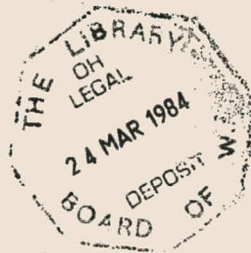


LEDGER, Sir Frank

NOTE TO READER

Readers of this oral history memoir should bear in mind that this is an edited transcript of the spoken word, and reflects the informal, conversational style that is inherent in such historical sources. The University Archives is not responsible for the factual accuracy of the memoir, nor for the views expressed therein, these are for the reader to judge.



This is an interview with Sir Frank Ledger conducted by Christine Shervington, the University Archivist, on 17th June 1982.

CS Sir Frank do you give the University Archives and the Battye Library permission to use this information you give on this tape?

FL Yes with pleasure.

CS Sir Frank could you tell us something about your family background? Your father and uncle arrived from England in the 1890's and established the family firm. Could you give us some of the details of this please?

FL Yes, the . . . In 1879 my uncle Joseph Edson Ledger at the age of 28 left Leeds in Yorkshire, England, to migrate to Western Australia. He was accompanied by his wife Jane and daughter Clara on the sailing ship Robert Mosman. . . Morrison, I'm sorry...landing in Fremantle on 16th July 1880. Joe's wife died in childbirth in April '81. He was later joined by his younger brother Edson at the age of fourteen, who arrived in a sailing ship Fitzroy on 30th June 1882. Joe was a fitter and turner and Edson was an apprentice tin smith. When Edson arrived Joe had already set up in a small business in the laneway between Hay Street and Murray Street. When Edson had finished his apprenticeship the two brothers opened the Stirling Foundry in Pier Street.

The discovery of gold created a minor boom in the new colony and the Ledger Brothers, as their firm was later known, cast many special pipes for the Kalgoorlie water supply scheme. These at the time of course were the largest castings ever made in Western Australia and they were castings weighing about four tons each, or about four foot six in diameter. They were very special pipes and then for the pumping stations along the way up to Kalgoorlie. From then on mining equipment, batteries and other equipment for the mines were developed and manufactured to suit the needs of the industry opening up in Kalgoorlie and Coolgardie. Business was prospering and the pay roll was in the vicinity of 40 to 50 people in 1896.

5 At that time Edson married Annie Frances Sumner and she also bore him four girls and five boys, all but one of them living today. Joseph Edson, the founder died in 1924 and Edson died in 1940. Throughout the history of J and E Ledger Pty Ltd, as the firm became known, progress has been linked with the State's development for over 90 years and the Ledger engineering group has supported industrial development in its most practical aspects and now with the Mitchell Cotts merger world wide experience and capabilities can be brought to bear on future prospects.

CS And your father was Edson?

FL That's correct.

CS And you were born in October 1899?

FL 1899. Born in Lord Street, East Perth.

CS And where in the family are you?

FL I was the third eldest. The second eldest son.

CS And can you remember anything of your early days in the family home?

- 7 FL Yes, in the early days of course things were. . . In the horse and buggy days, transport was by rail or by tram or horse and buggy or horse and cart as the needs deserved. We had in our foundry delivery transport by horse and cart, rail to Kalgoorlie and so on. And of course at stage of population Western Australia was very small and the town of Perth was only beginning to get established. What else do you want?
- CS Can you remember-you went to the Mount Lawley Primary School in about 1906? Can you remember anything of those school days?
- FL Well again that was in my very junior days, but naturally as all school children of that age one didn't like school too much. But I went from there to Perth Boys' School at the age of fourteen and after going through Seventh Standard of the industrial course at Perth Boys' School I then started an apprenticeship in 1915 with the firm of J and E Ledger. I was apprenticed to general engineering i.e. fitting and turning, black smithing and foundry.
- From then on they were days of 48 hours a week and I remember starting as an apprentice on 7/6d. a week for 48 hours and of course apprentices weren't paid for any overtime, that was all considered extra learning as a bonus for the apprentice. That's how one had to turn their hand to everything really. In the earlier days it wasn't so highly specialised as it has become now where a tradesman is only allowed to do his own work and very little of a complementary nature to it. So one became fairly adept at applying oneself to an all round obligation and requirement of the trade in general. So when one finished their time they were pretty confident all round tradesmen. Unfortunately during my apprenticeship the 1914-18 war was on and I enlisted when I became 18, but of course with the war finishing in 1918 while my apprenticeship was temporarily interrupted I continued on with it after I was discharged from the Australian Flying Corps, which I had joined.
- 6 CS And how long were you in the Australian Flying Corps?
- FL Well naturally in those days it was early days of the Australian Flying Corps and when one enlisted the procedure was you enlisted in the AIF and then if opportunities occurred, well then volunteers were called for for different sections of the fighting force. I nominated and was selected for the Australian Flying Corps, one of each from Western Australia. And I was to complete my course of training at Point Cook in Victoria, which of course was finished because of the war finishing in November 1918. So when I returned to Western Australia on discharge I then joined the firm again to complete my apprenticeship and go back into the trade. But of course like everything else after the war the whole of the community and of course naturally business had to readjust itself to reduced circumstances, both in employment possibilities and similarly contracts. And our. . . We went through a pretty torrid time in trying to make ends meet.
- But about this time I also took on private study in the International Correspondence Schools a complete engineering course, which together with night school I filled in a lot of the gaps in my engineering experience.
- CS So you were studying, part of your apprenticeship was conducted through night school was it?

6 FL Yes.

CS That was from the Perth Technical School?

FL Perth Technical School, yes. But also too naturally I took on sport and I had taken on sport right from school days, the main ones being cricket and football. And I continued on with football and yachting after I left school, going through junior grades and finally playing league football for both Perth and East Perth.

CS You were very interesting in football, how did you come to be playing for two league teams?

FL Well my loyalties and love was always with East Perth, naturally being born in East Perth and both my father and uncle were committee men of the East Perth Club. So I suppose through all that atmosphere and so on I emerged or moved towards the East Perth loyalties. I played junior football with East Perth before then and then I was asked to go into league ranks and the first scratch match we played against Perth and at half time they were changing teams around, trying out oh somewhere in the vicinity of 40 or 50 players, and while I was having a rub down at half time the then coach Phil Matson came over with a paper for me to sign which I didn't understand as meaning much, but I signed it, and they said I was right for the league side. When I got dressed and came out of the room somebody came up to me and they said "Your name's Ledger?" I said "Yes." He said "How would like to play football in the eastern states?" I said "Well, what's it all about?" It wasn't as well known with the procedures and possibilities going from west to east as it is today. But I was anxious to get extra trade experience, so I said "Righto, well if you can get me a good job in the eastern states I'll go." This was for the Essendon Football Club and so away I went and having got over there they asked me if I had signed any papers. And I then recalled that I had, which meant I was tied to East Perth. So they said "Oh well we'll have to get a clearance." So I said "Well you do all that. I'll carry on here." So I played junior football for one of the Essendon League Clubs and in the meantime of course they set the wheels in motion for me to get this clearance from East Perth. Well whatever went on East Perth wouldn't give me a clearance and I wasn't over worried about that aspect but I was worried about getting a position in Melbourne. And so of course time was going on and I was still continuing playing junior football and of course clearances have got to be through by June 30th. So the last match I played junior football over there I got injured and this was getting on into June, and as no clearance had come through and of course no job I decided to come back to Western Australia. But I was met when I got back to Perth by the Perth Football Club and of course Perth had call on my services as well as East Perth. In those days that was in the district. They offered to fix up my ankle, which was the injury, and so I went to Perth. I played with Perth for a season and a half, but my mind was still on the trade.

2 CS And what year was that, can you remember?

FL Oh about. . . I should think about 19. . . 1920 and so anyway the firm was getting bigger and bigger and getting more challenging. And so I decided to give football away and that's it came East Perth and Perth.

CS So you went back to continue your studies. How long was your apprenticeship?

FL Six years.

40 CS And you undertook examinations as you said from the Perth Technical College?

FL Studies yes, but. . . I was doing this correspondence course with the International Correspondence Schools and then came a period when the business was starting to move and became more demanding on time, when the 1923 strike, engineers' strike started. That lasted for between five and six months. So the whole of the engineering shops in Perth were closed down, but rather than be idle I got a job in Northam and I used to do working from Northam as a base. Work on farm machinery, steam boilers and portable steam engines, which were the motive power then for the chaff cutting contractors, and gained quite a lot of good experience.

But in the interim period I had become engaged to become married, this was some two years previously. And so when the strike was over I decided to get married.

CS Can you remember what the strike was about?

FL No, I don't really because I was never interested in that side of things. No, I can't remember now what it was all about, but. . .

CS So you returned to Perth from Northam and returned to the firm?

FL Returned not directly to the firm. I got another position in Perth in a motor body building firm and. . .

CS That was Daly's, Wellington Street?

4 FL Daly's, yes. And or Daniel White's as it was then known, I remember that now. And again added to my experience.

CS By this stage you had finished the apprenticeship?

FL Oh yes. But then when I had finished my apprenticeship I was earning £3.5.0d. a week. It's just very small compared to what they earn today. But anyway. . .

CS So it was in 1923 that you were married?

FL Yes, March 10th.

CS That was when you returned from Northam?

FL Well I don't. . . Yes, it would be about 1923, yes it would be about oh I suppose six or twelve months after the strike I suppose. About six months.

CS And you married Gladys Lyons?

FL Yes.

CS Of Lyons and Hart?

FL Yes, Councillor Lyons at that time, Perth City Councillor.

CS And you. . . the wedding was in Trinity Church?

FL That's right, yes.

8 CS And the reception was at your . . . her . . .

FL Mother's house.

CS And they lived in?

FL Charles Street, North Perth.

CS So when you were married where did you set up home?

FL In Mount Lawley.

CS Can you remember anything about the suburb in those days?

FL Well Mount Lawley was a growing suburb and it was handy to the works and I was only renting a house then, I hadn't built of course I didn't have the money, that's. . . Oh we lived there for a couple of years and by then I'd saved enough to think about building. So I was able to buy a block in . . . again in Mount Lawley, near the river, and subsequently built on it with a loan from the War Service Homes.

CS And by this stage you had gone back to the family firm. Could you tell us how it was developing and what effect the depression had on the firm?

FL Yes. I'd gone back to the firm and by this time I had quite a good measure of responsibility and I was determined that we'd progress and improve on it to where it was at that stage. And of course with engineering which is a comparatively highly capitalized industry compared to others, that every man you put on meant another machine and capital expenditure, and of course in turn subsequently a bigger building. But anyhow this was the challenge and we went along fairly satisfactorily progressing all the time, improving a bit each year, and then of course the depression came along and well that was a real survival test then. We had to cut down right to the minimum. I went back onto the machines again myself and there were times I was keeping three machines going, which had to be done to economise and survive.

2 CS So you cut back on men, did you?

FL Yes, yes and it was even difficult to continue giving apprentices sufficient work that we had at the time, but we struggled through and then I was determined that we would diversify. And instead of just having everything locked up in engineering, I developed a sales organisation and took on agency lines as well. And we progressed again and naturally expanded and then found ourselves in a position of wanting more land for more buildings and I purchased four houses alongside the old company's premises and we expanded across those. And we continued to expand and grow and so I then bought property out at Welshpool, about three and three quarter acres, which was a big move and. . .

CS What period was this?

FL Oh I would think that would be in about 1936.

CS By this stage the family firm had become a company though, had it not?

FL Yes, yes, we formed it into a company, I think the date was about 1934 or 5, yes about 1935, and the uncle had died in the meantime of course.

12 CS Were you the only brother in the business?

FL No, I had an elder brother who had been in the business, but during World War One England had called for volunteers to go to England on munition work and he was selected amongst others and when he came from there he decided that he wasn't that keen on going back to the trade, he went into engineering sales and with a firm or company, William Adams. And also then my . . . one of my younger brothers, who had gone through accountancy, decided to join the firm.

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CS So your brother joined as the accountant?

FL Yes. Then became secretary of the company. So there were only two of us in there then and then we went on progressing and expanding our activities and getting contracts in the eastern states. There wasn't sufficient for our expansion to keep us continuously busy with the bigger employment staff we had, so we ventured into the eastern states market and won some contracts. And I well remember one, I think it was the first contract that I realised as I was on a point of getting when I was asked to go over to Melbourne and see the board of directors on this project I had quoted and during the course of the interview one of them said to me, he said "Tell me Mr Ledger," he said "How many blacks do you employ?" It staggered me I think they thought perhaps we employed blacks for perhaps the price that we had put in for it and got the job. But I then knew that I had won the contract. But - so that was a start of the intrusion into the eastern states markets and this. . . We had contracts subsequently in Adelaide, Melbourne and Sydney and then later in Queensland, which we still hold.

CS And what sort of local work were you doing?

FL Oh we were general engineers. We had to apply ourselves to practically everything, to printing machinery, brick making and pottery work, all sorts of work to keep the pot boiling. But while it was very interesting I often used to say that every job you completed your brains went out of the gate with it. But anyway it all built up to my confidence in subsequently having a go at the eastern states and. . . which we were very successful with.

9 CS And you bought this land in Welshpool, had you built on it?

FL Oh I built on that and it became too small for us, and it was then that I - not immediately then, but when I could afford it - I knew that with the. . . this is jumping ahead a long way, but with the iron ore development or the potential of the nor'west that if we could get into those contracts we'd want considerably more ground than we had because we had extended very extensively into structural engineering and when you enter into that sort of work you have got to have a lot of space. But I did eventually buy twenty acres out at Kewdale and today of course that's where we are now and that's where. . . that's practically covered now. That is due in no small way to our merging with or selling to Mitchell Cotts of England and I was very careful to select a partner for this because with engineering as I did mention before it was always very capital hungry and the dividends weren't always good. But this company when we talked about this possibility I could see that they'd be prepared to carry on the philosophy and policy and move with the expansion of Western Australia. And it was when they came into it that we were able to develop Kewdale and now it's one of the best, I would say, in Australia of its kind, engineering works and. . .

35 CS When did that merger take place, that was much later?

FL That was in 1969 and we've carried on very happy in relationship ever since. I'm still a director of the board there, but purely in an advisory capacity.

CS Can we go back a bit to the war, how did that affect you and how were you involved?

FL We. . . In Western Australia we were very badly served by considerations for distribution of contracts, war contracts. It mainly centred round the eastern states firms, naturally I suppose geographically. But I happened to be President of the Ironmasters Association at that time and accepting that responsibility I felt it was my job to go east and prevail on, not only the central Government, the various Government departments and the ministers about Western Australia getting a proper consideration for their share of contracts because under the Manpower Act there was not only Western Australia being denuded of work in civilian contracts, but under the Manpower Act they couldn't get any security from being called up and so we were going to lose our manpower as well, and they were highly skilled tradesmen. And so after a lot of representations we were able to get proper consideration and we started to get contracts or advice to tender from Western Australia. I couldn't estimate how much Western Australia won in contracts because they were so varied and so general, but it made all the difference to Western Australia's development in the engineering firms, their techniques, know how. And so in that sense while wars don't benefit anybody I suppose you can say that it did benefit Australia in the engineering fields generally throughout Australia by doing a lot of their own work.

7 CS And your firm was involved in munitions production?

FL Munitions yes, machine tools mainly.

CS Which lead to your becoming. . .or going on to the committee for munitions production?

FL Yes, I was invited, not only in Western Australia but by the Commonwealth Government to go on to their advisory committees and this gave me a greater insight into requirements and how the necessity was for a responsible approach to the services required by the Navy, the Army and the Air Force and again it was a great educational experience. And I was also asked to. . . there was quite a shortage of tradesmen by this time in Australia generally of good tradesmen and so Australia embarked on an immigration. . . through an Immigration Planning Council to bring tradesmen from Europe and. . .

CS You were involved with that too?

FL I was on that. . . invited to join that council and again we in Western Australia had to really tussle with the eastern states to get our share of tradesmen that were coming in. But still it worthwhile.

CS How did that scheme work?

FL Well it worked through this Planning Council and we had these constant meetings, which meant a lot of travel as far as I was concerned for Western Australia, but each state put forward what sort of tradesmen they wanted and of course they were mainly in the metal trades, fitters or turners or boiler makers, machinists generally, draughtsmen, design draughtsmen and

4 so on. And so each state would put forward a list to the Planning Council of how many tradesmen they wanted in each of these categories and then they'd be grouped together and the Planning Council, who had their representatives in the different countries of the world with which we had migration agreements, would try and sift out those interviewed at the other end, our potential migrants, and then they would be shipped out here. The onus then came on to the recipient company or firm who received these allocations of tradesmen to find them homes and so on. Well of course it was like everything else, there a well known fact that one tradesman equals about three labourers, in other words he brings work for three other men, and this then in the latter part of the war became a housing shortage. And so we wanted brick layers and attendant assistants to brick layers, and so it became a broad coverage of seven different trades. And there was always a shortage, right up to the almost the last year of the war, they were still battling to get the requisite number of tradesmen.

CS So ultimately you think it was successful?

FL Oh yes, yes. Well a success under difficult circumstances and. . . but taking it all into consideration it was well organised and I think well done. Australia's war effort benefited very considerably to the whole contribution and so the Planning. . . Immigration Planning Council made quite a contribution to the overall munition effort.

CS You were also involved in the Insitute of Foundrymen?

9 FL Yes well that was another growth development, one of great benefit to the State. I found that in foundries there had been a growth and a good practical approach to development with the tradesmen, but there was a lacking of knowledge in a technical side of foundry work. In other words mainly with metallurgy. The foundryman didn't know what. . . his knew his melting metal and what was pouring and how it should be poured, but he didn't know what went into it. He knew it was scrap iron and pig iron but that was the finish. And so I got a lot of support for the idea when I first canvassed this and so we did develop it, but unfortunately the unions were only luke warm about it and I couldn't get the full support that I wanted and that was the men on the floor. But anyway we persevered with it and again it was most informative. We used to conduct these night lectures in the different homes or then subsequently when we got more members in we used to hire a tea rooms in Perth and have a cup of tea afterwards and a talk and so on after the lectures or the slides that we had to put on with the epidiascope and that's it. It was most interesting. With the war effort, for instance take aerial bombs, which had never been manufactured in Western Australia, I don't know that they had been manufactured in Australia until that war, and I was asked whether we had established ourselves, J and E Ledger, as one of the leading foundries, I was asked whether I thought we could make aerial bombs. Well quite frankly I didn't know anything about aerial bombs and. . . but I realised that they would be high tensile cast iron in them and you had to have control of the mixtures of cast iron. And so because of that enquiry this started off, this Institute of Foundrymen, and it was surprising what came out of that because I believe it improved the technique and the control of foundry practices in Western Australia considerably.

CS So that founded in about 1940 then, when you became President?

2 FL Yes, round about then, yes.

CS And who gave these lectures?

FL We used to get for instance dominating it mostly were lecturers from universities or university trained men in metallurgy. And the University helped considerably with. . . they carry out a lot of tests for the industry and of course they did at the time for the Department of Munitions, test fires and so on from the different foundries.

CS And did you have any personal involvement with the University at that stage?

FL Well not really. I think it was Professor Oldham, no that would be before your time I think. He was a Professor of Engineering. Perhaps another facet of our experience over war time conditions was I was invited to join a Manpower Appeal Court, which sat in Western Australia for the purpose of hearing hardship cases where, as I mentioned earlier, that when manpower came on and we were working under contracts to different munitions projects that if for any reason an apprentice or a man wanted to leave you and you didn't want him to go he could appeal to the Manpower Appeal Court. And on that court there were only three, there was a magistrate, an employers' representative, which was myself, and an employees' representative, and it was surprising the number of cases. You'd think it would be fairly easy, but it wasn't. There were difficult cases to hear, to give justification for everything, and we got quite a number of difficult cases. But that's incidental to all the structuring that went on or additive constructing that was not heard of during the war years that had to be done.

17 CS Just after the war you became involved in the Chamber of Manufacturers, as President, did you not?

FL Well I was a member of the Chamber of Manufacturers for many years and of course with a growing business, as we were then, I couldn't give much time to its policy matters, but I was like everybody else, sometimes dissatisfied with how things were going. And you know it's a well known fact that if you speak up at a meeting you're either a fool or you're invited to do something and this was what happened and, but, so I felt obligated then if I was complaining about this and the other not being right then I should answer the challenge and try and do something about it, so this was what happened. It happened with the Ironmasters' it happened with the Chamber of Manufacturers, and subsequently with the Federation.

CS WA Employers' Federation?

FL Yes, and I suppose it has happened with other committees too. With it all we can claim we had Western Australian well established and respected in the eastern states and all over Australia by our efforts here. I well remember that, I mentioned about aerial bombs as an illustration of manufacture in Western Australia, but when I was in Melbourne on one occasion I was asked if we could make a certain type of machine, highly precision machine, and I said "Well if you are talking to me I can say quite truthfully I can't. I haven't got the plant to do it, but I do know somebody who could." So he said "Well I have got to have a decision on this," he said "by Monday." I think this was on the Friday and as I was going to stay over in Melbourne over the weekend I got on to the phone and got in touch with this particular managing director of a firm and I said "You can make these machines." I knew his shop and he said "Oh,"

7 he said "No, we couldn't touch it." I said "Of course you could." I said "Give me your shop and I would do it." "Oh" he said "If you feel that confident," he said "I suppose I'd have to say yes." I said "Yes." "Well," he said "righto." I said "Now that's a promise, I don't want to upset these people." This was the Board of Area Management in Melbourne. So again to cut a long story short, I was able to. . . When I got back on the Tuesday, I think it was (it was a two day trip to Perth on an aircraft) and so anyhow he wondered what I had let him in for. But that led to a very big development of that particular company and. . .

CS Could we now talk about the development of the North West and your involvement with that during the 60's?

FL Yes, I suppose we could take this back to both my personal involvement and to State involvement. I was invited by the Brand Government, as I have been down over the years from the McLarty Government days and the Hawke Government days on the Advisory Committee to the Government, and it was just at that time that interest was being displayed in the iron ore development of the Nor'west. Now during the Menzies Government's era earlier on the advice they'd got about iron ore and even scrap iron was that we didn't have much iron ore in Australia. And so that had put a ban on export of pig iron or anything of that nature at that time. And it will be remembered that this was why Bob Menzies got the nickname, or Sir Robert as he was later known, of 'Pig Iron Bob' because there was waterside trouble over the export of BHP pig iron. That legislation was brought down to try and limit the amount of export because of the supposed shortage of iron ore in Western Australia, not only in Western Australia it was Australia. And of course being in the engineering game and using pig iron and so on, which used to be imported from England and Wales and even coke too into Western Australia and Australia as a whole, I knew all this and the lifting subsequently of this ban helped the development of the iron ore in Western Australia. It was well known in Western Australia that we had big deposits up the Nor'west, but it was useless because of the ban for export because it was far too much for consumption in Australia, but with the ban on it wasn't a viable proposition. So at that time of course, this was when people started to get, and I am talking now more to bring it up to date, during the Brand Government's time, and if I remember correctly Sir Charles Court, or Mr Charles Court at that time, was Minister for Railways and the Nor'west, two very difficult portfolios. But typical of the man who subsequently proved his value to this State, he threw himself into all this and made a great study of it and in conjunction with others intimately associated with the Nor'west decided that they would try and get some capital involved in it. And so one of the first schemes that I remember was when he was, Sir Charles or Charles Court then, was trying to get the enthusiasm whipped up amongst the business fraternity, particularly in the Nor'west. And even Western Australians, old Western Australians, in the metropolitan area in particular in business knew little about it, So I was then President of the Chamber of Manufacturers, I think that was the same time, I decided to help the thinking of the Minister by chartering a DC3 and inviting 23 businessmen, which was the capacity of the aircraft, to pay their own fares and so on to go on this trip up the Nor'west to have a look see. We went up as far as Darwin and I remember when we arrived at Kununurra we went out to what was then known as the Bandicoot Bar, which is a solid rock formation across the. . . it was dry then. . . the Ord River and we stood on this bar and had a look at it and visualised what the Government was thinking of. You know damming the Ord River so that they could develop this Ord River Scheme. And of course everybody now knows what it's all about. But it was a great vision to

67 build that and this was the start of a lot of educational tours by both Employers' Federation and the Chamber of Manufacturers and the business fraternity and including eastern states people on these trips to the north.

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FL This started a general interest throughout Australia, including a continuing number of trips organised by the Chamber of Manufacturers and Employers' Federation and Chambers of Commerce, including eastern states visitors to have a look for themselves at all the development possibilities.

CS And you were also involved with a trip or a visit of overseas investors to look at the Esperance development, were you not?

FL Oh yes, yes. The . . . I think in regard to the developments generally of Western Australia one should mention the development of Esperance. During the Hawke Government period of office, his Government decided to send a mission abroad to England and America to investigate possibilities of a development at Esperance. It will be recalled that Esperance in those early days was a very barren stretch of country and was selling at round about 4/6d. an acre, and a lot of country was taken up at that price, but they ran into all sorts of difficulties because there had not been any thorough investigation of what was necessary for the country, for that part of Western Australia. A lot of trace element had . . . superphosphate, had to be developed to suit the country, a lot of grasses had to be crossbred and so on to run sheep on, and it was found that . . . by a subsequent Government, that a research station was necessary in the area to experiment and develop this.

But getting back to the Tonkin led mission, which I was invited to join. They then had to, amongst one of the responsibilities, see the Chase Manhattan Bank in New York in regard to the finance that had been arranged for development down there. That was successful in this respect that later American interests became interested in Esperance and Mr Art Linklater became prominent investing a lot of money down there.

6 CS Who were the other members of the mission, which was in 1958 was it?

FL Yes, there was. . . Mr Tonkin led the mission, there was myself and Mr Gordon Miller who was then President of the Chamber of Commerce, and Mr Bert Telfer, Secretary of the Chamber. . . Secretary of the Mines Department, and who else?

CS And you went as a representative really of the Employers' Federation, did you?

FL Chamber of Manufacturers, yes. Anyhow then it followed on from there when the Brand Government came in that Esperance had all the earmarks of potentiality, but a lot of research work had to be done. And it needed still more capital, which wasn't available from Western Australian or Australian sources. So another mission was projected to try and get English capital interested, not only in that but in Western Australia generally. And so Mr Court then was Minister for Industrial Development and he arranged for nine industrialists or commercial people from England, leading commercial people from London and England generally to come out and have a look at Western Australia. And again I was given the responsibility of chartering a DC3 and taking them down to Esperance, round Albany and all round those spots, showing them around and describing

4 it to them and with the idea of them putting money into projects in Western Australia generally. But they were bankers, industrialists and commercial men and so this was all part of trying to get people with the money to invest in Western Australia because it was such a big country and wanted a lot of money for development.

CS And do you think that this approach was successful?

FL Well it is not always easy. . . easy to judge that because you never get or very rarely get, unless you see an outstanding bonanza, an immediate reaction, it takes some time to . . . for the gospel to be repeated and approaches, reapproaches to be made and so on. But I think it all has had that general overall interest in Western Australia that it justified its costs and interest. This was another one of them, that Centaur visit.

CS Yes in 1964 was it not, you were. . .

FL 1963.

CS '63 you were the national leader of an Australian trade mission to South East Asia.

FL Yes.

CS Could you tell us about that?

FL Well I was invited by the Associated Chambers of Commerce of Australia to see if I would lead this mission. And naturally Mr Court, the then Minister for Western Australian Industrial Development, was vitally interested and I had been approached before, but I was so busy and my health was breaking up at that time and I had had to refuse. But finally I was persuaded by Mr Court to take it on and it was when I started building this house. And so not having had previous experience of a mission of this nature I accepted it with trepidation naturally because I hadn't been in on any of the previous conferences that the various Chambers had had on all this and well I said yes on the Thursday and left for Sydney on the Saturday and a ship was due in Sydney coming down on a maiden voyage from London in the next three or four days.

1 CS The Centaur?

FL Yes. Well she was designed for the Nor'west run, in other words for the cattle mainly, but designed perfectly for passengers as well. And she was fully air conditioned and it might be expected with the big mob of cattle on board that the smells from the cattle would become offensive, but they didn't really, not that we had it that trip, but I know from trips I have had on her since. But she was perfectly designed. But it meant a terrific amount of work to get her ready as a trade ship because we had to remove all the cattle pens from between decks up forward and prepare her as a show piece. There was Queensland, New South Wales and Western Australia, yes Melbourne came into it and Western Australia. South Australia didn't exhibit. But we had 100 men on board. I made it a must that my wife go with me because I had this trouble and a female secretary and three mannequins and the proprietress of the fabric and dress show that they were going to show. So in all there were about four or five women on board, but the rest was 100 men. And well we had to get this ship all fitted out. We had to put on a couple of carpenters and. . . as well as the ships' crew, dismantling and re-erecting and altering it around and carpeting floors, wool all carpets. And a lot of

39 money was put into the exhibits.

CS So the exhibits were on the ship itself?

FL We had to put the exhibits on, yes, from the different states, whatever it was. We had tractors from Chamberlains, for instance, on board here as well as other lines. Lyons and Hart had an exhibit on board and. . .

CS And did your firm exhibit?

FL No, we. . . We weren't looking for overseas markets at that stage. We knew we couldn't compete with the cheap labour. You see where they have a labour industry, it's a cost industry, we couldn't do that. Anyway the. . . it was quite a successful trip. It was a seven weeks trip to Hong Kong and back. We had four days in Singapore, two days in Bangkok, I think it was two days in Manilla and four days in Osaka, and four days in Hong Kong. And it was acclaimed as a great success by all and that was a very exhausting trip, a nice trip in this way that you did have. . . in my case it was necessary of course, two or three days at sea before you got to the next port. But it got a lot of press. We had they say one of the biggest press conferences that of that time that had ever been held, and that was in Bangkok, about 40 press men there. And again more experience, you know talking through interpreters and so on. But it was a real eye opener and then of course before we. . . as soon as we left Hong Kong we had to dismantle our ship because we couldn't bring any of our stuff back that was mounted on the ship back to Australia without paying duty on it. And oh it was a sham to see some of the stuff we had to throw overboard, some of the beautiful carpets you know. But still it had to be done and it had to be done by the time we got to Sydney and then. . .

2 CS You had already been to Asia, we didn't discuss this earlier, as an Australian Employers' representative to the ILO meeting?

FL Oh yes, that was in 1949.

CS The Asian Regional Conference in Ceylon?

FL That's correct, yes that was a fortnight's conference. That was a great experience too. I took my wife to that one. But I was, you know, comparatively young and that sort of thing in those days and most interesting and informative. But it was amazing to me that in places like India and Ceylon, old nations that had never progressed, because this was in 1949 when work loads were carried in trucks then and not in ox wagons and so on. But there is the sad fact there was only a few trucks about the place, still going on with the old oxen pulling the wagons and that sort of thing, and the women doing all the work. The big boss you know. . . You know I had some snaps at the time taken of a bit of road work going on and the women there doing all the pick and shovel work and the lifting of the metal onto the. . . loading up the trucks and the big boss just telling them to put it down here and there, you know and. . .

CS And what was your role then at that?

FL Oh I was representing the employers of Australia at that time. Well what was I? I was Chairman of the Manufacturers or something, I forget now. I think I was on the Executive of the Chamber of Manufacturers, I think.

CS So you had to come back and report on it?

30 FL Yes, yes, but. . .

CS To come back to the development of Western Australia. Your firm was involved in some large projects itself. Could you tell us about those?

FL Oh yes, we. . . We made the first ship loader, taking iron ore out of Mount Goldsworthy. They used to load 3,000 tons an hour and you would virtually see the ship go down like that, but, once she was being loaded. And we made a ship loader for Alcoa down at Fremantle or Kwinana, there first. And the Ord River Scheme we made the cranes for that. We made the cranes for the Narrows Bridge job. This was part of what I was saying earlier, with this I could see that if we were going to expand we would want a lot more room and this was why I bought that land at Kewdale really. That's our. . . These were all biggish structural steel jobs.

We...I think this is a feather in the cap of Western Australia that we export right over to Mount Isa from here. All that freight differential. And that's. . . We've been doing that for years now and we're still continuing repeat orders.

CS Sir Frank you have been very involved with the development of Western Australia and in 1963 you were knighted for your services to industry. Can you remember. . . Well obviously you can remember. . . You went to. . . You received this in Canberra?

FL Yes. Yes, there were several Australians, prominent Australians that had done similar work for different causes and so on knighted at the time. And quite a big occasion at Yarralumla and. . .

7 CS Then later in 1968 you were awarded the Correspondence. . .

FL Man of the Year.

CS Man of the Year Award.

FL International Correspondence School.

CS For that study that you did all those many years ago?

FL Yes, yes. Well. . .

CS What is this award?

FL Well they select a man, if I. . . He's obviously got to prove himself before they select anybody. He's got to be apparently a student of theirs and I know. . . oh yes I forget his christian name, Hornibrook from Queensland got it one year, Sir Robert Webster from New South Wales another year and I was the first Western Australian to get it.

CS So they had been watching you for all those years?

FL Apparently, yes.

CS You are still intensely interested obviously in the development of Western Australia and recently you donated some money to the University for an advanced management course.

FL Yes.

2 CS Could you tell us why you have done this and what you intended?

FL Well this was prompted by a very early desire of mine when I was in the business in Pier Street and employing hand picked apprentices, and I used to take a great interest in the boys then. I wasn't as big then, I had the time to make a closer study of them, and I remember one of my boys, I think he was in about his second year of apprenticeship, very bright boy, keen, very well mannered and the son of Italian parents, Australian born, and I said to the foreman one day, I said "That lad down there" (mentioning the name) I said "There's something wrong." And he said "He's half asleep." I said "You'd better have a chat to him and see if there's something wrong." I said and I said "Let me know what he has to say." So he came back after and he said "Oh he said he'd like to come and see you." I said "Righto." So he came in and I said "Now what's your problem?" "Well," he said "I'm tired out." He said "I do a milk round before I come in here," he said "to help the family." At that time there was a labour shortage and even boys would get a good job on a milk round and he was doing this before he came in at eight o'clock to start his day's work. And I thought well this is a darn pity, there must be a lot more boys like this because of the need of money, you know parents not being able to help them. Could be thrown on the industrial scrap heap. I got to know my boys pretty well and they were all worthwhile, they were real triers, and I can say this later on in life they have all done well for themselves, those that I know are still living and. . . But that's what prompted me to do something and. . . But apparently I am not as close to the scene now as I used to be, but there is a need for good management, people that understand young people or younger people than themselves if they go up to get a position of management they should know people well, know them backwards, their aches and their pains and all that sort of thing and get to understanding them properly, and that's one of the reasons why I decided to do this.

7 There is a charity trust set up and they make the recommendations to me and. . . not that I as a trust do anything about it, but they look to me for guidance lines. They wishes to carry it out they way I want it carried out and. . . The idea of this being to get a better understanding of the needs of people, their desires and ambitions and how to put your own knowledge in an interpretative way to them. And I believe there is a gap there that could be well filled and could create a better understanding between the employer and the employee.

CS So it is to be used for scholarships?

FL Yes. Well your scheme isn't called a scholarship a course.

CS An advancement management course, yes.

FL Yes. I am hoping that I can live long enough to see that come into fruition and see what happens.

CS I am sure you will. Thank you very much for your time with this interview.

FL Thank you, good.