

Preserving Memories

A joint project of the City of West Torrens and the West Torrens Historical Society

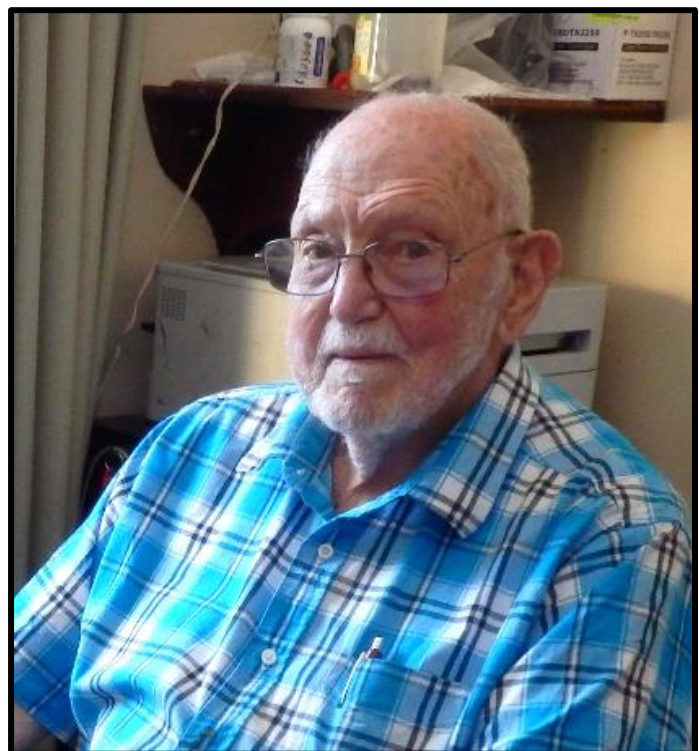
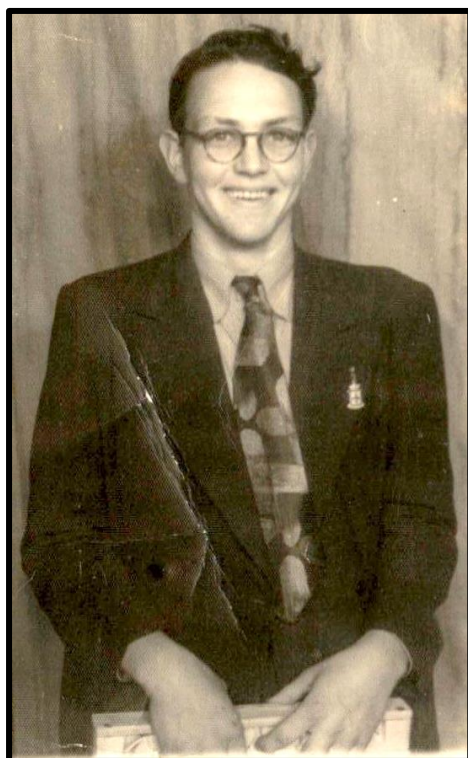
COLIN DRENNAN, Marleston

'I'D PULL THINGS APART JUST TO SEE HOW THEY WORKED.'

Colin Drennan has spent most of his life working as a mechanic in the West Torrens area. His accomplishments are supported by his success working in AMPOL and long term clients at Drennan's Motor Repairs.

He has extensively travelled outback Australia in the reliable, but of course well maintained, Landcruiser, nicknamed Fred.

He is an IT savvy nonagenarian, with some great insight of the motor industry over the 1940s to the 2000s, who still works out in the garage.



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Family Background

Colin's ancestors came from Ireland & Scotland. His great grandfather, John Drennan (1843-1921, came to Australia in 1879 on the *Argonaut* under contract to J.H. Angus, Merino Stud "Hill River", and settled at Emu Flat, near Clare in the mid north of South Australia around 1880.

His wife Ann Murray Drennan (nee Lucas) (1846-1900) came a year later, arriving after three months on board the *Corona* with their nine children. Then they had another five children. Colin quips '*No TV in those days*'.

The family were spread through the mid north, around Blyth, Clare, Emu Flat, through to Everard Central, north of Balaklava. In 1901, John remarried a widow, Margaret Longmuir (nee McLaughlan) in Clare. In 1910 they moved to 'Roseneath' in Hughes Street, Woodville.



John and Ann Drennan circa 1890

John was actively involved in the Port Adelaide and Woodville community, as Justice of the Peace, acting magistrate, and Elder and Minister in the Presbyterian Church. He sat on the board of the Scotch College Council leaving money on his death for the 'Drennan Scholarship' for a student entering the Presbyterian ministry.

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Thomas Everard Drennan

John and Ann's third child, John Carson Drennan (1868-1939), married Ada Lucy Virgo (1878-1963), on the 3rd of June 1900 at Ada's home, the *residence of Thomas G. Virgo*, (her father), at Hamley Bridge.

Colin's father, Thomas Everard Drennan, was born in Everard, (north of Balaklava), in South Australia, on 27th October 1900. Tom was christened at the home of his grandfather Thomas Virgo.

John and Ada had another son, Allan Gilchrist in 1902 in Blyth.

Around 1902 John, Ada and their children moved to Moora (north of Perth) in Western Australia, where Marion Irene was born in 1903 (Koogan WA). Their last child Lucas Arnold died in infancy in 1906 (Yatala SA).

My grandfather moved from north of Adelaide and went across to Western Australia and he worked all over the State ... but when in Fremantle they lived in 14 Palin Street, Palmyra and Mum was in Beaconsfield which was sort of next door.

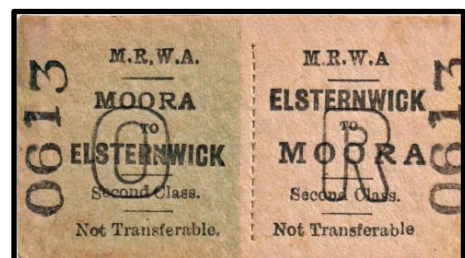
Thomas grew up attended Moora and then Elsternwick School, south of Moora, from 1908. (Colin had Thomas' school reports, baptism certificate and some postcards and sent them to the Moora Historical Society).

He was brought up on the farm and then Thomas boarded at 14 Palin Street, Palmyra. His father John later left the farm and purchased this property.

After leaving school he became an apprentice Pastry cook.



Circa 1902 Thomas (left) and Allan



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Hetty Chester



Colin's mother, Hetty Chester, was born on 13th January 1901 at Curedale Street, Fremantle, Western Australia.

Hetty's family originated from Chester, England.

William George Chester (1871-1916) married Ada Bertha Theresa Howers (1877-1903), in 1897 in Fremantle, Western Australia.

They had three children, Mary Ann (1898-1998), Hetty (1901-2002), and William Jack (1903-1987).

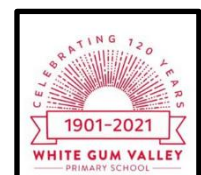
Bertha died after the birth of third child William, in 1903.

William remarried Mary Elizabeth Raynor (1886-1936) in 1904, moving to a farm called *Stockton*, near Pingelly in the southwest of Western Australia.

Hetty then had two half-brothers, Henry George, known as Harry (1906-1973), and Arthur Gra Withnell (1908-1980).

Hetty attended the White Gum Valley School, and when her father died they moved to a rental home in Beaconsfield. Colin had her drawing books and sent them to the Fremantle Historical Society.

Hetty worked as a waitress in a Fremantle Tea Room and here she met Thomas.

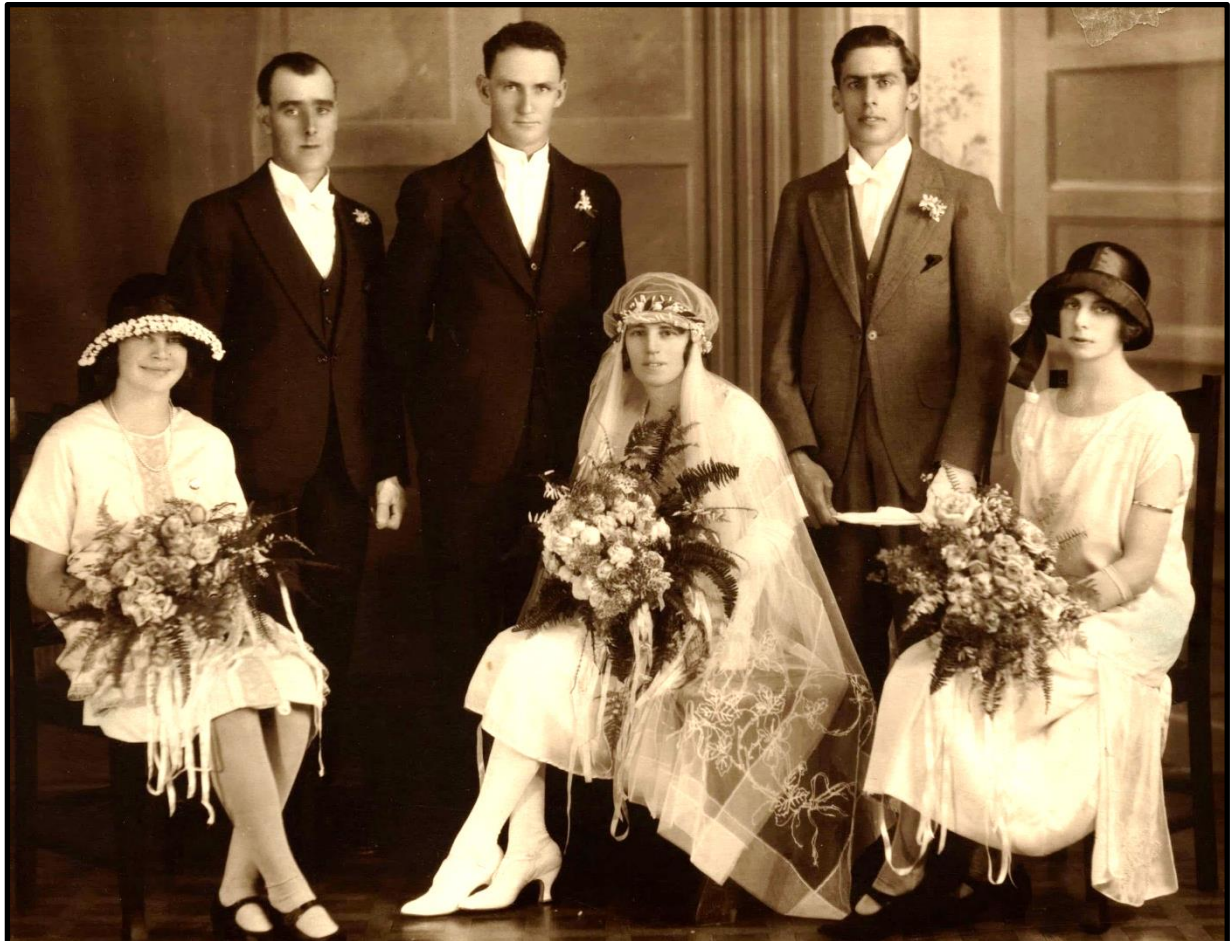


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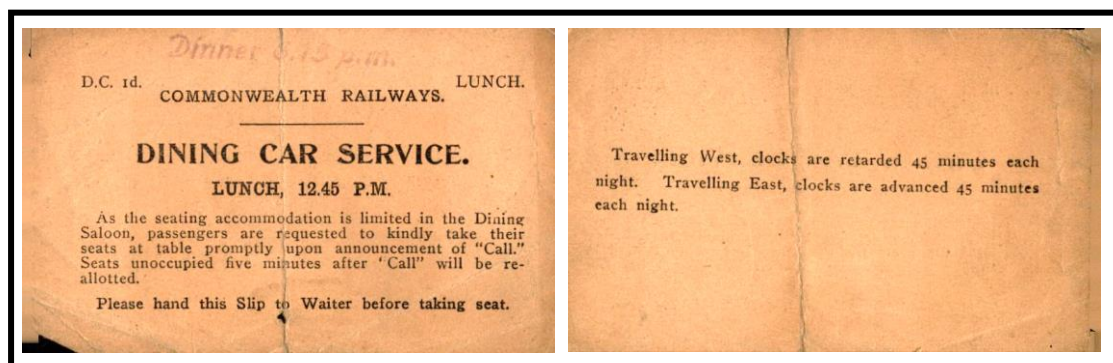
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Parents' Marriage

Hetty and Tom loved, and were good at dancing. In 1926, Tom and Hetty married in Fremantle, Western Australia.



For their honeymoon they travelled on the train to Adelaide. The railway was laid around 1925 and this was their first train journey.



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The honeymoon journey to Adelaide served the purpose of Tom's return to South Australia to take up employment with Ellis's Bakery in Gouger Street as a baker and pastry cook.



The Ellis Cafe organisation was formed about 1917 as bakers, pastry cooks, caterers, fruiterers and confectioners. The office and factory was at 120 Gouger Street, Adelaide, with a restaurant Covent Gardens at 50 (later 68) King William Street, the Arcadia Cafe in Bowman's Buildings, King William Street, the Maple Leaf Cafe at 21 Rundle Street and two others in the central business district. The Covent Gardens premises was burnt in 1948 when five people died. The Ellis Cafes ceased trading in 1952. [SLSA BRG 277]

Tom and Hetty first lived with Tom's great aunt and uncle (G. W. Virgo, a tinsmith, plumber) at 36 Tennyson Street, Kurralta Park (known as Grassmere), while they built a house.

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Home in Keswick

Tom and Hetty bought a block of land financed by the Savings Bank and built a house at 28 Marlow Road, Keswick, (this was at sometime known as number 26), moving in around 1927.



1935 [WestMaps Public]

I can remember there was a tennis court alongside of the house, about where number 30 would be and there was another tennis court out at Hampton Road, roughly where Office Works is now. There was a deli facing Anzac Highway and a tennis court there behind it and they all used to go out there for a weekend and have their tennis matches.

Their first child Jean Hetty was born in 1926 and Colin Thomas was born 27th December 1931.



1927 Four generations on the Virgo side
Thomas (standing), baby Jean



1932 Jean and Colin

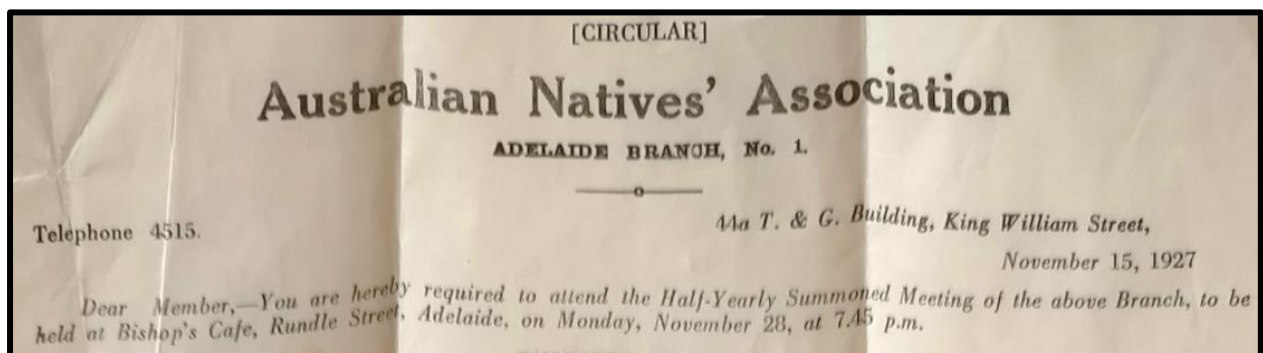
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Thomas and Hetty's life



Colin has some of his father's memorabilia including his pin, membership information and photograph from his involvement with the Australian Natives Association. This association was a registered friendly society which supported federation, protection and restrictive immigration. (In 1983 the Australian Natives Association merged with Druids, Foresters and Rechabites to form a new friendly society, Lifeplan.)



Thomas was a member from 1927 and in the late 1930s he was the President of the Adelaide Branch. He was Vice Captain and fast bowler on the Cricket team in 1930-1931, which played in the Y.M.C.A. Cricket Association.



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Letters sent between Hetty and her mother via the first AirMail flights Adelaide/Perth 1929.

Jean and Colin were both born in a private hospital on Manchester Street, Mile End. The doctor attending was H.H. Hurst who lived and practiced at 157 Rowland Road (now Sir Donald Bradman Drive), Hilton. Colin recalls that there was also a tennis court near the property.

Dr. Hurst was the family doctor for many years and Colin remembers a story that the doctor would drive to Tom's bakery (in Norwood) as Tom's were the only pasties that would not give him indigestion.

Tom and Hetty saved to purchase a rundown delicatessen at 214 The Parade, Norwood in 1934. They built up the business and called it Drennan's Kake Kitchen. The family moved to Norwood around 1935. Hetty worked long hours in the shop and supported Tom who was the baker.

Colin remembers that shop required long hours. Tom started baking at 2am and opened the shop at 6am. They had 'shop girls' who worked 8am to 4pm. Jean or Colin would work until closing for tea from 6.30 till 7pm.

I'd be at the shop as soon as I could see over the counter. We made pies, pasties, queen cakes, Banbury's, Chester squares, custard slice. We worked around when we could get eggs, as they were seasonal and rationed during the war.



[cinematreasures.org]

The shop was opposite the Town Hall used as a picture theatre. They would open for interval time and until after (about 11pm).

On Sundays Tom slept in until 6.30am when he would get up and bake about 100 dozen scones and sold hot to the churchgoers. Sunday hours were 7am to noon, then close until 5pm, reopening until 8pm.

Colin recalls that Tom's Uncle Henry would drive from Alberton on the Sunday night to play chess with him.

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Colin still has some of the promotional materials for the Kake Kitchen.



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When war broke out in 1939, the RAA (Royal Automobile Association) offered its facilities to authorities and established a volunteer transport auxiliary corps as an arm of the Civil Defence Department. Tom was an inaugural member and section leader of this group.



Tom was exempt from war service as he was considered an essential worker, (he supplied the recruitment officers with their lunch!).

Form C.R. 3.
Civilian Registration (British Subjects.)

Keep this Identity Card in a cover.
It will fit into an ordinary envelope.
Carry it with you when away from home.

IDENTITY CARD.

NUMBER.
S 1 F.O. 27189

Notify any change of place of living on Form C.R. 4 (obtainable at Post Offices.)

If not delivered within 14 days return to Divisional Returning Officer at

1355...

TO THE PERSON TO WHOM THIS CARD IS ADDRESSED—

1. This Identity Card must be signed by you on receipt, in the presence of a witness, and carefully preserved. You may need it under national emergency conditions for important purposes. You must not lose it or allow it to be stolen or permit it to pass into the hands of any unauthorized person. If nevertheless the card is stolen or definitely lost you must immediately report the facts to the Divisional Returning Officer by whom it was issued. Therefore make a separate note now of the address of that officer (see left hand corner on other side) and of the Identity Number shown on this card so that if the card is lost you will be able to quote that number.

2. If you Change your Place of Living (other than temporarily) you must, after making the change notify such change on Form C.R. 4. (obtainable at a Post Office).

3. You must carry this Identity Card with you whenever away from your home. The Card must be shown, at any time on demand, to any person authorized by law to see it.

Witness to Signature: *Johnnie Granwell* Signature of Holder: *H. Drennan*

Address of Witness: *214 Parade* Holder's business address (at date of signing card): *214 Parade*

999 Magill Rd. St. Morris

For OFFICIAL PURPOSES, IF REQUIRED

Ration Books for Two Children

Russell

6222987

624435

Any person finding this card should hand it in at a Post Office.

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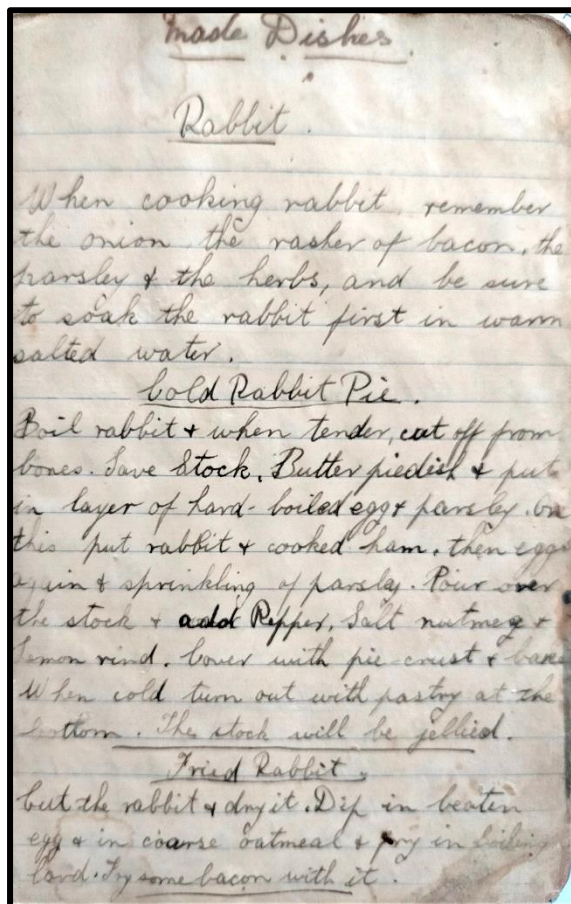
After the war they sold the shop. Tom worked as a baker for two sisters, whose father was the baker and he had died. The shop was on the Parade near Osmond Terrace. Tom had also established a Dry Cleaning business on the corner of Queen Street and Magill Road, Norwood, with a delivery round. His 'territory' was from Glen Osmond Road to the Torrens River and Fullarton Road to the Hills. He was an agent for Barker Brothers Dry Cleaners. Hetty did clothing repairs and had a knitting machine for articles to order and Colin helped when he wasn't at school.

The Keswick home had been rented out, and Colin recalls they had trouble evicting the tenants so that they could move back in August 1948.

Around 1952 a second Dry Cleaning business was established. Hetty ran one store and by then Colin had married and his wife Joan managed the second store.

Tom died of heart failure, (whilst being treated for gallstones), on 22nd of November, 1959.

Colin and Joan moved in with Hetty, now 58 years of age, in the original family home in Marlow Avenue in Keswick.



R. E. Evans & Co.
First Floor, VICTORIA INSURANCE BUILDING (Entrance Peel Street)
32 CURRIE STREET — ADELAIDE
LICENSED LAND & ESTATE AGENTS
Telephone: LA 5011

Mrs. H. Drennan.

1962. Re Part Lots 146 & 147 KESWICK.

| | | | |
|----|---|--------------|--------------|
| By | Mr. N. Symorfidis. | | |
| | Sale price of above property as per contract dated 30.7.62. | | 3050. 0. 0 |
| To | Commission on Sale | 111.10. 0 | |
| To | Excess Water | 12. 0 | |
| To | Adjustment of rates and taxes as per voucher attached. | 3.10. 3 | |
| To | Land Tax to 30.6.63. | 2. 7. 0 | |
| To | Balance | 2,932. 0. 9 | |
| | | £3,050. 0. 0 | £3050. 0. 0 |
| By | Balance due on settlement. | | £2932. 0. 9. |

Less £500 Received on 31/9/62
Bal due Mrs — £2432-0-9

The home was sold in 1962 and a flat was purpose-built at her daughter Jean's home in Esk Street, Woodville.

She was a good cook and in the early days and had many of ways to cook the 'rabbitoh's' produce.

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Hetty was involved in a variety of community activities. In the 1970's she was president of the SAWWA Inc. Woodville Branch. (SA Weight Watchers Assoc.)

She was also president of the Senior Citizens club at Woodville.



Hetty Drennan 1987
[SLSA B70869/12066 - Messenger Press]

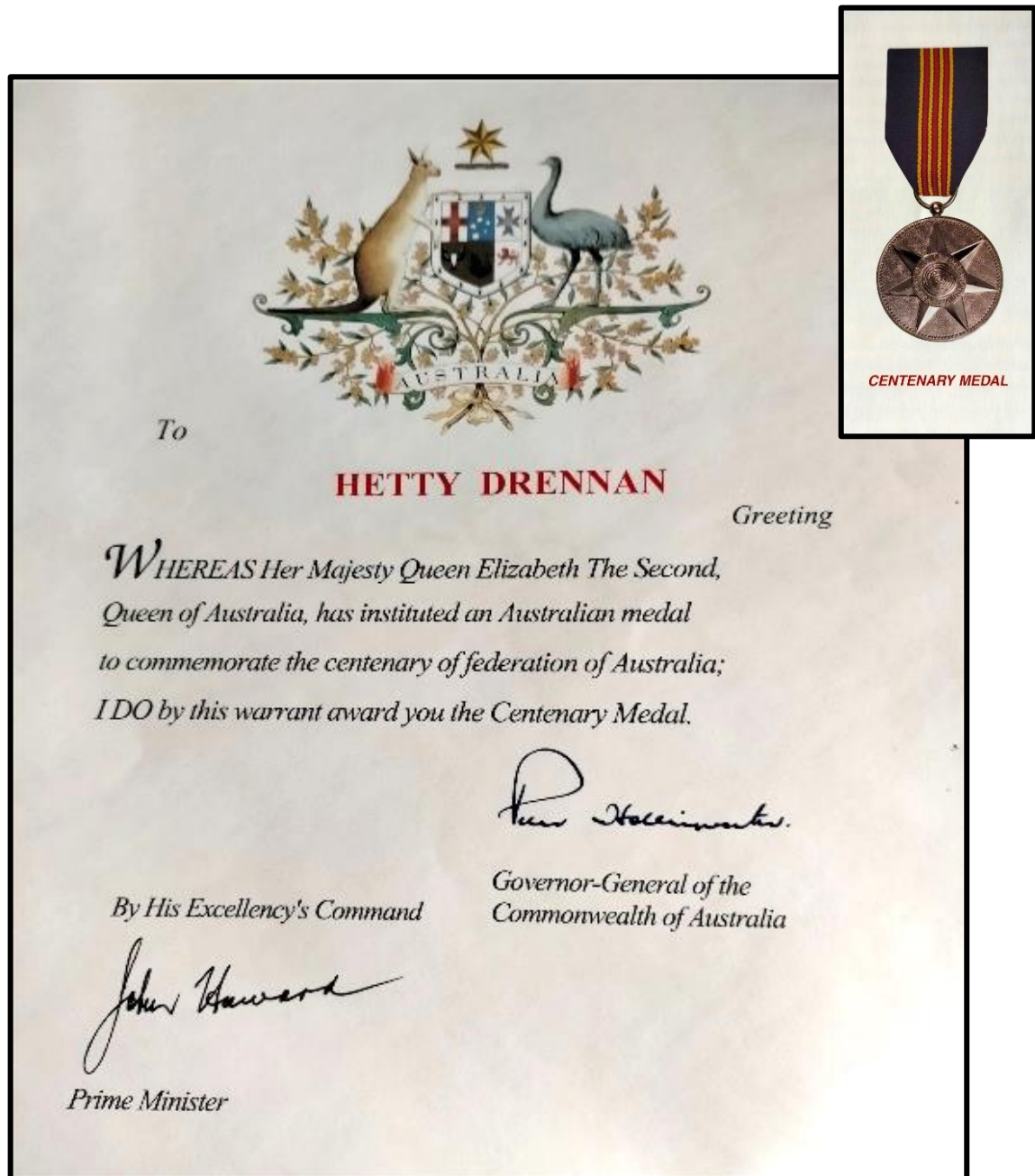
In 1967 Jean moved to Perth and Hetty found a unit in the Adelaide Workman's homes in Davenport Terrace, Richmond. She lived there until 1989 when she moved into the Kirkholm Hostel in Goodwood.

She was captain of the indoor bowls team and continued to knit and crochet for the residents and staff of the Hostel. She also renewed her talent for drawing and painting.

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When Hetty turned 100, she received a letter from the Queen and also a commemorative medal for the Centenary of the Federation.



Hetty continued to be active until a few weeks prior to her death on 20th May 2002.

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Colin's recollections of Keswick



Circa 1931 The family at 28 Marlow Road Keswick

The family lived at Keswick until Colin was about five years old.

I was told but I can't actually remember, but I stopped traffic on ANZAC Highway. I climbed on a chair and unhooked the screen door, got out and went for a walk. I was about 4, and ANZAC Highway was a single lane then and I sat in the middle of the road and stopped the traffic. Nobody could get near me because my dog, Nigger, wouldn't let them until somebody distracted the dog and somebody else grabbed me and soon as that happened the dog took off for home so the bloke just followed the dog, [laughter] in time to see Dad coming out on his push bike to try and find me.

The only other memory of that era was we had folding beds setup, in the dining room for guests, and I fell over and hit my eyebrow on a corner and that was the first of many stitches I had in my eyebrows.

Colin recalls that living opposite them was another baker, Stanley Herman (Stan) Gehlert (1903-1984), who had a shop and bake house in Gouger Street, and ran the Pier café in Henley Beach. He lived there with his wife Nell (1903-1988), and their children John, Barry, Robin and a girl (whose name he cannot recall).



1954 Gehlert shop Gouger Street [SLSA 13065]

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Colin recalls that he and Barry Gehlert would get into trouble for going to the Mile End Goods Yards and coming home smothered in coal and dust from climbing around the cuttings and storage sheds.

The McMillans lived behind the Gehlerts. They played tennis as a group on those tennis courts I was talking about behind the delicatessen on Anzac Highway, just before the Keswick Bridge.

Living just to the north of them were Laurie West and his family.

Schooling

Colin went to Norwood Infant School, Norwood Primary School and then Prince Alfred College for 2 years. He recalls that he didn't really enjoy the College. *Couldn't get on --- they were too stuck up for me!*

Colin was in the Scout Group at St Bartholomew's in Kensington from 8-11 years of age. After the Scout meetings he would sleep a few hours before working at the bake house from midnight with another baker and an apprentice. Thomas was working 12 hour shifts.



Colin did his third year at Norwood Technical School and received a scholarship for his fourth year.

They had a woodwork class and a metalwork class and an arts area, an arts class. They were into the technical side more than the high school. We did Maths 1, Maths 2, English, Science, Social Studies and Metalwork. We had the Woodwork class and the Metalwork class where you could learn hands on skills.

Learning Mechanics

I can still remember being given toys like humming tops and things like that and pulling them apart to find out why the heck they worked, or how they worked. Not very often put them back together again but I just wanted to find out how they worked.

At age 18, Colin joined the CMF in the Royal Australian Engineers Military Establishment 24 Light Aid Detachment which was part of the Infantry Battalion at the Keswick Army base.

We were the mechanics that kept the Army vehicles moving.

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Marriage and children

Around 1952, Colin married Joan Trevaskis, about three years after he met her at Edithburgh. Joan's family were living on Greenhill Road, Toorak Gardens.

Mum and Dad and my mate Bill went over to Edithburgh and towed the trailer behind the car. As kids we were going to sleep in the trailer and Mum and Dad were booked into the Hotel. But we got to Ardrossan and we'd got out and shot a rabbit, came back. Bill went to put the rifle down and he accidentally hit the end of the bolt, although it wasn't cocked, he hit the end of the bolt on the running board which was loose enough to fire the bullet. It went through his hand and across the top of the bicep, into the side of his face, hit the teeth and bounced out.

I looked at him and thought, Oh Hell! The bullet is rattling around in his head, he's going to go.

So we left him at Ardrossan Hospital and went on to Edithburgh where my boss was staying. He was staying at the other pub across the road with one of our customers who was staying at this hotel. Well, his workmate was there and his workmate's daughter was just my age. So with Bill not being there I cuddled up with her, and finished up marrying her!

Colin and Joan had a daughter, Helen Joan, who is now 63 and a son Peter John, now 60. Peter worked in IT, and Helen is a retired carer.



Colin with Peter, Hetty and Helen at Hetty's 101st birthday, 2001

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Occupations

Colin worked at City Taxis garage. He had also worked on Saturday mornings for Bill and Harold Pens at Nettles Garage, East Parade, Kensington. When he finished school with a leaving certificate at age 16, he began working there fulltime and when Harold left, Colin was indentured as an apprentice after 18 months.

The first car I worked on was a re-ring of an Austin Big 7, it had a larger bore. I did a lot of reconditioning of motors.

Colin recalls an altercation in the workshop ended up with him in stitches and also an article in *The News*.



Colin recalls that labour was cheaper than the parts, which were readily available.

It was cheaper to repair it than it was to go and buy a new one.

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After a couple of years, Bill and Colin swapped workshops with another mechanic opposite Clayton Church on the corner of The Parade at Kensington. At the time the Petrol Stations were a separate entity to the workshop.

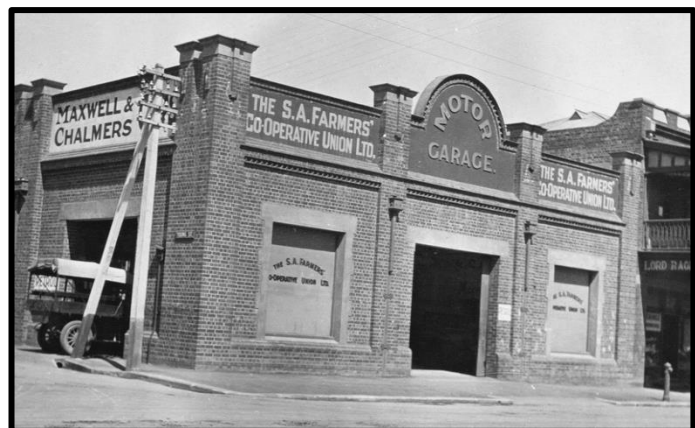
Colin learned a variety of skills on the job and while at trade school he taught others there how to weld.

I wasn't supposed to! It was things like welding class. So, went in the welding booth and they gave us some material and said, "Here, weld those together." Of course I had already done all this and used to do a bit of panel work on all sorts and so I'd weld it up. "Oh! How do you do this?" "How do you do it?" So I'd have to show these other blokes that were in my class how to weld.

[I had] just picked it up. Watched the boss doing it and picked it up. ... oxy and arc. Not too good on the arc-welding but oxy is pretty well alright.

Farmers Union Truck Workshop

Colin worked for Farmers Union at their truck workshop in Young Street, Adelaide, during which time he attended trade school to finish he apprenticeship. He recalls that the trade school was on Montifore Avenue, and he went 1 night a week and 1 full day per fortnight. He was aged 22 and earning about 30 shillings per week.



1925 [SLSA B1756]

Trucks were --- well it was quite funny actually because --- we had a Chev truck in for a valve grind --- so I got stuck into it because where I was apprenticed doing a valve grind on a Chev was a one day job. That's it. You did the whole lot. Cut the valves, cut the seats, face the valves, did the lot and lapped them all in --- you had to have the car going out the door... at the end of the day.

Get to Farmer's Union and I get stuck into pulling this head off and so forth and the foreman came up to me and said, 'Hey, hey, slow down, that's a two day job!' [chuckle] Yes, so it was different but it was a very good learning experience of trucks and things!

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'How to get the head off the truck'

You sit on a mudguard, with your left foot on the chassis, with your right leg stuck over the top of the guard and you reach over and pick up a cast iron head that weighed about the same as a bag of cement. You pick that up, turn, put it on top of the radiator. Then, holding it steady, you clamber out, get on the ground, and pick it up and put it out over on the bench.

To get the gearbox out you get in there and you have a bloke underneath to steady the box, but you'd get in and straddle the hole in the floor, a rope around the box and grab hold of the gear lever, slide the box out and then lower it down onto a board down underneath. Then do the opposite when you were putting it back.

Backyard Mechanics

Colin left Farmers Union around 1956 and worked with a friend Mick Myer (Basil McLachlan Myer), from his days working with Bill Penn at Farmers Union. They began working in his back yard at Marlow Road, Keswick, at nights and on weekends.

Together they sought out to lease a business. They applied to several companies and were shortlisted for two.

AMPOL - South Road and Richmond Road

There was a new AMPOL opening on the northwest corner of South Road and West Beach Road (now Richmond Road). At the time on the other corners were Hume Pipes (northeast), Golden Fleece (southeast) and an ETSA substation (southwest).



Colin and Mick took up the lease on 16th January 1956.

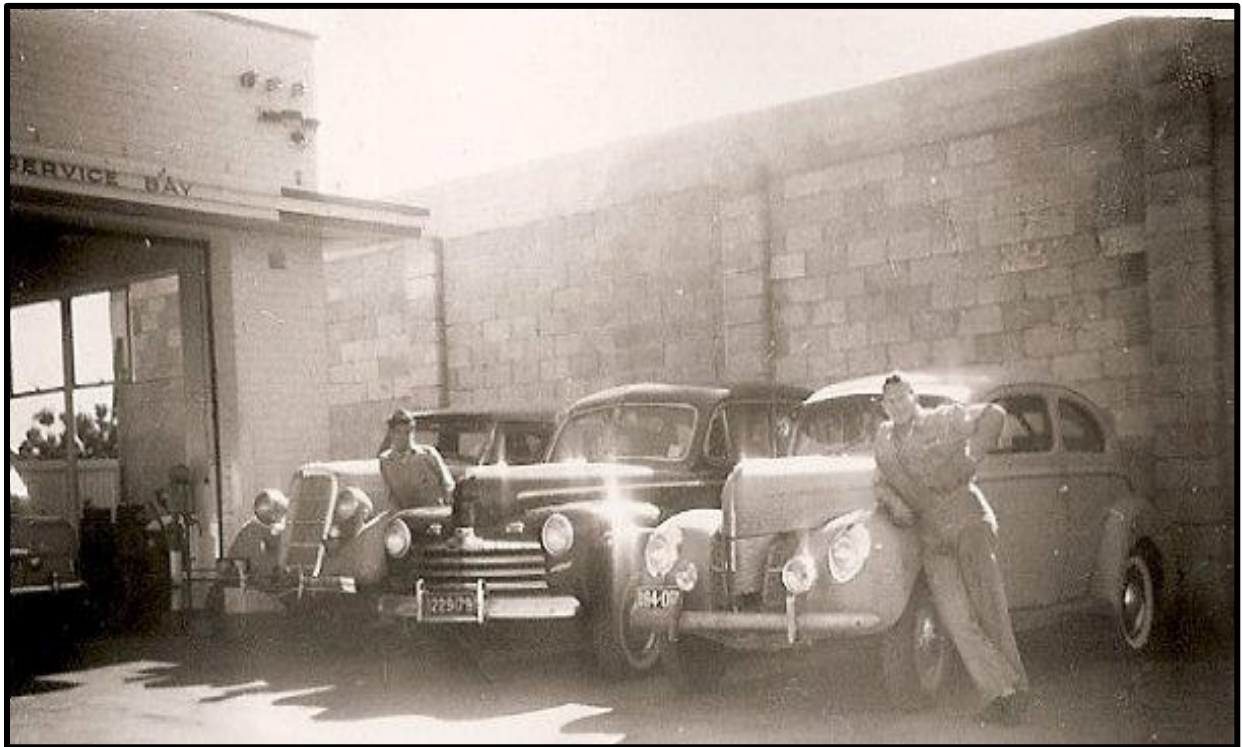
We used to start at 7:30am in the morning. We had to close the petrol pumps at 6:00pm, and then Mick and I, we would both get stuck into the work that we couldn't get done during the day. We were so busy. We'd get stuck into the work then and work to about 9, 10 o'clock and then go home. Back again at 7:30 the next morning. We were not trained. We worked but we didn't do our bookwork did we. We weren't trained to do that bookwork properly.

Eventually, once we sort of woke up to what was going on, Mick had done a course with AMPOL, but I didn't get to do it, and as he also did his back in, he then became front man looking after the paperwork and I just did all the workshop.

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We did try having a woman doing the office and the driveway. It didn't work out. She would have the drawer open reading romance novels instead of looking after what she was supposed to be doing, and all that sort of stuff. It wasn't worth it.



*Richmond Service Station, corner West Beach and South Road
From left 1935 Ford V8, employee Singh, 1946 Ford Deluxe (owned by partner Mick Meyer),
1940 Ford V8 Deluxe 2 door (owned by Colin), Colin Drennan*

Colin recalls that they had casual staff do the petrol service on the busy Saturdays and that they took on an apprentice.

This site became too small for them and additionally, alterations to the South Road corner necessitated acquisition of some on the land, so they sought an alternative location.

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AMPOL - 79 Burbridge Road, Hilton



79 Burbridge Road Circa 1989 {WTHS LH0913-01a}

On the 28th January 1966, they swapped businesses with the company operating the AMPOL at 79 Burbridge Road almost opposite the Hilton Hotel, which had a larger workshop.

They reckoned it would do about 8,000 gallons of petrol a month. We had it doing 10,000.

We were selling 6 gallons of petrol for just under a pound. That's 27 litres for two dollars. [chuckling] Oil was one and three pence a quart.

In those days if you had a car that was ten years old you had a very modern car! And anything up to twenty years old was quite normal.

I had a full-time mechanic --- and a lube operator. I had Theo Dodson and Jim, --- they both worked at the Shell down here on Marion Road... I had various apprentices as well. Jim was the lube operator and driveway.

Colin has many recollections of this time:

Things went smoothly apart from, you know, things like people breaking in and so forth which knocked the things around a bit. But it was a hell of a lot of work! Long hours!

Well, the more people I employed the more work I had to do! [chuckle] ...I had a woman doing driveway and office but after we closed up at 6 o'clock I'd have to go into the office and go through everything she had done because she couldn't work it out, or whatever, and do the paperwork for jobs they had done during the day.

I had to watch them all the time because quite often somebody would come in and pick up their car, pay for it and go and then they would come in and say, "Oh, such and such a job, I put a set of spark plugs in it." Colin, "Oh, you didn't write it down!" It was quite difficult. You had to, as a boss you had to watch everything that was going on.

In those days if you wanted a top hose for a Holden, that same top hose fitted for ten years. Now you get a certain VIN number, or Vehicle Identification Number, it will change.

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We used to keep disc pads in stock. Actually, I had [an arrangement] with Tilbrook's in the City, ... that I kept consignment stock of disc pads and wheel cylinders and things because we kept using them all the time.

Don't tell anybody but I had done a bit of work on aircraft. Blokes, a couple of times brought in the seats out of aircraft that needed repairing and I'd weld them up ... and fix them. I did all sorts!

I had a guy who was into Arab and Palomino horses and he restored old buggies and things like that. ... two of these wrought iron pieces that held a seat. He had sent them off to get them pickled, cleaned up so they could do them up, and the pickler had lost one. So he came in to me and said, "I need another one opposite hand to this!" Colin - "Oh, alright". So I made one.

I think it was just something I picked up along the way! When I did my Apprenticeship, it was just after the war and you couldn't buy parts and my boss, he was a good mechanic and good welder and he would weld up spring leaves because you couldn't buy spring leaves. Somebody came in with a broken spring, you'd pull it all apart and pea it out and weld it all up.

A generator, didn't work, so you would pull it all apart and put it on the growler to test the armature and machine the commutator and put new brushes in it. You would do all that. Retap field coils and overhaul fuel pumps. They are all throw away now!

Running a business

Colin recalls that several of his customers became good friends. About five people are from his original years of working and still come to the workshop, *Drennan's Motor Repairs*. One of these was the newspaper boy from the front of the Service station.

I think it was a lot more personal. --- people considered you as a person, not just as a business.

Payments in these days were made by cash and cheque.

The advent of the bank card was quite a big thing. In those days you had to have cash, or a cheque, but mostly it was cash. You could bank daily because the cash turnover was successful, and it was quite normal to have eight to ten cheques to take in, per day.

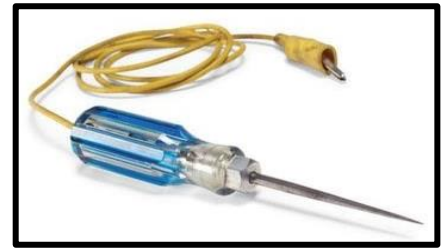
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Colin tells of thwarting an attempt of fraud:

One day a bloke came in and wanted us to cash his Social Services cheque and as it happened, I had a test lamp in my hand which had a big sharp point on it. I'm standing there and he presents this cheque and wants me to cash it for him and I just looked at him and said, "Well, for starters you don't look like Mr. So-and-so because he just lives down the end of the street there and he's one of my customers. You certainly don't look like him and I don't think you've got authority to cash his cheque for him."

And I've got this blooming pointy thing, pointing straight at him. So he just walked off. --- in those days Social Services cheques were delivered by mail and he'd gone and robbed his box.



Vintage test lamp [familyhandyman.com]

Colin was always very generous in his dealings but unfortunately not all customers paid.

We had one guy, a young couple, struggling, trying to make a go of things and he had this courier run. He used to start at six in the morning. He had to be up in Port Pirie by ten, having gone to all the Banks, you know a zig zag pattern all the way up and then he'd have to hang around until three and then do the reverse on the way back.

He'd get back into Adelaide about half past five, quarter to six and he'd come down and fuel up and if he had any problems I'd work back at night and help him out.

He didn't do as I'd told him which meant that, he was running on gas, and I told him to make sure he was running on petrol between the City and his home and back again in the morning to preserve the valves, which he didn't do because it would cost too much.

Anyway, I ran up a couple of bills with him, it was a Holden V8, and for some reason the third cylinder back on the right hand side was soft and wore out quicker. It just wore out and had to get rebored and sleeved.

He ran up a bill overall about twelve grand and then just disappeared! Never seen sight nor sign of him since.

But that's the case of, I was too soft. But I just hope that he's gone and made a success of things and still going.

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Colin earnt his reputation as an honest mechanic.

One of the customers who is one of my originals, took his car into the dealer and, he is a bit of tight arse, but he took it into the dealer and they said, "Oh, we've replaced your front brake pads, they were worn out." He said, "That sounds funny. Where are the old pads?"

They brought them out and showed them to him. He said, "They're only half worn". They had replaced his pads that still had thousands of kilometres left in them.

So it's not just the backyard operator. If somebody comes in to us and say, "Oh, we've been told that we need so and so." Let us check it first. We don't take anybody's word for it.

Colin recalls that it was quite normal to keep cars for twenty years with a mechanic working on it to prolong its life. *Most European cars are designed to do a hundred thousand and throw them away and get another one because that's the way it works in Europe. As for working on a European car, [utters a gesture of distaste].*



Colin spoke about how in Japan the vehicles having a life of about five years for pollution requirements and this is why, in Australia, the second hand motors from Japan were so cheap to buy.

Depends on the car. You're talking some of the European stuff or Astras and Barinas, Captivas and things like that, you got two hundred thousand you are going really well! When you're talking Toyotas or Japanese or Korean cars, oh, three hundred thousand plus.

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Business changes

After thirteen years the partnership broke up. The business was still busy with petrol sales steadily increasing and Colin continuing with the workshop work.

Colin's first overseas trip was to Fiji, and this was from winning a *Goodyear Tyre* sales prize.

The businesses that were leased from big companies were not an ongoing concern as they could give the lessees only 30 days' notice. Colin states that Service Station businesses were good money until the big oil companies took over.

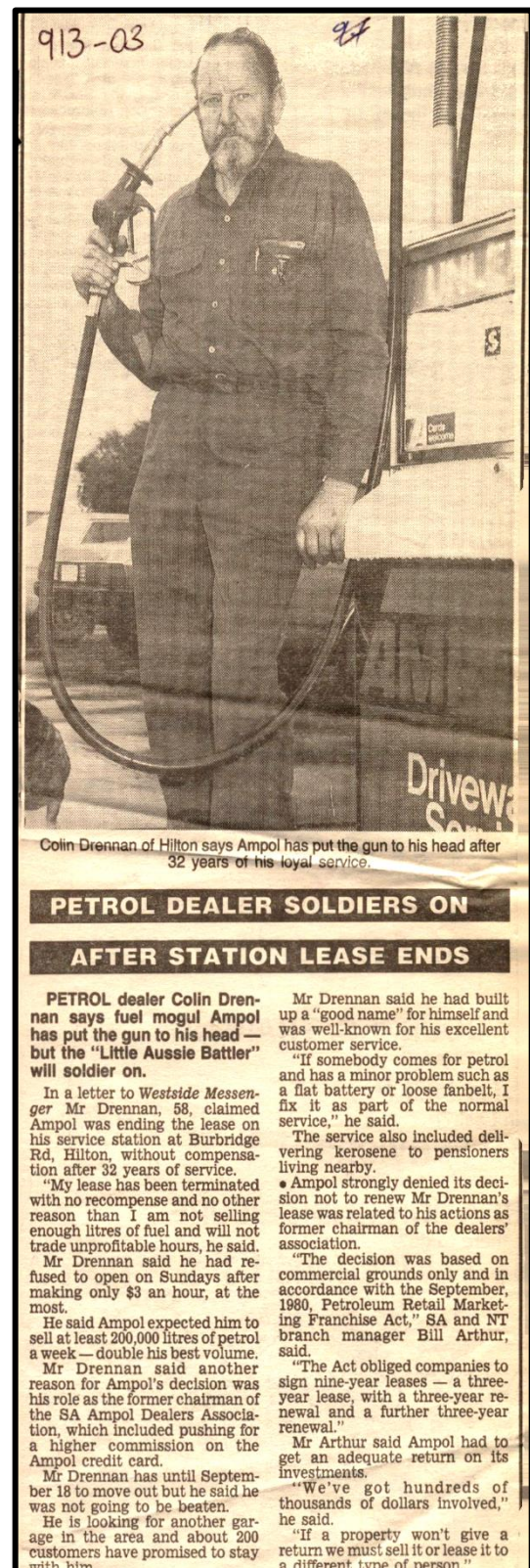
Just as an example the things that they used to do, AMPOL decided to have a cheap fuel outlet called the Yellow Cab and one of the dealers who was on South Road in St. Marys, well he went away on holidays and came back and he drove right past this Service Station as it was this Yellow Cab place, before he realised that that was his place. When he had gone on holidays it was AMPOL and when he came back it was Yellow Cab!

Colin was a member of the *South Australian Automobile Chamber of Commerce* (now the *Motor Traders Association*). In the late 1970s they were looking for security of tenure, and Colin went with a group of 8 others to the US for 13 days to visit them.

We'd pushed for and got ten year leases. Twelve months and then three by three years. So you had some sort of security. We got it enshrined in law.

Colin formed the *AMPOL Dealers Association*, in an attempt to attain improved deals given by the large oil companies.

In 1989 the lease with AMPOL was terminated.



26 July 1987 [WTHS LH0913-03]

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It might have had something to with the fact that I had started the AMPOL Dealer Association in South Australia and we'd had a few arguments with AMPOL and we'd won them. Including going to Sydney to front up to the big Boss and before we left Sydney he'd given us his limousine and chauffeur driver to tour Sydney and drop us at the Airport. While we were out he'd fixed everything that we had wanted fixed, so I was NOT welcome! [laugh] In '89 they terminated my lease. It was all the oil companies, not just AMPOL! They just laid down the rules and that's what you did.

Colin talks of the business operating procedure – credit being extended to customers on a fuel card arrangement, however the Station still had to pay cash (COD) for fuel on delivery.

AMPOL had a credit card scheme which they've still got, all the Oil Companies have got them, where you get a card so you can go to any AMPOL Service Station, or Caltex, put that on their credit card and get it billed from the company, from the Oil Company. The thing is, we had to pay COD for fuel.

When the tanker dropped fuel in you had to have a cheque ready to give them. You had to supply it to the customer, you had to do all the work which in those days was check the tyres and all that sort of thing, then you had to fill out the paperwork, then you had to send the paperwork off to AMPOL which had to go to Sydney, then you had to wait until they processed it and then pay you, which could be up to three, four weeks. In fact, for one bloke, it got out to three months.

Colin talked of how the business closed down due to AMPOL refusing to purchase it.

Well, I'd wanted to get out, but I wanted to get out on my terms. AMPOL's terms was, "See you later". No recompense, they wanted to take over my business. I approached them and said, "Well, if you want my business, pay me for it!" And they refused. I had arranged, I got a meeting with the Branch Manager, whom I had known for 20+ year], and he just said, "Nope, that's it!

Relief work & Southern Cross

Colin then discussed how he moved on to mechanic work and advised his customers.

What I did was get a big book with a, b, c, d and people said, "What are you going to do?" I said, "I'm not sure yet." I'd looked around at possibly getting another Service Station. In fact, I'd bought a block of land and put a workshop on, then sold it. But, I said, "Put your name in the book and when I know what I'm doing I'll let you know". I've still got the book.

In the meantime, Colin was able to obtain relief mechanic work through the *Motor Traders Association*.

I went from Torrensville, into the City, down to Port Adelaide, down to Lonsdale. Then a bloke was injured up at Echunga so I went up there and worked up there for twelve months. Well, I had to do something!

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He found it a lot different being an employee instead of a boss.

Yes, it was almost a holiday. For arguments sake, the place at Lonsdale --- three o'clock Friday -- - go home! A thirty eight hour week! I'd [laughter] get there and I'd start, sweep the floors and tidy up and so forth and they'd say, "What are you doing? You pack up and go home!"

In 1991, at the end of the relief work at Echunga, he was only unemployed for two weeks before reopening a business in a service station on Marion Road.

Somebody said, "There's a little Service Station down there on Marion Road that's been closed. Why don't you have a look at that?" It was Southern Cross and the boss of Southern Cross was one of the guys I'd gone to America with, with the MTA, when we were looking at this long term tenure thing and so I went and said to him about it. I said, "I'll open it" ---.

Yeah, so went and saw him and on a handshake deal. For twelve months I had it rent free. If I sold more than a certain quantity of fuel they'd give me a bonus. I was quite happy!

So I ran it, from being shut, within three months I had it doing the same volume of fuel that I was



1991 Corner of Marion Road and Talbot Street [WTHS LH0931-02]

doing on Burbridge Road. All cash --- no account.

A number of his customers followed him which had an impact on the AMPOL station not far away.

Yes, which was a kick in the butt for AMPOL because they had a Service Station on the corner of Galway Avenue, where the Doctor's Rooms are now, that was an AMPOL Service Station. AMPOL rep came round, came in to see me and says, "How're you going, do you own this site?" "Yeah!" [laughter]

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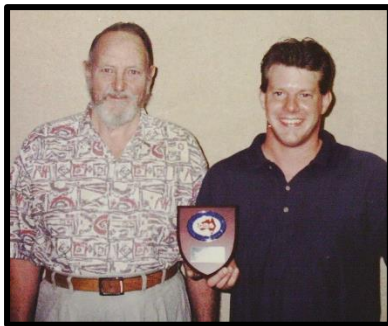
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Drennan's Motor Repairs

Just over twelve months later the property was sold, so he looked around the area and found an empty workshop owned by sign making company, Adlab. In 1992, Colin rented the property at 2A Commercial Street, Marleston, with an option to buy it.



Colin worked for himself and took on an apprentice, his partner Venita's son, David, to help with the work. Under Colin's instruction David gained an award for apprentice of the year and he continues to successfully run the business with two others working for him.



A petrol shop not a Service Station

Colin laments the changes to the way the industry is now run. He tells a story of a customer who recently came to his workshop.

We had a customer with a Ford LTD and he'd been down to Victor and he was on the way back and the windscreen wipers decided to play up and one hit the other and they sort of locked. He went to the Caltex on the top of Tapley's Hill and asked the guy there and he said, "Oh, I haven't got a clue, we're only petrol handlers, that's it!"

He decided to try and sort it out himself and in the process he cracked the windscreen. Big bikkies! He got a taxi home, left it there and came and saw me. The next day, I thought I'll have a look on the way home, so I detoured via there and in about thirty seconds had the wiper arms off so he could pick it up.

He had to get a taxi then back up there to get it so it cost him a hell of a lot of money just because this wasn't a Service Station, it was a petrol outlet only. And that's the problem you get with any of the petrol outlets nowadays.

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The RAA

Modern cars with computers and electronics are a new challenge. Colin recommends the RAA as a first point of call.

People ring me up and say, "I've got a red light on the car, a red light has come on." Yeah, OK, are you in the RAA? "Yes." Ring them, they will come out with a scan tool and check it, because that red light means that there is something, it might mean there is something wrong.

It might be just a minor fault but it might mean a major fault. If you drive it, it could cost you a lot of money. Get the RAA to come out and check it first. If it is minor, they'll fix it. If it's drivable, they'll tell you. If it's not drivable, they'll arrange a tow.



[miloandco.com.au]

Life away from work

Colin talked about how they went to the football or the cricket or the movies.

He recalled Theatre 62 on Burbridge Road, Roxy movie theatre on Anzac Highway and that the Thebarton Town Hall played movies like *Gone with the Wind*, *South Pacific* and *My Fair Lady*.



Theatre 62 1979 [WTHS LH0377-27]

Because of the commitment at the Service Station I didn't get to go out to the movies very much. Saturday night would be about the only time and it was a bit hard to take the kids out to anything like that.

In hindsight, I wish I had spent more time with the family. I've still got a good relationship with my children, but it could have been better. I could have spent more time with them.

In the mid-1970s Colin and Joan had separated. While living in Glenelg North, Colin met Venita Trembath and they moved together to the home on the Marleston property in front of the workshop.

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West Torrens Area

Hilton Hotel

Colin agreed that he had a key business in the West Torrens area and saw many changes. His main location was near the corner of Burbridge and South Road, not far from the Hilton Hotel.

He recalls that the pub was purely for drinking, not counter lunches, television or horse racing. However, on Saturday there would be a band playing. He remembers that six o'clock was closing time from 1915 to 1967 in South Australia, and when Don Dunstan was Premier the time was extended to 10pm.



Hilton Hotel 1979 [WTHS LH0039-02]

I can remember when we ran the Service Station, we used to go down the beer garden on a Saturday afternoon, because we had to close, legally we had to shut at two o'clock. Mick and I used to go down there and have a few beers down there and you'd get the message come over, "Time gentlemen, please!"

Adelaide Airport

Colin had some interesting stories from his business being close to the Adelaide Airport.

This chap got off a plane and walked from the Airport up to the Service Station and came in and asked me where he could buy a car that he could go around Australia in. So, I pointed him in the right direction and checked it over before he bought it and then I showed him how to check spark plugs and all that sort of thing for general maintenance and he left and went across to Perth and up around.

He sent me a letter from Darwin saying that he'd had a puncture, that's all, and then I got another letter from Brisbane just before he got on the plane to say he had sold the car and was quite happy. I did get another letter from him when he'd got back to Denmark but I've lost track of him since then.

He recalls the trading rules for Service Stations and how it was of detriment to his business when there was one built on the Airport grounds.

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In South Australia you had to close your Service Stations at six o'clock at night and two o'clock Saturdays and nothing on Sundays. But then Caltex built a Service Station in the Airport, which because it was on Commonwealth ground, it did not come under State Government rules. So they were able to trade twenty four hours a day.

It was a move brought in during the war that they, same as like six o'clock closing at hotels. That all came about through the war, and it was never repealed.

I attended a meeting about it all when they were discussing it and I said, "You'll see two things. You'll see a lot less Service Stations because they can't afford to run that hour. You've got so much volume of fuel goes through and if you spread the hours, nobody is going to use more, they'll just spread the hours where they buy it and when they buy it. So you'll have a lot of Service Stations that'll go broke. So you'll have less choice of Service Stations and the price will go up because you can't pay wages twenty four hours a day to sell the same --- it costs more to sell it for the same volume! It doesn't work." And that's what happened!

Colin recalled a few of the local businesses.

Across the road in West Beach Road was a Post Office come Grocer Shop. Then of course Conroy's was just behind us, Conroy's Small Goods. There was a Deli on the corner where there is still a Deli, the next street down.

There was a woman that ran a home-made cake shop, home-made pies and pasties, just up South Road, the other side of West Beach Road. Can't think of her name --- bloody beautiful pies and pasties!

Retirement & Travel

When Colin retired he bought a Landcruiser and with Venita began touring Australia. The map they have on the dining table has lines marked all over Australia, showing their various trips. When he first set up Fred (the nick-name of his Tray top Landcruiser), they just slept on a mattress on the floor in the back.

The Landcruiser which I bought when we left the Service Station, it was an ex-Avis vehicle, and the idea was to set that up as a basic camper and tow the caravan. [We'd] leave the caravan in, for arguments sake, Cropley, and go out for two or three days at a time with the Landcruiser and look around and we gradually worked our way around Australia.

Oh, Fred is the Landcruiser. There is nothing else to go bush with but a Landcruiser! The reason I wanted him --- I wanted a tray top, diesel, because no matter where you went you could get bits for it and when we went the first trip, all the Aborigines had them up north so there was no problem with getting bits.

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There's still no trouble getting bits for him. But, when we got out in '89 --- we took him and went up to Darwin, around from Darwin around to Port Headland and followed around the coast to Perth and back to Adelaide.

Since then we've done, Fred's done just under three hundred thousand kilometre] and it has all been in the middle of Australia.

Colin retired around 2001 and then took a lot more bush trips.



2013 Colin with Fred in the outback

I got one of our friends who I'd met through going bush, he was a member of the Mitsubishi Four Wheel Drive Club, and they were planning a trip from Coober Pedy across to Laverton in Western Australia.

It's fifteen hundred kilometres with no sign of civilisation, no water, no fuel, no houses, no nothing! Across a place called the Anne Beadell Highway. One of Len Beadell's famous roads that he put through.

It was about three months after it had rained, so we had to dodge a lot of wash-aways, but it was beautiful. The wildflowers out.

We went from here, we met them in Glendambo, then went up to Coober Pedy and headed straight across to Laverton and then went around the gold field area.

When we were packing up to leave, we were north of Kalgoorlie and I turned the radio on in the morning to catch the weather and the announcer said in due of what's happened in America there

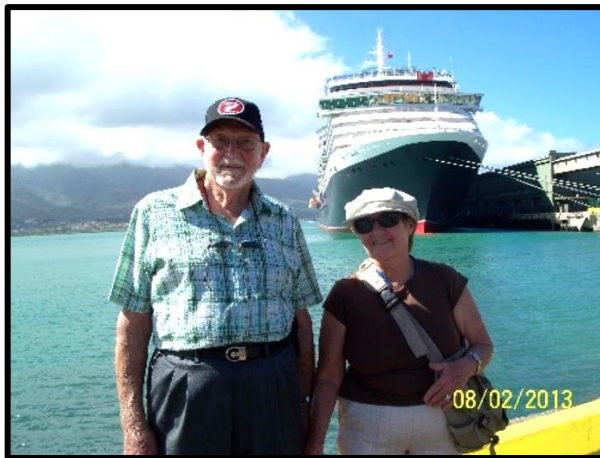
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was no financial report. That was all I could get out of it. When we stopped for smoko we found out about 9/11.

There were seven vehicles altogether. It was quite interesting. The Mitsubishi Four Wheel Drive Club, the President was along with his Rodeo, the Secretary was along with his Rodeo, I had a Landcruiser, there was a Landcruiser with a trailer, and they had a three month old baby. There was an OKA and there was one Mitsubishi.

Colin and Venita have also travelled extensively overseas.



Learning to fly

Colin had previously mentioned his enjoyment of photography and also his love of flying.

Well, from when I was about fourteen year old, in the war, I had always wanted to fly. And then one Saturday I closed up at two o'clock, finished all my work and the wife was gone out somewhere. There was no --- so, I thought, Oh! Nothing to do, I'll just go out to Parafield and have a look and a bloke there, talking to him in the Royal Aero Club and they decided I could do a trial, TIF they called it, a Trial Instruction Flight.



So I went and did a Trial Instruction Flight. Liked it and decided I was going to learn, which I did. What I'd do is go out there every Sunday morning, first booking at eight thirty every Sunday morning and if I couldn't afford it or the weather wasn't right, well I wouldn't go. Eventually got through and learned on Victa air tourers and got through that and did all my cross country navigation work on a Cessna. Got my private licence and very much enjoyed it.

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Colin flew to Perth in a Semi, and up the Western Australia Coast and around Rottnest Island. He also hired a plane in Canberra and flew around Mount Kosciuszko, and on another trip at Alice Springs and Ayers Rock in a Beechcraft Bonanza.



We took Venita and her parents to Alice Springs and Ayers Rock. It was fairly bumpy so I was well up, about ten thousand feet. Going along and Venita's doing the navigating. I said, "Oh, Finke should be down there." Well Finke's about four buildings in this huge area and the river, which has no water, it's all dry, so she's looking for it.

"Oh, I can't see it, I can't see it. It must be down there!" Alright, so I go across there a bit. "No, no." [chuckle] I could see she's starting to get worried. She said, "What do we do now? What do we do?" And I said, "Just follow that arrow." We were not supposed to be using the instruments. I'm not instrument rated but, of course, you know all about them so I'm just using the DME. "Just follow that arrow, it's pointing to Alice Springs". [laughter].

We were coming back and we were out from the controlled airspace which is right to the ground over the airport and it goes out in steps. As you go further out, you get these altitude steps for the controlled airspace. To stay out of controlled airspace it's preferable.

I'm at Port Pirie, at ten thousand, so I trim the aircraft out for a five hundred feet a minute rate of descent, which is the normal rate of descent. That will keep me outside the controlled airspace but I didn't bother to retard the throttle. So we're covering the ground at two hundred mile an hour! [chuckles] Venita's saying, looks at the map and says, "Oh that's back there!" [chuckles] Yeah, it was good fun.

On another trip he took a couple of friends away for the weekend but encounter bad weather.

We were coming back into Whyalla ... I was going to Adelaide but I was overhead Whyalla and there was bad weather, the cloud was right down to the ground so we went from Whyalla across to Port Pirie and I was going to head south.

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I started heading south but I thought, "Nah!" not under visual flight rules. So I turned round and went back to Whyalla and landed just as the normal aircraft, passenger aircraft, was about to head back to Adelaide so they went back to Adelaide and I stayed overnight and then came back the next day. That was about the only time there was any sort of dramas.

2021

At 90 years of age, Colin stills helps out with the customers and the bookwork for the workshop.

Colin recently sold Fred after having covered a vast amount of Australia.

Unfortunately the travel restrictions imposed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic have prevented any overseas trips and travel interstate. Instead, Colin and Venita have been making the most of South Australia, taking cruises on the River Murray and bus trips to local areas.

He also is enjoying time spent with their grandchildren.



Colin has been an excellent source of information about his industry and the local area of West Torrens and his contribution to the Preserving Memories project has been invaluable.

Date: 30th March 2021

Location: MARLESTON