, of course was only, in those days, in my twenties and early thirties and therefore I received myself a great amount of good fellowship from this wonderful organisation.

JT What did Toc H do for the people of the district?

BOVELL Well, members would assist in any way. Say for instance a farmer was ill and couldn't take off his crop; well the lads would

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go and do the work for him. In connection with widows or people, elderly people, service was done for them like cutting wood and all sorts of menial tasks that people couldn't do for themselves. Visiting old people, giving entertainment, as best we could, campfires and what have you, which all helped the morale of the people. I was fortunate, I left Geraldton in 1936 as one of Western Australia's representatives to the Coming-of-Age Festival of the Toc H movement in London and that was my first experience of going overseas.

JT Can you describe that festival?

BOVELL Yes. It was a festival attended by representatives from the whole world and it was held in London. It was held during a very critical year in the United Kingdom, King George V died, King Edward VIII became the King, he abdicated and King George VI then became the King. We were to have met King George V but he died so we were perhaps some of the few people that were received at Buckingham Palace by King Edward VIII as King.

JT What were your impressions of him?

BOVELL I had met him earlier as a boy scout in Busselton on his visit to Australia in 1920. We all journeyed to Bunbury where with Lord Mountbatten the then Prince of Wales came, we had a guard of honour of all the scouts and guides in the South West. My later experience with the Prince of Wales was when he was King Edward the VIII and I must say that my impression of him was that he was most sincere. He was concerned for the welfare of those people, especially during the Depression years who couldn't help themselves. I believe that this possibly was one of the reasons for his abdication, apart from any domestic problems that may have arisen at the time. He was a most sincere young man for whom I have the highest opinion and the greatest admiration.

Also at this meeting, in London, the Geraldton Lamp of Maintenance of Toc H was lit in the Crystal Palace in London. The Crystal Palace was burnt during the last war so it was my great privilege and honour before ten thousand people, to present this unlighted lamp to the then Duke of Kent who kindled it and lit it and I brought it back to give to the branch at Geraldton. The branch was elevated from a group to a branch, and a branch is granted a lamp of maintenance and it was kindled in London.

JT I was going to say how did you bring it back?

BOVELL I brought it back, but it didn't stay alight all the time, but we re-lit in Geraldton and it was kindled and lit to the memory of Mr Frank Green's son. (Mr Frank Green to Geraldton in those days was its great benefactor, a grand gentleman, but he lost one of his sons in the Great War of 1914-18 and this lamp was kindled and lit in

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memory of his son.) Mr Frank Green has another son, Eldred Green who is, of course, still living and residing in Geraldton at this time.

JT And this was all at the conference of '36?

BOVELL All at the conference of '36. Then early in the war, 1941, I enlisted in the Royal Australian Air Force. I received a commission at Laverton, Victoria in July 1941, and was posted to Pearce [RAF Base] as an Administration Officer in No. 5 Air Crew Initial Training School. I was there until Japan entered the war and I was one who was sent to Clontarf to take over from the Catholic Church the Clontarf Boys' Orphanage to become a training school. Pearce, prior to Japan entering the war, was operational and training, but when Pearce became operational only the training school was sent to Clontarf. The ground staff training came incidentally to Busselton, No. 4 Recruit Depot. No. 5 Initial Air Training School went to Clontarf. I was there for some time and was then posted to 4 Initial Training School in Victor Harbour, South Australia, and after that I was posted to No. 2 and No. 6 Initial Training Schools of air crew at Bradfield Park in New South Wales. During that time which occupied about three years, I, in various categories, in these initial air training schools helped with some ten thousand individual young men who trained as air crew. Unfortunately many of them never returned to Australian shores.

JT What was your position in that training squad?

BOVELL Well I was an administration officer to begin with. Later I entered for training, all academic. My official title was, Officer-in-Charge of the Training Wing. I occupied the same position at Victor Harbour and the same at 2 and 6 Initial Training Schools at Bradfield Park. I was also a member of the Category Selection Board, which was comprised of five people who were responsible for selecting the category in which the air crew would serve. Ninety percent of trainees wanted to be a pilot but of course we were fighting a war and the exigencies of the service demanded that there were to be so many to train for a pilot, so many to train for a navigator, so many to train for a wireless operator and so many to train for an air gunner. Every month a course went out and we received a signal from Air Force Headquarters saying if there were (for easy reckoning) a hundred that had qualified for further training they wanted sixty percent for pilots, ten percent for navigators, ten percent for wireless operators and the remainder were to be air gunners and we had to decide, this Category Selection Board, of which I was a member for three years, had to decide what these young men were to train for when they left their initial training school. I repeat that ninety percent of them wanted to be pilots.

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JT How did you divide it up then?

BOVELL Each member of the Category Selection Board had ten votes for each category and one candidate came in at a time and of course you lived with these fellows, you knew what they were. You can't tell whether anyone will make a good pilot or navigator but it's all a matter of assessing qualifications.

For a navigator his personality would have to be studious and exact. A pilot would have to perhaps have personal qualities of initiative and a wireless operator would also have to be exact in his ways and a gunner would have to be a bit slapdash but nevertheless if there's a fight on he'd be in it.

I, with nine others were given a training course the other person from Western Australia was Mr Harry Dettman who was later Director General of Education. Mr Dettman and myself went off on this course. We went into the Recruit Centre; we did our aptitude tests, we went through all air crew training schools and eventually finished up at Darwin in operations. Naturally we didn't indulge in operations but Wing Commander Caldwell came from England with his Spitfire Squadron and we were stationed up there to see how operations worked.

During the course of this exercise, this training that we had to go through, we did a course in psychology at the Melbourne University. We were given a course in the time allowed. We did a course in at least elementary psychology so that we could perhaps have some idea of the characteristics of these people that we were to decide what they would train for. I might mention that Mr Dettman, at the initial training school at Clontarf, was also a member of the Category Selection Board.

Having gone through this training, and of course being at home during the war, (I was then in my early thirties) was not very satisfactory. One would have liked to be in the thick of it. I was later posted to Assistant Staff Officer, Organisation, Northern Command and we were moving towards Japan with the Americans. My last domicile was at Madang and I was there on the 15th August 1945 when the war ended. I was posted down south in December for discharge.

I did not return to the bank. I returned to the district of Vasse and later Busselton where my forebears had lived for three generations. My father was aging, finding it difficult to cope with the interest he had so I decided that I would return to Busselton and I entered the family business. Shortly after, I returned (this was in 1946).

Early in 1947 the member in the State Parliament for what was then the Sussex district, Mr Henry Willmott, died suddenly. I was approached to stand for Parliament. I felt that I had come home for a certain purpose and that was because my parents were aging and I therefore couldn't feel my way clear to contest the election unless my brother, my younger brother, Reg, would come home. He was then on the staff of the *West Australian*

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Newspapers. He came home, I was elected to Parliament and from 1947 to 1971 I was the member, first of all for Sussex, which constituency was abolished in 1950, then for Vasse, from 1951 to 1971.

The business that I gave up to enter politics comprised a shipping agency which had been conducted by various members of the family going back to my grandfather's day since the 1870s. In those days my people, the various brothers of my father conducted a general store, a farm, a hotel and various other small interests including an agency business of the shipping that had been conducted in Vasse first of all and then Busselton since the early part of the nineteenth century. All these business affairs, or not all of them, but some of them had ceased to exist because of death and other circumstances. My father did retain the shipping agency. I was also a registered and qualified taxation adviser, all of which made up this business of my family over so many years. My political career was (I found) most interesting. I might say at this stage that I never really enjoyed the political side of it: that is the arguments and discussions in Parliament itself. The great reward I received from my Parliamentary life was the service I was able, or at least I hope that I was able, to give individually and collectively to people who needed it.

When Sir David Brand was elevated to the ministry under Sir Ross McLarty's Premiership in 1949 I was elected Government Whip, the position that Sir David held before he entered the ministry, and Secretary of the Government Parties in the Legislative Assembly. I held this position until 1953 when the McLarty government was defeated. I was then elected (the Whip always is elected and not appointed), by the Liberal members in Opposition then, to Opposition Whip and Secretary of the Liberal Party. The Country Party had their own Secretary at that time. The McLarty government had just been elected in 1947 when Mr Henry Willmott, to whom I've already referred, died suddenly. The state of the parties in Parliament at that time (and it must be remembered that the Labor Party had been in office for fourteen years without a break) was Liberal Party: thirteen; Country Party: twelve; two independents and twenty-three Labor. That meant that the Premier Sir Ross McLarty, had not a majority in his own right even with the Country Party support.

There were two independents, the late Harry Shearn, member for Maylands, and the late Ray Read, member for Victoria Park, both virtually Labor-inclined seats. Mr Willmott died and this had the effect that if a Country Party representative was elected to the Sussex electorate (as it was at that time) Sir Ross McLarty would have had to resign as Premier and the late Mr Arthur Watts, who was the then Leader of the Country Party, would have been Premier of Western Australia.

Also if a Labor candidate had won the election for Sussex it would have embarrassed the Liberal government. There would have been twenty-four Labor; twenty-four Liberal/Country Party and still

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two independents and it might have been thought by these two representatives, Harry Shearn and Ray Read, that the political climate had changed and they may, in conscience, support the Labor government and therefore there may not have been a Liberal/Country Party government.

But there was no fear of that because, through my association and my father's association over many years with the timber mills of the district (and there were nineteen at that time), and the workings on the wharf, the Labor Party, the official Labor Party, never contested the seat and the same with the Country Party. The Country Party did not want to embarrass the position of a newly-formed government.

There were four applications for Liberal endorsement. I was endorsed and it was thought that I would have been elected unopposed on my first election, but two of the disappointed candidates contested the seat as independent Liberals. I was fortunate to be elected, with an absolute majority over the other two, so it didn't come to a preferential count.

I want to record here the pleasure I had in my first election. Sir David Brand who was, as I say, the Whip and had only been in Parliament himself eighteen months at the time, came down and helped me in my election campaign. There were no party-politics involved because my two opponents, as I say, were Liberals unendorsed.

However, it was a wonderful campaign and I was elected the newest member (Parliament had not met under the McLarty government at that time but met in July of that year), and being the newest elected member of the government I had no alternative but to make my maiden speech by introducing the address in reply, moving for its adoption, on the first day I was in Parliament. Naturally I was overawed having to speak in the Assembly crowded with visitors for opening day.

It was perhaps one of the most wonderful experiences that I'd had up 'til that time. As I say, there was a sense of being overawed in every way. My speech was not lengthy. At that time there were refugees, people were starving in many parts of the world, and the main theme of my speech was that Western Australia was blessed with many advantages and perhaps our first task should be to try to evolve some way which would feed and care for some of the millions of people who were homeless and starving throughout the world as a result of the war that had not long finished.

I had only ever been to Parliament House once before in my life. My uncle, the late George William Barnard, was member for the District when I was a youth and young man. In those days, you know, young people didn't hold the positions they have now, we were taught to be seen and not heard and despite the fact (and I don't say this in any way of criticism), during his nine years at Parliament House I was never invited ever to go there.

But on one occasion I happened to be in Perth during my banking service, I was I think stationed at Tambellup at the time and I



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decided, with my brother-in-law, to go along to the public gallery and listen to what went on in Parliament. At this time I would be probably twenty two or twenty-three years of age. It must be remembered that we were not eligible to vote until we were twenty-one in those days.

I was very impressed. I was taken to task by my uncle later for not letting him know that I was there. The then member for Gascoyne was speaking and, you know at that time (this is going back to the early Thirties, or 1930 or about that time), Carnarvon was being sponsored for the growth of peanuts, bananas and other such produce. There was nothing firmly established and the member for Gascoyne in those days was a gentleman called E H Angelo. I had never met Mr Angelo. I had heard of him and he was talking about the need to develop the Gascoyne River and the potential that it had for growing certain commodities, and I remember this quite well, there was an interjection from the other side of the House, it was in the time of the last Mitchell, Sir James Mitchell's government. Mr Angelo was a supporter of the Mitchell government, but there was an interjection from the other side of the House to this effect: 'Ah! the member for Gascoyne's usual subject, peanuts plus bananas!' And Angelo as quick as lightning, turned around and said, 'Mr Speaker that voice came from the biggest peanut in this House!'

That was my first experience and I never entered Parliament House again until I went there as a member. One of the first persons to meet me was Mr Frank Wise. He had just retired, (not voluntarily) as Premier, but he came up to speak with me in the corridors of Parliament House. He welcomed me, he said whatever he could do to help me he would do, which he did over the years. He became one of my firmer friends as did so many more in the Opposition of those days in both houses.

As my parties, or the parties I supported were in government, the ministers were seldom at Parliament House, only when of course Parliament was sitting, so I seldom saw Mr McLarty as he was then, nor Mr Watts and others who were in the ministry. The other gentleman who made himself known to me was a gentleman called James Isaac Mann who in those days represented Beverley. A great character Jim Mann. He made all sorts of speeches and threats in the lobby and he was often the government's greatest opponent there. In Parliament he seldom spoke. He was a kindly gentleman and there again on my first day at Parliament House as a member I made his friendship which lasted until he passed away.

This was the atmosphere at Parliament House in those days, nobody gave away their ideals, their loyalties to their own side. The fellowship and the personal feeling between people was just absolutely wonderful. I was privileged to sit in Parliament, (not on the same side of the House), with the late Mr Philip Collier as a man and a statesman. He gave me some good advice. He wasn't at Parliament House very much. He and the late Sir Norbert Keenan used to pair and, here is another name I would

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like to record as one who helped me considerably, I was seated next to the late Sir Norbert Keenan when I first entered Parliament. His brain was brilliant and he gave me very sound advice which I believe stood me in good stead throughout the whole of my public life.

But Mr Collier, I think, epitomises the sense of goodwill between all members that prevailed at Parliament House in those days. I regret to say it does not, in my opinion, prevail to this degree at the present time. You know, I remember Victor Courtney writing a book, I think it was called *All I May Tell*, and he likened the Mitchell/Collier era to a test match, a cricket match. At one time Sir James was batting and Philip Collier was bowling and then the electors decided to give Mr Collier a turn at the bat and Sir James bowled and this went on for almost twenty years. They had the greatest respect for one another, so much so, of course it's legend, that when Sir James Mitchell was defeated as Premier and defeated as member for Northam, Mr Collier represented to King George V at the time that Sir James become Lieutenant Governor and Sir James, as we all know, remained at Government House for a record term of eighteen years until 1951. [Sir Stewart says 1851 on tape]

But that spirit prevailed at Parliament House when I went there and I believe that the Mitchell/Collier era was responsible for it because of the respect for one another of the two leaders. If one was to go to Hansard one will see where W C Anguin, Minister for Lands and later Agent General in London, a Labor minister in both the Scadden and the Collier governments, took his own colleagues to task for daring to criticise, personally, Sir James Mitchell, and this was the atmosphere of Parliament House when I entered it and I think it would be good for Western Australia if this atmosphere still prevailed. You could fight your battles from a party point of view, from your own platform, from your own policy, but dare you say anything against the personal attributes of a member of either side you were taken to task.

The grand man, on the opposite side, was Teddie Needham, a grand old gentleman, you couldn't find a lovelier gentleman. Bill Marshall, Bob Coverley, Frank Wise, all these people, I could go on ad infinitum saying the wonderful spirit that existed and the wonderful characteristic of these people of those days. It's not for me to criticise individually members of today or yesteryear, but I do express my own thanks that I was privileged to be a member of Parliament, to experience that wonderful companionship between all members of Parliament that existed in Western Australian Parliament in those days and I believe that Western Australian was renowned for its wonderful cordiality between the members concerned.

JT

Do you feel this would have anything to do with the distance, its isolation, or was it the calibre of the men?

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I think it was the calibre of the men, I'm quite sure. I've tried to convey this by my reference to Philip Collier and Sir James Mitchell and the fact that W C Anguin (and it's recorded in Hansard somewhere) took his own colleagues to task for having the audacity to criticise Sir James Mitchell from a personal point of view and this, I think, was responsible for the good atmosphere and the good fellowship that prevailed. A member's word was his bond, if Frank Wise said something it'd be carried out. There was no question, if the word was given it didn't have to be in writing, if the word was given, that word would be honoured, there was no question about it. What happens today, I'm not there, I can't say, but from what one reads one would almost feel that there has been a deterioration.

Sir Ross McDonald who had been leader of the Liberal Party until he retired just before the election when Mr McLarty, later Sir Ross McLarty, became leader, was one of nature's finest gentlemen. In the years that I was in Parliament and the years before, that I knew Ross McDonald personally, I never heard him raise his voice, nor castigate any person who didn't coincide with his own views or other matters. He was a leader who gained the greatest and highest respect. I cannot say anything high enough for the calibre of Ross McDonald. He helped new members who came to Parliament in a quiet dignified way. In fact he epitomised the dignity of a learned gentleman who I think we would like to see leading our affairs at any time.

There were so many of these fine gentleman in Parliament in those days and I would like, really, to go on, I could go on ad infinitum speaking of the virtues that I found in so many wonderful gentlemen. I know I omitted reference to many who I would like to have recorded as (of assistance) being of assistance to me, and in my opinion of great assistance to the State, but perhaps I might continue with my words in relation to my duty in the various offices I held during my Parliamentary career.

This position of Whip was one I found very exacting, especially at the time that the McLarty government had no majority in its own right. To survive, the McLarty government had to have the support of one of the two independents and here again, to those gentlemen, whilst they held their own ideas and opinions, they never at any time held the government to ransom to give them any favours for their own electorate. They were gentlemen of great honour, Harry Shearn and Ray Read, whom I knew personally, but both of them I held in the highest esteem and through my experience. Never once, I say to my knowledge, did they hold the government to ransom, which they could have done because of their unique position of being able to defeat the government at any time if they combined.

At the fall of the McLarty government I became Opposition Whip. I was elected as I have already said and then Sir Ross McLarty decided, (I think in 1957) to retire as Leader. Mr David Brand, as he was then, was elected Leader and Mr Charles Court, as he

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was then, was elected Deputy Leader. On the election of Sir David as Leader of the Opposition, as he was, Leader of the Liberal Party, I was chosen by him as his mouthpiece on matters appertaining to Lands, Agriculture and Forests. Virtually, I was invited to the front Opposition Bench. This meant that I had to resign as Whip and Secretary of the Liberal Party which I did, and I was followed by Mr Ross Hutchinson, later minister and Speaker, just retired as Speaker of the Legislative Assembly. In 1959 after two sessions as spokesman on the Lands, Forests and Agriculture, Sir David Brand or Mr Brand and as he still was, was elected as Premier of Western Australia.

One of the exercises in Parliamentary life is the need to liaise with other parliaments of the British Commonwealth, as well as the Commonwealth of Australia and for this purpose there is what is called a Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. I took a keen interest in the operations of the Association and I think I was elected to the local Association, the West Australian Branch of the Association, the executive of it in 1950, or thereabouts. In 1954 a conference, which in those days was held every two years in some part of the British Commonwealth, was to be held in South Africa, or in the continent of Africa.

South Africa at that time was a member of the British Commonwealth. This conference comprised of delegates from every parliament heretofore, if my memory serves me correctly, was the only parliament which had representation on the General Council, which is the executive body of the British Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and all positions, as far as delegates were concerned, were done on an elected basis in a secret ballot. There were, I think, in 1954 seven or thereabouts number of candidates who nominated for the position. I was fortunate in being elected and I was appointed by the State for reasons I don't know, as the State's representative on the General Council, council meetings of which were to be held in Nairobi, Kenya and Victoria Falls, Southern Rhodesia of those days.

So I was not only the West Australian representative to the gathering of representatives of all the British Commonwealth parliaments, but for the first time, the States were represented I believe, on the British Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, General Council. However, I represented the States at meetings as I say of the General Council which were held in Nairobi and in Victoria Falls, Southern Rhodesia. That tour was at a time when the present President of Kenya, Kenyatta was in custody. The Governor of Kenya was Sir Evelyn Baring. We visited Uganda, the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyassaland as it was in those days and the Union of South Africa. In Uganda and Kenya we needed an armed guard. It was at the time at the height of the controversy between the British and the Kenyan and Ugandan people. It was of course a most interesting exercise. The same with South Africa. I was amazed and perhaps horrified at the sense of feeling against the British in South Africa.

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In one area I shared a unit with a representative from South Africa. He was a young man and a very decent young man too, but his ideas on the Royal Family and the British Commonwealth didn't altogether coincide with my own. We were the guests on this occasion of a lady and gentleman who had rather a large rural property in Kenya and I perhaps was over-enthusiastic about the Royal Family during our conversation after the evening meal. In Africa you know they have perhaps the main building and then they have little chalet arrangements all round it and we had a chalet which we shared, and on the way over from the main building this young man said to me, 'You know I don't share your ideas about the Royal Family or the British Commonwealth.' So I said, 'Well what are you doing here?' However I then said, 'Well this is not a time for us to argue (it was midnight I might say) about these matters. You know what I have said, you didn't say anything until this present time.' But this was an impression I had, that there was a feeling of antagonism to the British in South Africa at that time. As we all know later there was a break away. But I have studied the life of General Smuts and I found in that study that he was a gentleman who, despite his privations under the British and his people's privations, his idea was that we should stand together as a Commonwealth and this was the only way that South Africa would survive and I believe that his ideas, if they had been continued would have obviated many of the problems that are facing South Africa today. I believe that if South Africa had remained in the British Commonwealth and seen reason in many, many things, that South Africa wouldn't be suffering the problems it is today, as is Rhodesia.

As the representative of the States to the General Council of the British Commonwealth Parliamentary Association I was invited to attend the Third Australian Conference in Melbourne and that was the reason for me attending that conference which was held in the Legislative Council Chamber, or the discussions were held in the Legislative Council Chamber, at Parliament House in Melbourne. I, of course, had to give a report to all the States who were represented at this Third Australian Conference, on the British Commonwealth Conference in Africa. In regard to the reason for me being the representative in Africa on the General Council and going to Melbourne, which was a result of me being in the General Council, I think this might in some way give support to the good feeling that was within Parliament at that time. I do believe that the result of my election in the first place was due to the support of Labor members, or at least some of them in Parliament at that time. It was a secret ballot and I do believe because of what they have told me of what they were going to do and the result of the ballot as it came out, that it was due, (in part) to the support of Labor members at that time.

Well the Liberal and Country Parties had been elected to office. They held more seats than the retiring Labor Party under the leadership of Mr Bert Hawke and of course the parties met and

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Mr David Brand was elected Leader, Sir Charles Court was re-elected Deputy Leader. As far as the ministry was concerned in the Liberal ranks anyhow, Mr Brand had already been elected as Premier, and Mr Court as his deputy as a minister, but there were still four more ministers to be selected. I think the ratio in that government was six Liberal ministers and four Country Party. There was only a ministry of ten in those days. Therefore there were four ministries to be filled from the Liberal ranks. Mr Brand, the Premier elect still held his office as Leader of the Opposition at Parliament House and there was some talk outside, as there always was, who was to get what, and the main theme was (from somewhere) I don't know where, that I was to be the Speaker. I was walking along the corridor of Parliament House (because my time allotted to see the Premier elect was three o'clock in the afternoon) and as I walked by the retiring Speaker's office (who was James Hegney), I was a few minutes early for my appointment with Mr Brand, so I popped into Mr Hegney's office to have a bit of a yarn and he said, 'Where are you off to?' Well, I said, 'I've received a summons from the boss. He's in the process of forming his ministry'. 'Oh,' he said, 'that's interesting, what are you going to be?' I said, 'I wouldn't know whether I'm going to be anything.' 'Well,' he said, 'if they want to make you Speaker and as the rumour goes that you're going to take over from me, (that was Jim Hegney) and you've got a chance of being a minister, be a minister'. He said, 'My brother Bill (that was Bill Hegney Minister for Education) is a minister and I'm Speaker, but (he said), take a ministry.' So I said, 'Oh thanks Jim for your advice.'

He went on talking 'til three o'clock came and I excused myself and went on. Well in his usual understanding, charming way Mr David Brand asked me to sit down and said, 'Well, I've got to form a ministry (or words to that effect). What would you like to be? That's if you had the chance of course! A Speaker or perhaps a minister? Not that you're likely to be any, but I just want to get the opinions of each of the members that are supporting me. I'm not saying that you or anybody else will be in my ministry.' (because the Liberal Party has the procedure of once the Leader and the Deputy Leader is elected then the Leader selects his ministers). So I said, 'Well, Dave, (you know, it was an informal personal chat), I think I'd like to be a minister.' 'Well,' he said, 'I don't think you will be, but nevertheless, if you were by any chance, what would you like to be?' I said, 'Minister for Education.' He said, 'You've got no hope, the Deputy Premier, Mr Arthur Watts has been interested in the Education ministry always, as he was in the McLarty government and he will get Education if he wants it. Now, say for instance, he wants it, what other choice would you like, would you have?' I said, 'Lands.' 'Why?' I said, 'Well I was a bank officer in outlying places for many years, I know that there are areas of land which should be developed within the orbit of existing development without costly servicing. Years ago there was a three thousand five hundred farm scheme that never got off

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the ground because it was isolated. The costs of bringing this area into production in those days was phenomenal and it never got off the ground. But, you look at a map of Western Australia and there are pockets of land here. (The environmental position was not so vital in those days) but the fact is that these could be developed without really, bringing outlandish costs as far as the Treasury of the State is concerned.' 'Oh,' he said, and we chatted like this for some time.

Alright, my time had expired and some other member walked in and there it went. Well in time (which seemed endless but it wasn't, it was only a day) he called me in again and said, 'I've decided that you will be one of my ministers. I still haven't decided what portfolios you'll get. I've got to confer with Mr Watts.' Well the final result was that I was appointed Minister for Lands, Forests and Immigration and later on, when the late Charlie Perkins died suddenly, I held the portfolio of Labour. However, I will say something more about that at the appropriate time.

We were faced with a problem at Esperance. Esperance was in rather a difficult position in regard to the lands that had been allotted to the American Chase syndicate at the time, the agreement had to be re-negotiated. But my first duty on assuming office as Minister for Lands was to confer with the Surveyor General of the day, Mr Vernon Fyfe who retired shortly afterwards, and the Under Secretary of the Lands of the day, Mr Carlton Smith; correction, Mr Canton Smith, was away in London on long service leave, Mr Neville Young the Acting Under Secretary and one of the Assistant Under Secretaries.

I conferred with these gentlemen and others in top positions and said I wanted a detailed map of Western Australia; the agricultural areas of Western Australia of existing development and non-development, showing the Crown Land areas that were non-developed and from that a system of land allocation was built up to the degree that for ten years, successive years, an average of a million acres of Crown Land undeveloped, was allotted for selection and after two or three years not only was a million acres being selected each year, a million acres of land was being brought into development for the first time each year. So it wasn't of course the same land, it was other land that had been allotted earlier but it was being brought into development for the first time at the rate of the release of land, a million acres per year. I cannot quote off hand the increase in the numbers of sheep and cattle and the production of various grains, but of course the main problem I had was that even with a million acres being released, it wasn't enough.

There would be countless numbers for release, usually of fifty or sixty economic-sized locations of land which could be developed for a family unit, and I was criticised for not releasing more. The tables turned in the seventies when wheat quotas had to be introduced and I was accused of releasing too much land, so one can never win! But as long as one feels that one has done the

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right thing from one's own personal point of view, then it doesn't matter. But however, the tables have turned again and I notice in the press at the time that Sir Charles Court only in recent days has made an announcement that further releases of Crown Land will be made for agricultural development.

JT How did you assess the size of those blocks; was it according to the rainfall in the region?

BOVELL It was done by consultation with the Surveyor General's Department, the Under-Secretary for Lands' Department, the Rural and Industries Bank headed by, in this phase of activity, by Mr J T Gabbedy who chaired a committee I appointed in regard to bringing into development the Midland Light Land that is in the area between Moora and Dongara. It took some five or six years to have a full study of the Midland Light Land which was a policy announcement of the Premier, Sir David Brand at that time. This land would be investigated for agricultural development and it took five or six years for this to function and Mr J T Gabbedy, a Commissioner of the Rural and Industries Bank was the Chairman of that committee.

#### **TAPE TWO SIDE ONE**

This is the second tape in a series of interviews with Sir Stewart Bovell for the Battye Library Oral History Programme. The interviewer was again Jean Teasdale and the interview was conducted on the 10th June, 1977. Sir Stewart continues to discuss his Parliamentary Career.

BOVELL Well, every aspect was considered. Soil surveys were taken, general surveys, locations, every aspect which was required for an economic unit was examined thoroughly and reports were submitted to me from time to time and it was the result of this that this land which had not produced anything now produces some of the State's wealth and contributes to a sound economy. But it was good, I think, being able to carry out a plan for twelve years, which is twice as long as any one of my predecessors. The longest term a Minister for Lands had prior to my occupying the ministry was Mr Frank Wise who was minister for (I think) six, between six and seven, seven years. But I do believe that the long range plan that one minister with a knowledge of land that could be brought into development for agriculture, enabled this achievement, (if it is an achievement) of so much Crown Land being released and brought into production. For instance I mentioned that I was manager of the Bank of New South Wales at Beacon. One of my duties was to release land north of Beacon, east of Dalwallinu which has proved a wonderful grain producing area. Now this was all virgin land. It's wonderful soil. For the first few years good fortune prevailed from a heavier type of land and the seasons were good. Last season was, I think, one of the worst they've had, but this is the exception I



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hope. But until last year the development north of Beacon is an instance of my having some knowledge of the land which could be made available for production.

JT Now would you have had consultation with the Premier as to which areas? You had your map and did you choose the area or was this first of all taken to Mr Gabbedy's committee? Was it in consultation with the Premier that you felt, and the Premier felt, that this particular land should be released? How did you go about it?

BOVELL Well the position is that during the course of discussions (like we're having now) with the Premier you talk about these things. There's no official sort of discussions about them, you talk about them and then when a release over an area is ready, one submits it to Cabinet, to the Honourable the Premier, in Cabinet and then each Cabinet Minister can have his say on it and that's the most difficult part of it. You've done all this work then you've got to get the government to agree. But as for official discussion, they never took place and this aspect I think shows one of the many redeeming features of Sir David Brand. Everything was done in that regard on an informal basis. There was no summons to go to his office and recount what you've done or what you haven't done. In my twelve years as a minister in Sir David's government I cannot recall ever being commanded to do anything. There were times when I did things that probably raised Sir David's eyebrows, but never once was I commanded to go to his office. But frequently he'd come to mine and sit down and have a yarn in a friendly way about things and talk about things and then get onto the subject and say in this way, 'Well Stewart, you know there's a bit of trouble about something, what's it all about?' And I'd tell him. He'd say 'Yes, that's fine, I quite agree.' On another occasion he'd say, 'But don't you think so-and-so, so-and-so, so-and-so?' And I'd think. If I didn't agree with it I'd say so, but without exception I did, not because he was the Premier but because he was right and I hadn't thought of it, that's all. But that's the way that Sir David Brand maintained his ministry for so long. I believe it was his personality and his personality alone that held a record term of government and not only with his ministers but with the people of Western Australia. I might remind you that Sir David Brand's ministry is the longest and I believe, second to none, of any ministry that has presided over Western Australia.

In regard to land there were many problems in the release of it, many problems. The Esperance matter was one of great concern. There was consensus of opinion politically, and otherwise, that the Americans had been given too much latitude and had been granted too many favours, but all this had to be overcome. It was a demanding exercise. In the first three years of my being Minister for Lands I visited Esperance on seventeen occasions. You must realise that one is elected by an electorate

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that demands, (rightly so) attention of its member, but I had visited Esperance on seventeen occasions in the first three years. During my time as a young bank officer in Albany, Sir James Mitchell was Premier and Mr Collier was Premier, but Sir James Mitchell was criticised because he never had any vast releases of land in the Albany region. He was criticised because he was opening up land down in the group settlement area in this part of the world, the southwest where I hailed from and it must be remembered that I was only in my late teens at this time.

I used to listen to the criticism of a gentleman I idolised at that time, Sir James Mitchell. It was my lot in years later to be Minister for Lands but in that period of time the scientists had brought forward trace elements and other ingredients and treatments. Not only the scientists, but other academics and other men of great knowledge, had brought forward commodities or whatever one likes to call them, and ideas, where lighter land could be developed and for this reason I was able to go back to Albany in my time as minister and in the Albany region, from Kojonup through down to Walpole and to Ravensthorpe in the east, I think there were some two and a half million acres of land released and selected; the Green Range area.

I visited the Albany Region during my twelve years, on forty-five occasions. Sir Basil Embery's sons took up a property at Cape Riche. I visited these properties and this is what I did when I went, I didn't go and talk altogether with local authorities and dignitaries in the town, I went from farm to farm. I called one day and Lady Embery was in the field working. She said, 'Well Basil's out at a fence line, erecting a fence, I don't think we can get in touch with him but he'd done something for me which I know I'm going to appreciate. Would you like to come and see it?' I said, 'Yes.' I wasn't aware what it was.

They were living in one end of a machinery shed, Sir Basil and Lady Embery, this great man who had contributed so much (I think) to the defeat of Germany in the air, through the last war. But Lady Embery took me in her car; she wouldn't allow me to take mine (or runabout or whatever it was). We had a cup of tea in this machinery shed where they were living with one of their sons and there we went to the top of a hill overlooking the sea and there were the stone foundations of a house.

I met Lady Embery on board *Britannia* during the visit of Her Majesty the Queen in March of this year. Speaking with her, Lady Embery said, 'My house is built and Basil and I are living in it!' Now this is the satisfaction, the pleasure if you like, that I got out of seeing this development. They took virgin Crown Land and people who came there, developed it, built their own house and now are proud to live in it. But this is only an example of what has happened.

JT

Well now those blocks that were released by the Crown, what criteria did they have attached to them, what criteria and what

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type of person got them? How much money did you have to have or was each person selected individually?

BOVELL The Minister for Lands of course has no jurisdiction by law in the allotment of this land.

JT Did Mr Gabbedy's committee do this?

BOVELL No Mr Gabbedy's was an investigation committee but there is under the Land Act a Land Board comprising of appointees. It's presided over by one and I think there is a local man on it, it comprises of a board.

JT But wasn't Mr Gabbedy on this too?

BOVELL Yes at times. Not always because each allotment of land was different. Say for instance there are fifty blocks of economic sized areas to be released. Well for each allotment, a new land board is constituted. It's constituted by, or recommended by the minister, I think approved by Executive Council but it is constituted for each allotment. They're advertised. People make application and they are heard in person. They are invited to a Land Board and then the Land Board sifts out their financial ability to cope with the development know-how as far as agricultural pursuits is concerned and every aspect is considered. Now you can just realise with fifty blocks and a thousand applicants the problem for the minister after a Land Board, everybody wants to see the Minister. 'Why didn't I get a block?' But however that's part of the job and you've just got to live with it, but it was the pleasure I received from seeing virgin land being brought into production and contributing to the welfare, not only of the people who were developing it but also to the whole State of Western Australia and of course Australia too. Well back to these visits to the various places. (I was forty-five times to the Albany Region, that's from Ravensthorpe to Kojonup and through down to Walpole). Seventeen visits to Esperance as I say and then the Midland Light Lands the same; the same exercise there, perhaps not so many times. In the area north of Beacon to which I have already referred (Parliament never sat Show Week) I used to go to the Royal Show on the Tuesday. On Tuesday afternoon I hit off for Northam. I went through to Dalwallinu, went out east along the rabbit proof or emu fence I think it is, down through to Beacon, through this land and during the course of those Royal Show week visits I used to talk with people developing it and I just mention this. There was a young woman in a caravan, she had two little children with her and I stopped, spoke with her, I said, 'Is this your block?' 'Oh, no, I wish it was. My husband is only the contract clearer.' She picked up some of the soil and she said, 'What lovely dirt, I'd love it for my husband and myself to be here to do

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something with it.' Now this was the interest in land. That woman and two small children living in a caravan with her husband. She wasn't one of the successful applicants but nevertheless that was the interest and I've often thought of that experience. Here was this woman who would have given almost anything to have one of these blocks, to go out there and develop it and my word it's not an easy job. No amenities, no telephone, not good roads if any roads at all, only bush tracks. I did see some of the finest wheat crops along the emu fence on the road to Paynes Find that I've ever seen anywhere in the first crops in that area that was released in that district.

In relation to forestry. One of the greatest problems in my own district was the demand for land for agricultural pursuits against that for forestry purposes. I believe that a viable forestry industry is vital to this State's economy. Here again in recent days I have read where the present Conservator of Forests, Mr Bruce Beggs is saying that they may have to curtail production of timber because we haven't enough hard woods to provide for the demand and that we would have to use more pine.

This is a constant battle, or was in those days, between agriculturalists and those who considered forestry as a State need and I believe, did believe and do believe now that it is a vital State need. We must preserve our forests. Apart from any matter of conservation it's a matter of economic necessity that we maintain our forests.

JT Well, how did you reconcile your two positions, as Minister for Lands and Minister for Forests, if you had people wanting land and people wanting to conserve forests, how did you reconcile those two positions?

BOVELL Never at any time when there was a release of land was it that the Forests Department, the Conservator of Forests, Mr A C Harris at the time, and later Mr Wallace that their opinions were not sought and invariably they were taken (not always). There were times perhaps, there'd be no good there being a minister if he didn't have some jurisdiction but the matter would be weighed up very carefully.

But no release of land in any part of Western Australia, whether it was forest areas or not would be released without a report from the Conservator of Forests. I was in continuous consultation with the conservators of Forests during my time as Minister for Forests which was of equal period and that was one of the reasons why Sir David Brand created the dual portfolio that the one the minister could see both sides of the question.

If you're Minister for Lands you can only see your question if you're going to fight your Minister for Forests, and fortunately that position has survived. The present Minister for forests is Mrs June Craig who is also Minister for Lands, and it has proved right. Before, the Minister for Forests was one minister, the Minister for Lands was another and with his jurisdiction under his ministerial

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authority the Minister for Lands can release land and unless it's designated a State forest or forest reserve he needn't even refer it to the Conservator of Forests but by being Minister for Forests and Minister for Land you can see both sides of the story and I do believe that it was for this reason that a balanced release of land could be made on a planned basis of a million acres a year for ten years during that period of time without any infringement on our forest land.

As a matter of fact, the area of forest land was increased, that's designated State forest and forest reserve during that period. I can't provide off-hand the areas but there was not any diminishment of forest land because of this great release over twelve years of Crown Land for agricultural development. In fact there was an increase in forest land and forest reserve and also in Crown Land reserves of various nature.

Here again the reservation of Crown Land for A-class reserves and other reserves I think almost created a record during that twelve year period. The whole plan of the State's use of Crown Land was not considered alone on agricultural development. It was considered as to the resources that were required by the people. Conservation, water resources, forestry and a number of other factors were considered in creating these vast areas of the reserves which were for the public use for the future.

JT Well now, during your term, the question came up of course of salt in cleared lands and also the question came up about dieback. How were you involved? And also perhaps the beginning of the woodchip? There were early talks on the woodchip industry, now how were you involved, you must have been involved?

BOVELL Well in relation to salt. Here again, my banking experience proved me in good stead. Not my banking experience in this regard but my experience in areas as a bank officer. I refer to the fact that I was a bank officer, I was only twenty-one at that time, in the town of Tambellup. The Gordon River flows adjacent to the town of Tambellup and one of the pastimes in those days was to catch freshwater fish in the Gordon River. I understand the various species of fish in the Gordon River. I understand the various species of fish were released by Sir Thomas Coombe, a relation of the Birt family who lived at Tambellup, still live at Tambellup.

Well that was one of the pastimes. I was twenty-one in those days. (I was fifty-one when I became Minister for Lands). In the process of time, the clearing of land in this area had caused the Gordon River to become salt and freshwater fish couldn't live in it, so that was an example of the need to guard against salt encroachment. Where land was released for agricultural development there were reserves of timber and natural growth to absorb salt and other ingredients which were detrimental to land use. Now I quote that as an example because that was my own

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experience. I could fish (not that I was a good fisherman or could catch many but there were plenty of others that could).

Freshwater fish, perch and other freshwater fish that were quite plentiful in the river. But in thirty years, because of the development of the adjacent land of the Gordon River, it had turned salt, so much so that the freshwater fish couldn't live in it. So that was taken into account in any releases, as far as I was concerned. There is salt encroachment, I read of it from time to time but I can't say that in the areas that were released in those years that there had been any sort of concentrated attack on the land being released without any consideration being given to the adverse effects of salt and other encroachments that might affect agricultural production.

The matter of dieback. Every possible avenue was, and I believe is being explored. Committees were formed with the Conservator of Forests of the day Mr A C Harris and might I emphasise this, that if there is a dedicated organisation it is the Forests Department. They are dedicated to the preservation of the State's asset as far as forestry is concerned. Now everything possible was done, committees were formed. The Conservator of Forests went overseas as did other officers to study the problem in other lands, all this was done. I regret to say to no great effect, for the problem is still confronting the authorities, but I'm quite sure of this, that every possible avenue has been explored by the Conservator of Forests and his officers.

In relation to woodchips, there again, the first proposal to me to develop woodchips was in the region near Augusta. There was a proposal to mine there, iron ore, and also a woodchip proposal. However it wasn't proceeded with, but the reports that were submitted to me by the Forests Department convinced me of their dedication again and that any exercise relating to woodchips that has the approval of the Conservator of Forests is sound. The Conservator of Forests can supervise through his department the timber that is used for wood-chipping and there is no danger to the State forests. I'm convinced absolutely about this.

JT So in your position as minister if you trusted your department, you would take their word for it because you know the report would be well done and this is what you did?

BOVELL I wouldn't off-hand take the report, I would want to be satisfied with every aspect which I considered was vital to the proposal, project or whatever. But I'm convinced of this, that if the Conservator of Forests agreed with a certain proposal as to the usage of the produce of the State forests then as far as I'm concerned (and the Conservators and the officers of the Forests Department that I dealt with and I know that the present Conservator, because he was one of my officers at that time is dedicated as was his predecessor in this regard) then I'm quite satisfied that what they recommended was quite satisfactory.

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Now if the recommendations are not taken, that is a matter for the authorities of the time from their point of view as far as the preservation and conservation of forests is concerned. If they recommended such a proposal or some project then it is in order as far as the State forests are concerned and I understand that any wood-chipping that is being done today is being done with the approval of the Conservator of Forests and that's why I agree that the wood-chipping industry is quite sound in the interests of conservation, in the interests of the economy of the State because it has the blessing of the Conservator of Forests and it cannot be proceeded with without the Conservator of Forests giving his okay and knowing the dedication of the Conservator of Forests and his officers I know there would be no approval coming from that source if it wasn't in the interests of the State forests.

JT                    Anyway it would then go to the minister and the minister would take it to Cabinet so you'd still have it looked at.

BOVELL            That's right, yes. Yes this is an exercise, especially forestry which would go to Cabinet.

One of my most absorbing and interesting ministerial posts was that of migration. It meant dealing with people and not paper. I was called upon to enlist migrants to Western Australia to cope with the vast development of the 1960s.

The Point Walter Migrant Centre was only really a military camp disused. I pay a tribute to the newcomers for accepting rather primitive conditions when they came to Point Walter but I know of no organised complaints against the conditions there. The wonderful way that newcomers adapted themselves to conditions here was indeed a rewarding experience. Knowing what I do about the United Kingdom and the facilities and conveniences that are there, I marvel at what newcomers, not only from the United Kingdom but from other countries.

However, at Point Walter the community generally was a happy one. Mr Carlton-Smith was the Under Secretary for Immigration at that time, later Mr C R Gibson and later Mr Bert Hegney. All these gentlemen were dedicated to doing all they could, with their officers, for newcomers. As I say it was an exercise with people which is rewarding indeed.

The Premier, Sir David Brand asked that representation be made for an increased intake of migrants. I might say that we became the government in 1959. It was the policy of the previous government (and it's not for me now to criticise it) that there was no room for migrants at the time, therefore I had the initial task of starting something again. Once an exercise is discontinued, as it had been, during the years 1953 to 1959, it is very difficult to reintroduce it again.

I found it is much easier and simpler to commence a new exercise than to restart an old one. My first year in office sent me

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to Canberra on five occasions. I had to convince the Federal Minister for Immigration because it is through the Federal Government that we are allowed to bring welcome visitors here to Western Australia. The Honourable Alexander Downer, later Sir Alexander Downer and I had later associations with Sir Alexander because he was High Commissioner for Australia in London and I was later Agent General for Western Australia in London. I interviewed Sir Alexander Downer and got my message there. This had to infiltrate down through the various departments of the Commonwealth Immigration and it took us some two years before we could really get our records straight and convince the authorities in the Eastern States that we really did need migrants. As it was Public statements were made not only in London but in Eastern Australia that Western Australia had discontinued taking migrants and this was almost two years after we had become the government! However the intake gradually commenced and increased until we found that Point Walter had seen its day, it should have seen its day years before, but there again finance is a very crucial matter in these exercises.

Sir Hubert Opperman was then the Federal Minister for Immigration. I referred earlier to my experiences in Africa. At that time Mr Opperman, as he was, was one of the Commonwealth representatives at that meeting and we travelled together throughout Africa. On one occasion travelling on the Blue Train I think it is, from Capetown to Johannesburg we shared a compartment.

Now these associations are made and they are continuous. Well it so happened that Mr Opperman (later Sir Hubert Opperman and also High Commissioner to Malta whilst I was in the United Kingdom as Agent General of Western Australia) was the Commonwealth Minister for Immigration, Sir Alexander Downer had gone to London to take up his post there. So I was able to meet Mr Opperman on a basis as a friend and the Premier had said we must have more migrants and I said, Well if that is the case Mr Premier we've got to have more accommodation, for when they come in.

So the result of Mr Opperman's exercise (and he wasn't a member of the inner cabinet of the Menzies government of the day) was that the Federal Government would provide seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars if the State would provide a like amount for the establishment of a State Migration Centre which is called Noalimba. The Premier of Western Australia, who was of course Treasurer, provided the required amount and what I believe to be the most up to date and best migration centre in any part of Australia was created in Western Australia.

Noalimba was a centre indeed of which we were justifiably proud. Migrants were coming in and it must be remembered that the State Government dealt with migrants from the United Kingdom only, the Commonwealth had their Graylands Migration Centre for migrants other than from the United Kingdom.



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As far as I am concerned the great majority of migrants came out here to start a new life, not only for themselves but more importantly, for their children. It was most refreshing to me, and I think to everybody associated with the exercise of bringing newcomers here to help us develop Western Australia, most refreshing indeed to greet the children. We had of course very distinguished visitors to Noalimba who wanted to come and look at it and I quote an instance. Sir Charles Gairdner came to Noalimba on one occasion to have a look around and he was very interested in everything but more particularly in the children and I don't know how many children there were, but to me there seemed to be hundreds and no doubt there were.

So we assembled the kiddies in an informal way and I introduced Sir Charles as Sir Charles but before long the children were delighted at meeting him, but to them he wasn't Sir Charles, they created him Prince Charles! Now that's a rather entertaining little sideline but these little episodes are I think very refreshing. But the children in my opinion were the focal point of our migrant history.

We had problems. Fathers and the menfolk seemed to settle down reasonably well, but the mothers seemed to be discontented and understandably so. They'd come out to a new country, they'd lost their friends. Dad can go off to his job and have a glass of Swan Lager at the local pub, come home and everything's alright. But mother is home with the children; she's confined to whatever accommodation can be found at the time and sometimes, I will admit, the accommodation was not up to the standard we would have liked but generally speaking everybody accepted that, mother included.

But it was their loneliness, their associations had gone, they didn't have the easy way of having a glass of beer at the local pub with their friends after work and in some cases we had the experience of migrant families returning to the United Kingdom. But you know, invariably with very, very few exceptions within six months, mum wanted to come back again and you know the position of a second migration journey was one which was frowned on by the government and rightly so too, but this was the case. They'd made the break in the first instance, had come here, had gone back home again to the United Kingdom and found well, We can see that Australia and West Australia in particular is the place for us.

JT                   What did you pay, what part of their fares did you pay?

BOVELL           They were required to pay ten pounds. The Commonwealth paid the funds. We were responsible for the accommodation when they came here but even then we were subsidised by the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth Government, as I think I mentioned earlier, is solely responsible for migration. It's under the Minister for Immigration but we could bring in British migrants who all had to be approved by the Commonwealth anyhow and

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this was all done in London and my later experience of course, as Agent General, brought me in touch with the migrant system again and here again I had, dealings with Sir Alexander Downer as High Commissioner and me as Agent General as I had with Sir Alexander Downer when we were respective ministers in Australia and Western Australia.

JT Well now at the other end before you started the migration scheme, what was your criteria, what was the fundamental intention of your government?

BOVELL In 1959, the former government, Labor government, had discontinued migration to Western Australia. With Sir David Brand as Premier, one of his policy commitments was to reinstate the inflow of migrants to Western Australia, because his programme made it imperative for people to come and help develop this State in the various activities. The development of land, twelve million acres of course, were released and, I might be repeating myself here, but a million acres was being brought into production each year for a number of years. This of course entailed a great amount of work, a great amount of effort, and of course we needed people to carry out the development of the State in various phases of activity such as mining, agriculture, industrial development and so on.

#### READER NOTE

There was an unavoidable lapse of some months before the interview with Sir Stewart was recommenced. The interview now continues, and again the interviewer is Jean Teasdale from the Battye Library Oral History Programme. The date of this interview was 8th December, 1977, and Sir Stewart continues to discuss his work as a Cabinet Minister in the Brand Government. He first continues his discussion on immigration to Western Australia, before discussing his portfolio as Minister for Labour.

BOVELL When we were talking before, we were speaking of the immigration scheme to Western Australia to help develop the resources, develop the resources of the State. During the period under review, that is, from 1959 to 1971, the State's population passed the million mark and a great number that came to Western Australia helped to achieve this record population development.

JT How did you, how did the Government go about their migration programme?

BOVELL We appointed officers and people expert in various fields of activity that were being developed, to the London office, the Agent General's office in London. And we established a special branch, a migration branch at Western Australia House and the officers

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toured the United Kingdom with a view to selecting suitable qualified migrants in specialised categories.

This exercise was continued during my own Agent Generalship, and I noted with very great interest that the officers concerned were quite enthusiastic about their endeavours to get the people to come to Western Australia, which the State needed. There were conferences and discussions in the major centres of the United Kingdom. A team of two or three used to visit Manchester, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Birmingham and so on and, as Agent General, of course, I followed up by meeting business people, the Lord Mayor of Birmingham, the Lord Provost of Edinburgh; I used to continue to follow their endeavours, or go before them to make certain that they were received and were able to carry out the job that was before them.

JT Now before you became Agent General, and when this migration programme started, having selected the migrants and the migrants having come out here, what was the Government involvement at this end? You provided Noalimba, as you've mentioned on the previous part of the tape, and you set up migration centres here, but can you tell me anything more about the Government plans at this end?

BOVELL Only that migrants brought here were urgently needed for the development that was taking place. I believe that Western Australia during the years 1959 to 1971, progressed to such a degree as to be more than favourable than any similar period in the State's history. There was development in every phase of activity almost and, of course, we know the mining development is legendary, and is providing not only Western Australia but the whole of Australia with capital and investment which rebounds to the benefit of all the people concerned.

JT Were you very intensely bound up with the mining; I know your portfolios weren't in this area, but were you very interested and bound to this?

BOVELL Well in perhaps an indirect way, because land is the basis of everything. If there is a railway to be built, if there is an office to be built, if there's a farm to be made, any activity, the basis of it is land. So therefore, even a mine is a matter for land. So therefore, although perhaps not directly responsible for the administration except when I was Acting Minister for Mines for some months when the Minister was away overseas on ministerial business, I was involved in an indirect way because the land is the basis of everything and therefore there had to be close consultation between the Lands Department and the Mines Department for any development that was taking place.

I did previously mention that I was appointed Minister for Labour on the sudden death of the late Charles Perkins. This was prior

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to a general election. I actually had my hands very full with the portfolios I was administering, but the Premier of the day, Sir David Brand to whom I have already referred, asked me to take the portfolio until after the general election. The Labour portfolio, even at that time, was a difficult one. No day passes without a crisis which has to be referred to the Minister. However, for the time that I was Minister for Labour, there was no great general strike, not any credit perhaps to me, but I found it interesting to work with the unions and their leaders and here again I found conciliatory attitudes always paid dividends.

The Government of which I was a member was again returned at the election and, true to his promise, Sir David Brand relieved me of the position of Minister for Labour and I then reverted to my three ministerial portfolios of Land, Forests and Immigration. 1971 saw the end of my parliamentary career. I entered as I've already said, Parliament, in 1947. I felt that it was time for me to retire, and I gave the Premier over a year's notice of my intention.

JT Now you have said that you didn't enjoy the hassles of the parliamentary side of your work but that you enjoyed the work. Did this have anything to do with your decision to move out?

BOVELL No. The decision to move out was that I thought I'd come to the age when I'd served a sufficient time in Parliament, I wanted some time, by the grace of God, to enjoy the doing of things that I wanted to do. I had at that time a long working life and I felt that as I was in good health, that I had come to the normal retiring age. It would be appropriate for me to retire after nearly a quarter of a century of parliamentary representation, twice as long as any one of my eight predecessors, as member for Sussex, and later for Vasse, I thought it was time to call it a day. The office of Agent General was to become vacant about the time of my retirement, but before proceeding to say what I intend to say here, my parliamentary career was one of great joy to me personally, because having the confidence of the people who had known me all my life, and where my father and my grandfather and members of the family had lived in the district for over a century. May I again return to the atmosphere of Parliament when I entered it and the atmosphere of what I read of Parliament today. Sir Ross McLarty, the late Sir Ross McLarty, the late Sir Ross McDonald, the late Dame Florence Cardell-Oliver, the late Sir Norbert Keenan, and many others on the side of politics that I followed, and on the other side, the Honourable Frank Wise, Mr Teddy Needham, Bob Coverly, Alec Panton and so on, never, ever indulged in personalities. Each side fought hard for their own principles, but not one of those gentlemen, and others in Parliament at that time, descended to the personalities which seem to be part of the political life of today. I'm thankful that I was privileged to serve in the State Parliament during a period when there was friendly and cooperative atmosphere and each side in their own way, had the ideal of

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working for what they thought and what we thought were in the best interests of the people of Australia without indulging in personalities and degrading other members each from one side to the other.

JT Do you have any feelings about why this has happened?

BOVELL I can't say. I've endeavoured to find a way, in my own reckoning why it should have happened, but I can't. I'm at a loss to know why this unfortunate trend has developed.

JT So that you were reasonably relieved now to leave Parliament. Even though you enjoyed it, you felt that it was retirement time?

BOVELL Yes, I felt that it was retirement time and as I say, I gave the Premier over a year's notice of my intention. Time went on and about June 1970, Sir David said, 'You know we're going to have a difficult job in being returned at the next election. After twelve years the people seem to want a change.' And this was understandable because that was the longest period of any government that Western Australia had enjoyed. He said, 'I'm confronted with the task of appointing a new Agent General. There are a number, or there are several anyhow, Ministers who would, I think like to go. But we have seven members retiring voluntarily from the government side of the house, including Dr Henn, Mr Richard Birt, and others, and I feel that to send any one of my Ministers' (and it had been traditional up to that time, for either the Premier or one with ministerial experience, go as Agent General). He said, 'Would you go?' I was rather taken aback, I had never ever thought of occupying the office, of going to London as Agent General. When I visited London in 1936 I called on the then Agent General, the late Sir Hal Colebatch and he helped considerably whilst I was there. However I asked Sir David for several days to give his proposal consideration and, of course, the first matter was to discuss it with my brother. I had the Premier's permission, although in other ways it was strictly confidential, to discuss the proposal with my brother. Well the outcome of it was that we agreed that I should go and I told the Premier so, and nothing was done until December. Nobody knew. I don't think it had ever been referred to anybody else, and then the Premier said, 'I'm going to refer this matter to Cabinet, and I'm sure they will agree.' I said 'May I have permission before an announcement is made to advise my family, on a confidential basis?' He gave me that permission and my appointment as Agent General was announced just prior to Christmas, 1970.

I retired from Parliament on 22nd of February 1971. I was still a Minister although not a member of Parliament until the Brand government resigned having been defeated at the election on the

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22nd of February. I think it was on 4th or 5th of March 1971, and I sailed on *Arcadia* leaving Fremantle on 11th of March 1971, for London.

On arrival in Southampton, I proceeded to London. I was met, of course, at Southampton by the official secretary, Mr F W G Andersen, and his wife, Mrs Andersen, who escorted me to London. It was on the Wednesday prior to Good Friday of that year, so I decided not to visit the office, Western Australia office, until after the Easter holidays. I commenced my duties, as Agent General, on the Tuesday following Easter Monday of that year, and continued in office until 17th of March, 1974.

JT When you arrive and start your job as Agent General, do you have to call on Australia House representatives and the Queen to present your credentials, or what is the procedure, could you explain that?

BOVELL There are a number of courtesy calls. We are called to Buckingham Palace, we don't advise that we are here, that is the one exception. But with the Lord Mayor of London, and all the various officials, the High Commissioner, we make arrangements through their offices when it will be convenient for the Agent General to call and pay his own personal respects and of course the respects of the Government and people of Western Australia. These are all arranged and it takes a considerable time to meet the leaders. You see there's not only the Lord Mayor of London, there is the Chairman of the London County Council, which in effect is a much larger concern than the City of London itself, because it's the whole of the area around the City of London which is only a mile square. All these things have to be done. Then as I've already mentioned about migration, there are visits to Glasgow, Edinburgh, Perth. I made a point of visiting the Lord Provost of Perth, in Scotland, each year. Manchester, Sheffield and a number of other places where it is necessary or not necessary, but it is advisable to, to have the contacts because there are a number of people who have vast interests in Western Australia and a very large investment. Some of the people concerned are the Earl of Inchcape, who is head of the P&O shipping company. His company operates throughout the southern hemisphere, and particularly in Asia and India and Africa and Australia. Recently, I say recently, in the last four, five or six years, the Inchcape concern has acquired Millars Timber and Trading Company in Western Australia, which as we know is one of the largest timber firms in the southern hemisphere. Then the BP Australia, BP in the United Kingdom of course is the parent company. Sir Eric Drake was the head of that company at that particular time. All these calls one has to make when one arrives in the United Kingdom. But it's not conducted in a normal way usually. One makes arrangements through the office structure to see when it would be convenient to call and usually

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the Agent General is invited to lunch, or to dinner, and very little business is talked on the first occasion and they expect the staff, their own staff, the Agent General's staff to do the actual business. It's only when there are problems that the top executives come together with the Agent General to sort out some problems that arise.

JT But you would have your finger on all these things anyway?

BOVELL One must, and that is the benefit I think of being in government. Sitting in cabinet you hear various aspects of all ministries over the years and this has always been my contention that the system of sending Premiers or Ministers is advisable. However, in his wisdom, the Premier, Sir Charles Court has altered the system and as far as I'm aware it is operating satisfactorily. But my time as Agent General was an interesting and absorbing one, principally because I am very interested in people.

On my leaving Sir David Brand said, 'You know, family must always be first in one's consideration, I want you to see that West Australians visiting the United Kingdom are looked after, you won't be able to meet them all, but, please see as many West Australians, personally, as your time permits.'

I found a multitude of problems; I hadn't been in the office for a few weeks and a young lady arrived. I knew her parents before they were married. She said, 'I am in a terrible fix, we haven't heard from my brother for eighteen months; my parents have sent me over to see if I can find out anything. And I found him, he's a drug addict, he's a cabbie, and I want to get him home.' Well, we made all arrangements and it even got as far as the airport and the authorities rejected him. They said he wasn't a fit passenger to go. So the girl came back to me, and said, 'Can you get him in to a hospital?' So he was put in a psychiatric hospital and after two months, he recovered sufficiently to come home. I instance this as some of the problems, unscheduled, that arrive from day to day. People become ill and lonely and they need help and comfort and support.

One gentleman died in Worthing. I was unfortunately in Perth in Scotland, but the staff saw that all arrangements were made. One Western Australian Foundation Day service, which is held in the Queen's chapel of the Savoy, a gentleman and his wife, elderly were there and the next day we got a message to say that he'd passed away suddenly. His widow was left there, an elderly lady, who had to be looked after, or she didn't have to be, but I think it's an obligation. But these are the things that confront an Agent General from day to day. I could go on and on and tell of the problems, the personal problems that arise, especially with loneliness, with sickness and with debt. I endeavoured to meet, as was requested by Sir David, as many West Australians as possible and I found that it wasn't always possible to meet them when they came in.

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But I instructed the members of the staff of Western Australia House, who were in direct contact with people who came in, that they were to invite the people to come to my afternoon receptions. We used to meet although I could only accommodate forty at the most, at a time, but this occurred in the summer time up to two and three times a week at four or five o'clock in the afternoon. This of course gave me a great amount of enjoyment because I met friends from home and with a little party atmosphere I enjoyed their company, and I believe the system did some good for the West Australians holidaying and passing through London at the time. I was very happy at Western Australia House.

There was a staff of thirty-two, all dedicated to serving Western Australia. I was made to feel very much at home. For instance when I started these parties, afternoon parties, or get-togethers, informal as they were, the staff ceased at five and I was set with the problem of showing the guests out at the back door. Well several members of staff said this is not good enough and without asking for any compensation, overtime, or any reward whatsoever, they without being asked, voluntarily, stayed behind and saw the guests were escorted out. It was usually seven o'clock by the time the last had departed.

But the experience as Agent General, I found was very rewarding to me and I hope to Western Australia. There was not so much development at that particular time, because of certain recessions had commenced, and it was no fault of the Government of the day, which was headed by Mr John Tonkin.

Now might I say something about Mr Tonkin? Mr Tonkin was Premier all the time I was Agent General. I was appointed by the former government, but all the time I was Agent General, Mr Tonkin was Premier. I had known Mr Tonkin for many years; he first opposed my late uncle, Mr George Barnard, who was the member for Sussex, from 1924 to 1933. I found Mr Tonkin, both in Parliament and out of it, a thorough gentleman. He gave me an open hand to conduct Western Australia House as I thought. He was asked when he became Premier whether my appointment would stand. He said it would, but I want to express appreciation to Mr Tonkin for his courtesy and his understanding whilst I was Agent General, although our political philosophies, of course, are not the same. Now here is an indication of the atmosphere which was in Parliament during the years I was there. Although our political philosophies are totally different, our personal association and our endeavours for the progress of Western Australia are the same.



**TAPE THREE SIDE ONE**

This is cassette three, number 217C, in the interviews with Sir Stewart Bovell, retired politician and ex Agent General in London. Sir Stewart continues his discussion of the Agent General's office. He also mentions his other interests and gives further details of his political career and of his family. The interview was recorded by Jean Teasdale for the Batty Library Oral History Programme, on 8th of December 1977 at Sir Stewart's home in Busselton.

BOVELL Of course finance is always a problem in government. Western Australia House, I believe, is economically run. The staff during my time were getting restive because they were not being suitably compensated for their duties (in my opinion). I corresponded with the various departments, including the Premier's department, regarding a suitable remuneration.

JT Sorry, can I interrupt there and ask you were they paid on Australian rates, or British rates?

BOVELL They were paid on British rates, and in sterling, as was the Agent General. But I'll come to the Agent-General's personal matter of finance later. However the matter was getting one of a problem which I was very disturbed about. Mr Tonkin with Mrs Tonkin came to London on his first and only official visit whilst he was Premier and I discussed with Mr Tonkin the plight of members of the staff. He was very understanding about it and said that when he returned to Western Australia he would personally make a full investigation and make a decision. He did and he made a decision which in my opinion, and in the opinion of all members of the staff, was fair and reasonable. They were brought onto a salary range which paralleled the public service in Western Australia, which they weren't enjoying before, and that is another credit, I think, to Mr Tonkin as Premier. I'm quite sure that we would not have got over the barriers of bureaucratic (if I might put it that way) dictation, had it not been for the personal intervention of the Premier of the day. The number of staff, I believe, has been increased because of added activities, now, in the Common Market, the European Common Market, but the actual expenditure for the maintenance of Western Australia House I think is reasonable and I'm convinced from my own experience that Western Australia benefits to a much greater degree than the independent investment which it is making in retaining the operations at Western Australia House.

JT How is the staff appointed and what ratio when you were there, were English and Australian?

BOVELL Most of the staff are English with the exception of (a) the migration staff, they come from Western Australia, most of them and (b) if I might say, the casual employees.

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For instance, during my time there I had four private secretaries; girls, Western Australian girls, who were on a working holiday and they were appointed to the position. Three of them married Englishmen and they, with their husbands, came back as migrants and at least one, with her husband, has been to see me at my house and they now have a little baby, a daughter, I believe, since I have returned.

But the main staff is recruited in the United Kingdom. Some members had been employed as juniors at the beginning in their teens, and retired at sixty-five, and had never been to Western Australia. This has all now been altered. Only two weeks ago, Mr Ron Burrows, who is now the Chief Administrative Officer at Western Australian House, came here to my house, because he is over on a tour of Western Australia to inform him of Western Australia. He is a man in his fifties. He was employed at Western Australia House as a junior, in his teens. Whilst I was there he was the accountant officer. He's now been promoted because of retirements.

The accounting officer, whilst I was there (when I first arrived in London), had joined Western Australia House staff in his teens. He retired at sixty-five and he'd never been to Western Australia. Mr Hyde, who is well-known to thousands upon thousands of Western Australians, is now retired. He was Chief Administrative Officer. Started as a lad and retired at sixty-five, while I was there, and had never been to Western Australia. But Sir Charles Court has altered this system. The senior members and the promising junior members will be brought out here from time to time to do a study-tour of Western Australia. Mr Burrows returned; I had a letter from him only this week, thanking me for the hospitality I extended him, and so on.

But mainly, the permanent staff are all recruited in the United Kingdom and, until recently, they'd go right through their career and had never been to Western Australia which, of course, in my opinion was a wrong policy. However that's all been amended.

JT Yes, well, now you said earlier that they were carrying out the bulk of the work and they would refer to you. Now how could they do this if they were doing the consultations and so forth, how could they do this if they hadn't been here and seen the set up here. They would do it from study and from being advised by the government through you?

BOVELL Well they would do it from correspondence and information that was available to them.

JT Yes. Now your immediate assistant was he a West Australian?

BOVELL The only West Australian was the official secretary, who was Mr F W G Andersen, to whom I think I have referred; and to both Mr and Mrs Andersen, I say thank you very much. As a bachelor,

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naturally, I was on my own for a considerable time but Mr and Mrs Andersen were most hospitable and most kind to me.

Invariably, once a month on a Sunday, I would proceed to their home, wherever it might be. They had several moves; once in Guildford, they lived there for a while. They lived in St John's Wood, they lived at Orpington, they had several moves and I'd go by train, have Sunday meal with them and spend Sunday at least once a month. So I do wish to record my very sincere appreciation of the hospitality and the friendship that Mr and Mrs Andersen extended me during my time in the United Kingdom.

JT Now you returned to West Australia at least once during your term?

BOVELL Yes. I had been in the United Kingdom two years and for family reasons, (there was a matter of family importance that I wished to attend to). I asked the Premier for leave to come home. I was granted leave. I asked perhaps for too long, I wanted to come home for four months, which was a long time, but Mr Tonkin said, 'No you can come for two'. Well that wasn't sufficient so I wrote back and I thanked him very much, but said that wasn't sufficient, I wanted what I'd asked for. And if I couldn't get what I wanted I would have to resign, a year before my term ended. Well I received a letter from Mr Tonkin saying, 'Well we won't talk about resignations yet, when you come home we'll try and sort it out.' But he said, 'Four months is a long time for an Agent General to be away.' I might mention at this stage that when I left it was fifteen months before an Agent General was appointed and I wasn't asked to return. I may have returned had I been asked, but I wasn't asked and that's just by the way. But just by comparison, Mr Tonkin thought four months was too long, but with Sir Charles Court, fifteen months with the official secretary acting as Agent General was permitted. However, I proceeded home, I talked with the Premier, Mr Tonkin, and we comprised and I was given three months leave, which after all said and done, is only a month a year for the three years I was there, because I had no leave in the United Kingdom. There was no leave.

JT I was going to ask you what the setup is. Are you given official leave each year?

BOVELL The Agent General can apply for leave, but I never applied for any leave in the United Kingdom. So therefore the three months that I had was virtually only what I was entitled to, over the years. It is usual at the end of a three year term for the Agent General to return and have three months leave before he returns for his second three years.

Now I might say that Mr Tonkin when he was in London, and it was about six months, nine months I beg your pardon, before I was due to retire or before my term ended. He asked me was I interested in another term and I'm quite sure that had I been (I

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was interested in another term) but for health reasons I decided to come, return, home when I did. I was asked if I was interested in a term and it has been traditional for governments of any complexion to renew the term for a further three years if this is the wish of the Agent General at that time.

For instance, the Honourable E K Hoare, who was appointed by the Hawke Government, in 1956, I think. He was reappointed by the Brand Government and for another three years, that's six years, and he also was appointed for a further half term of eighteen months I think, by the Brand Government. So the party political complexion up to date has not entered into the function of an Agent General.

I have already referred to the finance of West Australia House. The Agent General's salary is fixed by Act of Parliament and whilst I was there it was the sum of three thousand five hundred pounds, which of course is totally inadequate. There was a house allowance of a thousand pounds a year, plus a small entertainment allowance. I can't quite recall the amount at this time. It would be a thousand pounds at the most whilst I was there, my entertainment allowance, and it was often necessary for me to expend my own private money which I did on many occasions.

For instance, when Princess Margaret was coming to Western Australia, I was advised by the High Commissioner that it was my duty to entertain Princess Margaret before she left for Western Australia. Now this is not usual in a royal visit because the royal person visits several states, but on this occasion Princess Margaret was visiting, officially, Western Australia only. The only other area she had contact with was the Northern Territory, Darwin, because of her passing through. It was only en route that she was obliged to go through the Northern Territory. There were no funds available for me to entertain Princess Margaret. I arranged a dinner party for her. She expressed a wish to meet as many young West Australians as possible. It of course was not possible for me to have as many West Australians present at the dinner, but following the dinner I invited a number of additional young West Australians to meet Princess Margaret. Now that party, that function, cost me personally near five hundred pounds.

JT Where did you hold that?

BOVELL That was held at the Army and Navy Club of which Her Majesty the Queen is the patron. It was a wonderful function and included in the numbers there were members of the Forrest family and other old West Australian families and especially some West Australian descendants of prominent people of Western Australia. Sir John and Lady Hackett were there. Sir John of course the son of Sir Winthrop and Lady Hackett of great fame in the early part of this century. But there were I think forty at dinner and there were probably another twenty young people who came in after dinner to meet Princess Margaret.

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One of the greatest thrills, I suppose you could say, and I'll show you the letter afterwards, was a letter written in Princess Margaret's own handwriting, even to the envelope, thanking me for the dinner and, furthermore, when I received my knighthood Princess Margaret wrote a letter congratulating me. That is one thing that impresses me with the British people; their courtesy. That grace and charm which I regret to say is fading from our way of life.

I mentioned the Earl of Inchcape, he wrote me. Former Lord Mayors of London wrote me personal letters. You see the Lord Mayor of London only lasts for one year. But former Lord Mayors of London and I could recount numbers of people whom I would not have thought would have remembered me. Only yesterday I received a card from Sir Richard and Lady Rash, which I will show you in a moment. He's a member of the royal household. I also received a letter a card this week, from the Right Honourable Lord Glendyne and Lady Glendyne. These are people that I had dealings with in the interests of Western Australia whilst I was there, who have remembered me and we have become quite firm friends.

But this old world courtesy you know, just a bird of passage, sort of so to speak, but when I received the accolade of knighthood I was amazed but wonderfully exhilarated that so many people who hold such responsible positions and have so much to do and so many duties to perform, could remember me and would have time to write me personal letters of congratulation. For this I am of course most grateful.

I could spend hours talking of my wonderful experiences in the United Kingdom. The Church of England has been a comfort and guide, or the teachings of it, to me, for all my life. I've received a lot of comfort and inspiration from my belief. It was my custom to attend twice a month a Holy Communion service in Westminster Abbey. On the first Sunday in the month I attended a service at the Queen's Chapel of the Savoy, which is not only near Western Australia House, but it is the chapel of the Queen's Own Royal Victorian Order. Over there you'll see written 'Westminster Abbey', a big publication of Westminster Abbey. It was given to me by the staff at Western Australia House when I left, but the great thing is that it is signed (in their own handwriting) by the Dean, at that time, Sir Eric Abbott, and all the chapter of Westminster Abbey. These things leave a lasting impression on me and I might now refer with great respect and gratitude to Her Majesty the Queen.

I was called to Buckingham Palace and the Queen has to interview countless people day by day. How she does it, I don't know. Her Lord Chamberlain, Lord Cobold at the time, was there and I was with the Queen and Lord Cobold, and you know the Queen had been prevented from coming to Western Australia on two occasions when she visited Australia through no fault of her own. For circumstances over which she had no control she had to return to the United Kingdom on one occasion I think, prior to a

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general election. But on two occasions she had to cancel her visit to Western Australia. She'd carried out her itinerary in all other states but Western Australia was left out.

Well Her Majesty was so kind about it; she told me how disappointed she was; she wanted to know about Western Australia; she promised that she would come as soon as possible and stay as long as she possibly could; and she talked with me and chatted. I did very little talking, she talked and chatted.

Her Lord-in-Waiting, Lord Cobold was standing on one foot and then the other because I know I was allotted a certain time and it made no matter to Her Majesty the Queen whatsoever. She took her own time and even though she couldn't come to Western Australia, she wanted to show her interest in it, to display to me her disappointment and although I was only one West Australian, I was representing Western Australia. She was going to stay with Western Australia, through me, as long as she wanted and not as long as her official advisers wanted. Now this is typical of the Queen, she will not be hurried, she will go her own way, and this was just, I think, expressing through me, to Western Australia, her disappointment that she had been prevented, through circumstances over which she had no control, from visiting Western Australia, when she'd come to Australia for such a visit, which included Western Australia and it wasn't possible to carry out. Now this is just one instance of my experience of the Queen and her understanding of her own people.

Although my forebears came from the United Kingdom a century and a quarter ago my sentiments are deeply rooted in the traditions of the United Kingdom. I enjoyed my time there immensely; I only wish that I was younger and could have spent a longer period of that time there. I think it was Samuel Johnson, that said, 'He who tires of London, is tired of life itself.'<sup>1</sup> And this is so true. London, the capital of England is so full of interest, of tradition, of history, of which I am especially interested and that is English history.

And quite different, and in a different way, Edinburgh, with a quiet dignity with its friendly people is so different. Glasgow, different again. Birmingham, Manchester, Sheffield, industrial areas, millions of people, how they all work and the system works, I don't know. Then down to the lovely south coast, Eastbourne, Dover, Hastings, Plymouth, all the traditions of the early settlement of the United Kingdom, from 1066 onwards. All these things filled me with a feeling of gratitude that my forebears were Anglo Saxon.

This is not to detract from any other nationality. I am proud to be British. For that reason I thank Sir David Brand for sending me to the United Kingdom as Agent General for Western Australia. I did my best for my own native state but in the process I gained an

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<sup>1</sup> This quote is as follows: 'No, Sir, when a man is tired of London, he is tired of life, for there is in London all that life can afford.'

SAMUEL JOHNSON - Letter to Boswell 20<sup>th</sup> September, 1777. Oxford Dictionary of Quotations p178.

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immense personal benefit which I find it difficult to express satisfactorily in words.

JT It must have been a bit difficult then to make a decision, for health reasons, not to go back?

BOVELL It was very, very difficult. I was secretly hoping, I might say, that after being here for two or three months and the position wasn't filled I might be invited to go back until they did fill the position. The reason for the delay was Sir Charles Court, the incoming Premier. The appointment wasn't made by the outgoing government. But Sir Charles had undertaken to have an examination of Western Australia offices function and he wanted that examination held before he made an appointment of a new Agent General, but that lasted from March, 1971 to May 1972, which was a considerable period of time. But it would have filled me with a great pleasure, personally to be invited to go back for a year or so, because at that time my health had improved terrifically. But I wasn't invited so it's no good, no good thinking about it now.

JT He would obviously have been wanting to look into the affairs of the Agent General, because of the movement to Common Market and the fact that Australia was moving more to the Asian countries.

BOVELL That is quite right and the Under-Treasurer of the day, Mr Ken Townsing, went to the United Kingdom and he was the one that reported on this position which in the end result establishes the necessity for Western Australia House to continue to operate and not only to continue to operate but to be enlarged. I understand from Mr Burrows, who I referred to earlier, who visited me only recently, that the staff of Western Australia House is now thirty-eight or forty which is an increase of a number of six. And this is mainly to do, I think, with the European Common Market. Quite a lot of negotiations have proceeded with Germany and other European countries outside the United Kingdom and the Agent General, of course, the office of Agent General is the only statutory appointment outside Western Australia. The Commission is there and, in it, it says '... in the United Kingdom and elsewhere'. We have a representative I think, in Singapore. Western Australia has a representative in Japan, but they're not statutory. They're not parliamentary appointment, the Agent General is appointed under a special act, the Agent General's Act, which not only appoints him, but decides his salary and as I say, whilst I was there it was three thousand five hundred pounds. I believe it has been amended since and what the salary is today I don't know, but I'm quite sure that the salary has been increased to a reasonable remuneration for the holder of the office of Agent General.

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JT Now after you came back. It was almost two years after you came back that you were granted your knighthood. This was for community work and for acknowledgement of your work as Agent General?

BOVELL Yes I think the citation read, if I can remember it correctly. 'For service to Western Australia and the community,' meaning that not only my public life but my personal interest in affairs in Western Australia. The 17th of March, 1974, ended over half a century of my working life. I have retired to my house in Busselton.

I was, of course, as I already said, born here and my father before me. My grandfather, although not born here, came here at the age of nineteen years of age and lived here until his death. I have continued my interest in community affairs since my retirement. I am still patron of some thirty organisations, including State organisations and local organisations.

One of the State organisations is the Polocrosse Association of Western Australia. I am a personal member of the executive of the Good Neighbour Council of Western Australia, with which of course, I was associated so closely during my ministry of immigration.

JT Does that entail visits to Perth to attend meetings?

BOVELL I don't have to attend meetings but if I can, I attend meetings but on two occasions I was prevented by circumstances out of my control from attending the annual meeting. His Excellency the Governor was the principal guest at the last annual meeting in September. I am life Governor and Vice-Chairman of the Board of Governors of the Church of England Cathedral Grammar School in Bunbury. This occupies quite a lot of my time and thought. This is an absorbing and interesting exercise as far as I am concerned.

Locally I am patron in Busselton of the Art Society, of the Repertory Club, of the Choral Society, of the Junior Football Association, and so on. I'm a patron of the Tambellup Agricultural Society. I am the Patron of the Margaret River and Districts Agricultural Society and I could go and list say over thirty or more organisations in which I am still interested. This occupies my spare time, if I have any. As a matter of fact I have no spare time at all and I find this of benefit to me to be occupied mentally and physically.

For instance I have many invitations. Yesterday I attended the annual speech day of the Church of England Cathedral Grammar School in Bunbury. This evening as life member and past patron of the Southern Districts Agricultural Society I am attending their final Christmas meeting of the year. Last night, after returning from Bunbury, I attended by invitation and was a guest speaker at the local Pensioners League of Busselton. It was their Silver



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Jubilee dinner in honour of Her Majesty the Queen's Jubilee. I was a guest speaker, I had to come from Bunbury, I missed the dinner, I was too late for the dinner, but afterwards there were some three hundred senior citizens at this dinner. As I say tonight I am attending the Southern Districts Agricultural Society Christmas wind-up for the season. Tomorrow I go to Margaret River by invitation to join with the senior citizens of Margaret River in their Christmas luncheon and social afternoon and in the evening as patron of the Busselton Repertory Society I attend a performance of the Sleeping Beauty.

Saturday I attend, by invitation, a Girl Guide rally. I am one of the builders of the Girl Guide movement in Busselton and it will be the 60th Anniversary of the establishment of the Girl Guides movement in Busselton. Three of my sisters were members, two of them foundation members. The Guides are having a celebration here in Busselton, I have been invited to attend and I will attend.

During my banking days I was interested in sporting and other public matters and in February next I've been invited to go to Tambellup to their tennis carnival. I was the foundation secretary in 1928. It will be fifty years so they've invited me back.

Now I'm very well blessed. Divine will has given my own family very many blessings. I'm living in retirement, in a house that's not the original house. My grandfather's house, only a few yards from where I live, built over a hundred years ago still stands, and I pass it each day as I go out my own gate.

JT How long did you live in that. You lived in that house, or you didn't?

BOVELL No, no I never lived there. I did stay there with a maiden aunt. My father was the youngest of eight and one of his sisters never married and when I was a boy I lived for company with her. I was aged from twelve to fourteen I think. Our original home was in the main street, on which now is built many offices and business establishments including the Busselton headquarters of the Red Cross Society. I was born there on the 19th December, 1906. We lived in this house until my parents died, my father died in 1951 in the house.

JT When was that house built?

BOVELL It was built in 1850.

JT And what was it built of?

BOVELL It was built of hand-made bricks and it was occupied by the first civil magistrate of the Vasse district, a Mr Harris by name.

JT And when did your family occupy it?

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BOVELL My father purchased it before I was born so it was before 1906. But it was our family home up 'till the time my mother died in 1957, and I didn't move to my present house until 1960. I continue to reside there. It was disposed of, it was very old. It was a bungalow type of house with six rooms, and a verandah all 'round which had to be improvised for a big family.

JT Sleepouts?

BOVELL Sleepouts and what have you when we were all growing up. But that house has many fond memories for me.

JT Was there a bathroom in the house?

BOVELL Bathroom, yes.

JT Kitchen?

BOVELL Bathroom, kitchen; the kitchen was semi-detached.

JT Yes.

BOVELL Over the other side of the verandah, and it was the same with my grandfather's house, the kitchen was removed from the house. How they brought hot food to the dining room in my grandfather's house I don't know but they did in my time, living there with my aunt, but it was a system then that the smells from the kitchen were to be kept away from the house and it was the same with the toilet facilities. They were built very well away from the house. And even with the septic system it was still built up right at the other end of the verandah which was a route march almost to get to. One part of the verandah had been enclosed by timber making two rooms.

JT This is your father's house or your grandfather's house?

BOVELL In my father's house?

JT Your father's house?

BOVELL Where we lived. My grandfather's house is more spacious. Huge rooms with great fire-place, built of course on the English style of architecture.

**TAPE THREE SIDE B**

- BOVELL My parent's house, where I was born on 19th December, 1906, brings to me the fondest of memories. I said we were and are a well-blessed family; my elder sister, four years my senior, 75 on the 26th of December, this month, 1977. I was next, another sister, a brother and another sister all lived in that home, more than a house. In all my life I never heard within the walls of that house my father say a cross word. My mother was a most wonderful woman. I often look back and wonder how they managed.
- JT Did you have household help in those early days?
- BOVELL Yes. We had to get a room built off the house, there was always a maid, a teenage girl from one of the farms here, who lived as a member of the family.
- JT You mean she ate with you and everything?
- BOVELL Oh yes, sat at table with us. I want to come back to that too, the routine of the house. And also, there was an older woman who came in and cleaned the house, washing, ironing. My mother was relieved of that, but with a quick succession or reasonably quick succession of children my mother still managed the cooking and looking after the management of the house. When we were growing up, there was always a teenage girl who was part of the family and it was rather pleasing you know as we grew up. Busselton is a place where people seem to stay, they don't seem to go away and lots of the girls lived here and have died here. For instance my sister Strella, Mrs Frank Allsop, unusual name Strella, but my mother was closely associated personally, when they were girls together, with one of Australia's most outstanding singers, Strella Wilson. Strella Wilson was one of the most renowned singers of the day, not of course, as high as Dame Nellie Melba, acknowledged as one of the great singers of the British speaking world at that time. That's how my sister became Strella.
- JT Did they hope she'd be a singer?
- BOVELL I think it was just my mother's girlhood association with Strella Wilson, but I was just going to instance just a humorous interlude. My sister, a little child, just toddler, was out with one of the employed girls and some people passing by said to my sister, who was a little toddler, 'Oh and that's your mother?' 'Oh no', said my sister, 'That's my Janie, that's not my mother'. So that's one instance but there was always some help in the house.
- JT Can you describe a bit of your routine, or do you want to go onto something else?

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BOVELL No, it was a well-ordered house. The midday meal was hot, always, except on Saturdays when it was a cold meal. Sundays was hot meal too, midday, and it was a high tea in the evening.

JT Lunch was formal?

BOVELL Formal and the evening meal was formal. Breakfast was informal. Lunch was served at 12.30 each day, or dinner actually, midday dinner, the hot meal. Tea, high tea at 6 o'clock, we were never instructed but always expected and we were there at meal times.

JT What would you eat at those meals?

BOVELL Well Mondays was usually cold meat. A stew midday. Grills, plenty of vegetables. Two or three roasts a week, which provided perhaps the evening meal, but in the winter of course, there was something hot in the evening whatever it might be, scrambled eggs or something of that nature.

But we had plenty of fruit, we had any amount of vegetables and living in the country of course everything was good, which I think reflects on the fact of the five of us still being alive. We've been a very fortunate family as I mentioned earlier and I do believe that it was because of the way that we were brought up, it helped considerably. But I thank God that I was privileged to live perhaps in a Victorian atmosphere, that it was a well-ordered household.

And since I've grown up I've reflected on how my parents managed. My sister was born in 1902, parents married in 1901, 25th May, 1901, I beg your pardon, 23 May 1901, my elder sister was born on the 26th December, 1902. I was born four years later. My next sister Strella, Mrs Allsop now, born two and a half years later. My brother born in 1913, so at that time there were four of us at the outbreak of war. My younger sister was born in 1916, during the war. And during the war I just can't imagine how my parents managed financially, but they did.

My father was mayor of the town of Busselton. This entailed of course, a lot of work for my mother, who had a young family of four, and another child was born while she was mayoress. The mayoress of a town has duties to perform and my father had to sponsor them, you must contribute, however they managed, I don't know, but they did. Business of course during the first war particularly, in a country town such as this was very restricted, but we overcame all the difficulties. By the end of the war I was still going to school, of course, growing up, all of us were. But it was to me, and is, the greatest reward that I have received in life, to be raised in a house where there was order and courtesy and never, never a cross word.

My father was a mild gentleman who when he was at home, was perfection, and my mother was a good organiser. She became ill at various times, but nevertheless she was there. She made us

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go out into the world, we were all sent away from Busselton, because she felt that we should get experience away and whilst I wanted to come home on many occasions when I was a young bank officer not enjoying the best of health, I was told I had to continue on and the time would come perhaps when it would be appropriate for me to return.

But I do record very, very sincere and loving appreciation of my parents, when I reflect, as I often do on our happiness, a family happiness within the home, and the struggle that my parents must have had to maintain it and the dignity that was both inside and outside the house always, I thank God for those blessings which in my opinion are the blessing of the best.

JT Now you were an Edwardian family, living in a country town in Western Australia you didn't feel then, but do you feel now that your father was typical of his era? Did he help in the home, or was this not expected? Did he read you stories, or play with you, or have much to do with you as children?

BOVELL No, no, I don't think I ever saw my father wash a dish. I don't think that I ever remember my father telling me a story. The girls who helped in the house did or my mother did. My father would say goodnight each night and good morning every morning, but I don't remember any household chores that my father did, and I suppose really there wasn't any necessity for this. When my sisters were growing up of course they helped and when they grew up there was no need for any assistance. The younger girls disappeared, although for so long as I can remember when I used to come home for holidays when I was a bank officer, there was still a lady who came in to do the house, clean and polish, and the laundry and the ironing and so on. That went on right up 'till my mother, you know, left home to live with her daughter because of age and infirmity. My mother lived 'till she was eighty-three years. As a matter of fact only this year, on the 23rd of January, after thirty years of service the lady, Mrs Lawson, at eighty-three gave up service cleaning my house and doing what she had done for my mother.

JT For your family?

BOVELL My mother has been of course dead for twenty years.

JT But she went on serving you?

BOVELL She went on serving me until January this year. Cleaning the house and the three years I was in England she came here each day and looked after things, aired the place, looked after it and so on, and this sounds like something out of the Victorian era, but this has been my experience and I'm thankful for it.

JT Did you say grace at the meals? Was it very formal?

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- BOVELL I always said grace. I don't do it now, but I did then.
- JT But you said it for the family?
- BOVELL For the family, yes.
- JT Did your father carve?
- BOVELL Carve at the table, yes. On occasions, but not always.
- JT And was he the sort of man that you could talk to? You say that he didn't do the chores like reading to you. Did he play with you or romp with you? At all?
- BOVELL No, he didn't.
- JT But you could go and talk with him if you wanted to.
- BOVELL Oh yes.
- JT And did you?
- BOVELL Oh yes, as a matter of fact without reflecting in a derogatory fashion on my mother, if I wanted to go to the pictures or go off somewhere, I'd ask my father first. He'd invariably say, Oh yes, I think it's alright, but ask your mother. And of course I'd go, Dad said I can go. But no, no, there was I think a great love for all of us for our father, but he just didn't join in. I can't remember my father ever having a game with me but I do remember I was keen on gardening and I had a vegetable garden and we had cows which I had to milk and I wanted my father to enter the cows into the milking tests in the annual show here, and he did assist me in this matter. Any enterprise that I had outside the house or any of us had, well he'd do what he could to assist. I remember him walking over with me to the show ground and getting the cow I thought was going to win the prize because it was giving the highest quantity of milk, not the butterfat content, it was the gallonage, and our cow was a fantastic cow. But she was temperamental and she got over there amongst the other animals and wouldn't give a drop of milk. So all these things my father was interested in and would do for us. But not to the extent of sitting down and reading stories to us or playing with us or anything of that nature.
- JT Did your mother do this?
- BOVELL Yes, mother, did.
- JT As well as preserves and jam-making and all the rest of it?
- BOVELL Oh yes, she did all the cooking.

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- JT Did she have to bake bread?
- BOVELL Oh no, no. Oh no the butcher called, the baker called, the milkman called. It was, you know, an ideal life. Really in those days the greengrocer, everybody called, and the grocer boy came and got the order and delivered the order, there was no going like a packhorse now and dragging home things from supermarkets. There was an air of dignity which I think and hope will return some day.
- JT What about your youth? Were you allowed to go out to dances whenever you wanted? Did you have one set night a week out, or was your father strict about this, or your mother strict about this?
- BOVELL No, we were allowed to go to church dances in the parish hall. We were allowed to go to the pictures on Saturday night.
- JT And you went to church how many times on Sunday?
- BOVELL At least once, at least once on Sunday. I was a choir boy. But we were expected to go to church on Sunday. I remember an incident; I went to Sunday school, then on to church, and I was to be home for a photograph. There was a photographer in Busselton and the photographer was coming from Bunbury to take the family photo. Well I forgot all about it, and wandered off to pick wildflowers. When I arrived home there was panic, I wasn't there and that held the photographer up until I arrived home at dinner time, in time for the Sunday's dinner at 12.30. I was supposed to be home at 11.30. When I arrived home mother was not amused about it and she spoke sharply to me and I started to cry. Well that upset the applecart, because all my eyes were going red and this was not good for the family photo. That's just one of the incidents in family life that happens from time to time. That's about the most serious problem that I can recall.
- JT What sort of games did you play, can you recall anything unusual or was it just cricket and this sort of thing.
- BOVELL Cricket, Tip Kat.
- JT What is Tip Kat?
- BOVELL Tip Kat is two pointed ends on a short stick and a bat. And you hit the stick with the bat.
- JT What sort of a bat?
- BOVELL A wooden bat. You hit one end of the stick pointed at each end on the ground.

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- JT           What an inch across, spike?
- BOVELL     Yes, it would be inch and a half thick in the centre.
- JT           About an inch and half across?
- BOVELL     Inch and a half in length, tapering off to a point, you hit one end and it went up in the air and then you hit it with the bat as far as you could.
- JT           How big was the spike?
- BOVELL     Oh about ...
- JT           Six inches?
- BOVELL     Four to six inches and I remember once I was watching somebody playing and I got the bat on my nose. One of these casualties that children experience from time to time. There were marbles, tops, cricket, I didn't play tennis 'till I was older.
- JT           Tops, you mean spinning tops?
- BOVELL     Spinning tops, yes.
- JT           Did you whip them, were they whipping tops?
- BOVELL     No mainly spinning tops with a cord. All these things, marbles, cricket. St Patrick's Day was a great day; there was always sports and lollies and a party atmosphere on St Patrick's Day. But our entertainment was very simple; pictures once a week on Saturday night and invariably the projector broke down and we had to go back on Monday night again if we were allowed because we were expected to go to school and do our work, late. We were not encouraged to be out late at night. But my earlier boyhood was marred by ill health. At the age of ten I had an illness which doctors couldn't diagnose. It was not fever, but every joint of my body ached. It was like neuritis, they called it neuritis and I was ill for months and my elder sister used to say my screams could be heard down the street.
- JT           Did you have to be in bed?
- BOVELL     Oh yes, I was in hospital for I don't know how long. I was sent away to the Goldfields to get away from the coast; they thought it may be that I'd become Coastie. I was sent to Kookynie, to the hospital there, to Leonora, to the hospital there. It was the time my mother was about to have my younger sister. I must have been a trial, but that illness set me back.



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JT Can you recall how you felt when you were packed off to these various places?

BOVELL Well it was an adventure, and the matron, a Sister Kenny was the matron at Kookynie hospital. I well recall, as a little boy, being interested in the natives and there were numbers of natives, Aborigines, around Kookynie and I got into 'holts' with them one day and promised to buy some spears and other weapons from them. The next morning at daybreak they had the whole hospital in turmoil because they paraded, had a corroboree 'round the hospital with these spears. They collected all their mates and friends and I think they thought that I was going to buy everything they brought. But I enjoyed it all from what I can remember. I was shut away for health reasons. I think there was another reason, because my mother was about to have a baby. I then came down to Perth and stayed with an aunt of mine there until the confinement had taken place when I was allowed to come home. But I never recovered from that illness until I was in my middle or late twenties. It had the effect upon me of my being sensitive.

I found I couldn't mix very well. If anybody said anything which hurt me I took it to heart. I don't know how I came through, oh yes I do, I was fortunate in having friends who helped me along the way.

Now for instance I mentioned Tambellup earlier, I was first of all sent to the bank in Perth for six months then I went to Katanning. I was in Katanning fifteen months and I never was invited into a person's house or home. At the age of sixteen, seventeen, having come from a country town, I felt lonely and unwanted. I think you do in your teenage years and also being sensitive and not being well. I came home for a holiday, and I said to my mother, I'm not going back to Katanning. Oh yes you are, oh yes you are.

I was packing up and the bank manager came up our garden path in the old home one afternoon. My mother went to the door and said, Oh come in Mr Taylor. He was the gentleman who had asked me to join the bank and made arrangements for me to join. He said, I don't want to come in, I just want to tell you that Stewart doesn't have to go back to Katanning, he's to work in the bank here.

So I went into the bank in Busselton. I was later transferred to Bunbury and later to Albany and then to Tambellup. I was twenty-one by this time, but I was still not well. One of my duties at Tambellup was to get up at three o'clock in the morning, once a fortnight, get a bag containing three hundred and twenty pounds from the safe and lock the safe up. I lived on the bank premises, all on my own. Run across to the railway station, go by train to Cranbrook, and conduct the bank business there, (I was only twenty-one) and return by train to Tambellup by eleven o'clock at night. At that time, it was 1928, a young bank officer doing the same duties from Perth to Guildford was murdered in the train.

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But it was the friends I had, a schoolmaster took me under his wing. We met again at Geraldton, we were firm friends the whole of his lifetime.

JT What was his name?

BOVELL Charles Montgomery Balstrup. He was transferred from Tambellup to Geraldton and later I was transferred there and for six years we were again together. Later I was transferred to Perth. He was closely associated with me and helped me very greatly as did his wife. He proposed me into the order of Freemasonry in Geraldton. He was, as I say, a second father to me. I was the executor of his estate, I was also the executor of his wife's estate, but unfortunately she died while I was in the United Kingdom and I had to renounce my executorship because she was living in New South Wales and the law of New South Wales decreed that you must be living in Australia to administer an estate. We were very closely associated all the years. He died in 1945 and his widow, as I say, died in 1973.

JT So you had friends like this all the way through?

BOVELL These friends all the way through. When I was in Tambellup and not well, I wrote home and I said to my parents, I'm coming home, I can't stand this any longer. My mother wrote back and said and I thank her for it, I have to be cruel to be kind, there is no place for you at home now, you must make you own way in life. There may, (and she repeated) be a time when you can come home but that time has not come yet.

Now I know that my mother in saying that would have probably have wept but, nevertheless, that was what she thought was best. It was best, as it proved in the long run. I went to Geraldton and I thought oh, so far away and I was so lonely. Then I thought of Charles Montgomery Balstrup, and the first Sunday I was there I was invited to go and have high tea, which was the custom of a Sunday for the evening meal. I only quote this one.

There are many others, who have helped me over the time when I couldn't help myself. I had a serious illness in Geraldton, I was in hospital for some time. I think I was away from work for about three months, culminating in a peritonitis and after that I seemed to get more confident and I thought now, so and so can do this, so and so can do that, why haven't I got the confidence to do it? Well I suppose I was in my late twenties before I really felt self-confident about anything.

During the Depression years in Geraldton I was fearful of getting retrenched from the bank's service. I knew that I didn't have the physical stamina to go out and work on the roads or do any heavy manual work; I would have expired. I lived in a fear of having to do things that were not possible for me to do, physically. I lived in this state of fear, all the time, until came a turning point.

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I seemed to get confidence, I hope not overconfident, and from then on I took a great interest in the Toc H movement. I mentioned that and I went to the United Kingdom and I think that 1936 experience overseas was really the turning point. I nearly lost my confidence again when I came back I was sent to Morawa, but I lived through it and that is the story really leading up to war and my commission and career, and later Agent General.

I'd referred to the house which grandfather built over a hundred years ago and also the house where I was born and lived until after the death of my mother. But the house I live in now was built some fifty years ago by a Mr Frederick Maitland. Mr Maitland married one of the Layman family, who were the first settlers or amongst the first settlers in this district. I came here in 1960, to live and have resided in the house or it has been my home since then.

Mr Maitland was an Englishman, and the house is built on English lines. It has, or had, two acres of land around it, but in this present day and age nothing is one's own and the local authorities resumed an area and destroyed the old horse stables that were here and carriage sheds. And now the area has been reduced to approximately one acre and a half. It is more or less a park land area with a house, which to me is very comfortable and I hope if I can afford to in this present day and age of inflation to be my home for the rest of my life.

It is comfortable, it is pleasant and it suits my convenience. The house comprises of a number of rooms, a drawing room and a sitting room, and several bedrooms, a study and outside a library. I am more or less in isolation, but this was not always the case. My father was the youngest of a family of eight, one of his sisters did not marry, I have referred to the fact that I lived in my grandfather's house which she occupied at the time for company when I was a child. But every Sunday afternoon it was custom for all the family to meet at my Aunt Ann's house, my grandfather's house originally, and have afternoon tea. This was a family custom.

One of my father's brothers was the father of six sons and one daughter, a sister, four daughters and two sons. Three sisters I had and one brother, that was five. So can one imagine the noise and the jollity and the little children's differences of a Sunday afternoon. My Aunt, Mrs Barnard's husband, by the way, was mayor of Busselton before the first war and he was parliamentary representative for Sussex from 1924 to 1933.

In my very young days my own parents had a horse drawn conveyance but we were not very far away. But my Aunt, Mrs Barnard, her husband and their children as many as could get in it, were driven in a carriage which would be reminiscent of Queen Victoria going to some function. Afterwards the Barnards were the first to acquire a car in Busselton, in 1915, and they were always jealous of the number plate BN 1 on their car. But this

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was the atmosphere in which we were raised, eight children, as I say in my grandfather's family.

My grandfather, my grandmother, their eight children, grown up of course, all died in Busselton. The service for their burial was held in St Mary's Anglican Church here and they found their last earthly resting place in the local cemetery. I'm afraid families are not so closely knit today, but this is another experience in my life for which I am most grateful, this family life, where the adults of the family met indoors for afternoon tea. In the fine weather the children would play around my Aunt's house and in the wet we'd have to come into the verandah and what have you, but we seemed to manage somehow. I suppose if the weather was too boisterous well we just had to cancel the Sunday get-together. But this happened every Sunday, without fail, at the house which my own grandfather built over a hundred years ago in Busselton, which, I repeat, is only situated a few yards away from my own house at which I live now.

JT You mentioned this schoolteacher who had an influence on your life. Are there any other people that you would like to make mention of?

BOVELL Yes, the late Sir James Mitchell. I admired him from my earliest boyhood. I followed his career although he was rather severe on me because I never married and he was a man who advocated marriage and large families. I admired him. I believe he has done as much as anybody for the development of Western Australia under very difficult conditions. Another gentleman who is, I think primarily responsible for me entering politics, is the late Patrick, or Paddy McCann. He induced me to stand for Parliament; I had no intention of going into politics, but he was the one who asked me to stand and insisted that I stand. As a true Irishman he said that he would stand himself and win the seat and hold it until I was ready if I couldn't fulfil my obligations to my parents to which I have referred. He died in 1957 but he never once said I was wrong to go into Parliament. Now I must have been wrong on many occasions, but he had implicit faith in me, I had implicit faith in him. He was my confidante as it happened, from time to time. I used to get upset about things that I wasn't able to do, or that somebody had said, or some incident in the House. I would go to him and reveal my problems and he would pour oil on troubled waters and he was a friend indeed and I really am grateful for his companionship during this time.

JT Sir Stewart are you quite happy with the Battye Library being able to use these tapes and the transcripts for any purposes to which they see fit?

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BOVELL Indeed I would be pleased if the Batty Library used the tapes and transcript as they think fit, because I have complete confidence in the Batty Library and, of course, I knew Dr James Sykes Batty personally so very well, especially in my experience as a Freemason.

JT Thank you.

**END OF INTERVIEW**

**NOTE:** No Copyright Deed required because of Sir Stewart Bovell's full verbal consent at the end of his interview.