

Preserving Memories

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

JOHN LEWIS, Netley

'ONE SATURDAY NIGHT THE MANAGER KICKED US OUT OF THE CINEMA. SO, THE NEXT SATURDAY NIGHT HE GOT A SPUD UP THE EXHAUST PIPE.'



John Lewis started working in his father's Netley market garden around 1945 and grew top quality celery for over 25 years.

He was an instrumental part of the Market Gardeners Association and the Farmers' Federation in the 1960s and 1970s.

He recalls his memories of Richmond and Netley, the people and changes over the years.

Family background

My father, **Thomas Henry Lewis** was born 16th April 1896 at Brooklyn Park, known at the time as Reedbeds. He died aged 72 on 17th June 1967. His parents were Thomas Lewis (1862-1920) and Evaline Anne Asgood (1865-1936).

My mother, **Ivy May Crocker** was born at Galway Gardens, now Marleston, 17th July 1897, and she died 28th January 1981. Her parents were Albert Edward Crocker and Isabella May Quin.

John says he never knew his grandparents.

Preserving Memories

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

John was born in 18th June 1931 in the market garden house at Netley. I have one brother older than me, Ross Lewis.



1931



At the Netley property circa 1936 [John Lewis]

My Dad was a market gardener and my mother worked as head shirt maker for Foy and Gibson's in the city. My Mum - *She had a copper for boiling the water to wash clothes and the scrubbing board. God, she worked hard.* (He still has the scrubbing board she used.)

John says that during the depression they were 'doing it tough' and would have to barter and trade with close friends and neighbours in order to survive.

Preserving Memories

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

Thomas 'Early' Lewis

Thomas worked at McEachern's sheep station at Cape Jervis.

He was reasonably tall, but very thin. He jockeyed for McEachern in the Normanville Cup on March 17 1911, and won on a horse named *Andalusia*.

He then went on to work at McGowan's dairy, Fulham (Lockleys).

He got his nickname of "Early" as he was always early.



RACE MEETING AT NORMANVILLE.

Yankalilla, March 17.

The first meeting of the new Normanville Club took place on Thursday. The officials are:—President, Mr. A. McArthur; committee, Messrs. E. Hunt, M. Hodgson, P. Stairs, G. Backshall, L. Backshall, H. Kirby, W. O'Connor, A. M. Dixon, G. Hesthote, T. Pinches, G. Taverner, A. B. Martin, E. S. Payne, G. V. J. Roper, N. McNeil, and T. W. Cudde; stewards, Messrs. M. J. E. Hunt, J. Morris, and H. Kirby; time-keeper, T. W. Cudde; handicapper, Mr. J. Cheeseman, jun.; judge, Mr. H. C. Carr; starter, Mr. B. Manisty; clerk of scales, Mr. C. H. Dixon; clerk of course, Mr. E. J. Hunt; hon. surgeon, Dr. S. M. Verco; secretary and treasurer, Mr. C. T. Ropes. Results:—

Hurdle Race, about two miles.—Mr. P. H. C. Neil's Actress, Mr. E. S. Payne's Lady Chatter, Mr. M. Hodgson's Billy Perkins. Maiden Plate, seven furlongs.—Mr. N. McEachern's Andalusia, Mr. G. V. J. Roper's Caruso, Mr. P. Florence's Muscatelle. Normanville Handicap, about one and a quarter miles.—Mr. T. Goss' Victoria, Mr. W. Gerard's Maximilian, Mr. E. S. Payne's Speak Up. District Plate.—Mr. E. S. Payne's Lady Chatter, Mr. G. W. Roper's Caruso, Mr. P. Florence's Muscatelle. Welter Handicap.—Mr. W. Gerard's Maximilian, Mr. P. H. O'Neil's Actress, Dr. S. M. Verco's Willy Watkins. Flying Handicap, winner of Normanville Handicap to carry 7 lb. penalty, about six furlongs.—Mr. N. McEachern's Andalusia, Mr. T. Goss' Victoria, Mr. C. Elliot's Thoroughbred. Forced Handicap.—Mr. T. Goss' Victoria, Mr. E. S. Payne's Lady Chatter, Mr. E. S. Payne's Speak Up.

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/5257388>

Later in his life Thomas would stand against the fence along Marion Road and wave at the cars going past.

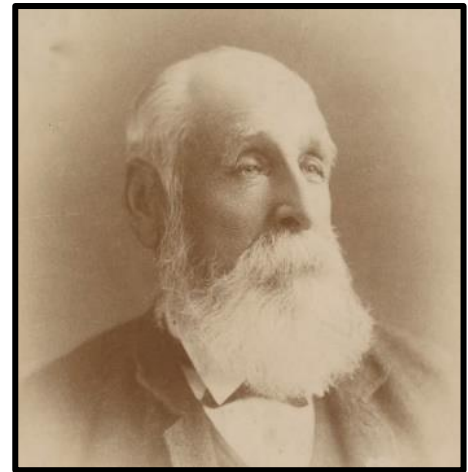
Thomas Lewis, circa 1960 [John Lewis]

Preserving Memories

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

Netley area - William Beare

John provided some background information about Netley. William Loose Beare arrived in South Australia by the first vessel called the *Duke of York* chartered by the South Australia Company. His father, Thomas Hudson Beare was second officer of the company to Samuel Stevens, its first colonial manager. Around 1852, Mr Beare took up residence at Netley.



William Loose Beare c1890 [SLSA B11306](#)

He named this homestead *Netley* after Netley Abbey in England and today that area still bears the name Netley.

The property's main entrance was just past the roadway that became Beare Avenue on West Beach Road, this northern end of the roadway is now known as Transport Avenue. You would go past the sheds and stables to get to the homestead. It had straggly pine trees along it that would have been planted back in William Beare's day. One son built a new home on the corner of West Beach Road (now Richmond Road). The old homestead was demolished after 1969.



Netley Homestead (circled) [WestMaps Public - 1949]

The last resident in the Netley homestead was Ben Marles. John mentioned that Ben Marles had inherited the property at Netley and also the lease on the land.

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

Market Garden, Netley

In 1920, Thomas [aged 25] and Jim [James Thomas] White leased a block of land on the south western corner of Marion Road and West Beach Road, [now Richmond Road] Netley from **Bennett Arthur Marles** for seven years.

South Australia.
(CERTIFICATE OF TITLE.)


Register Book,
Vol. 10 10 Folio 121

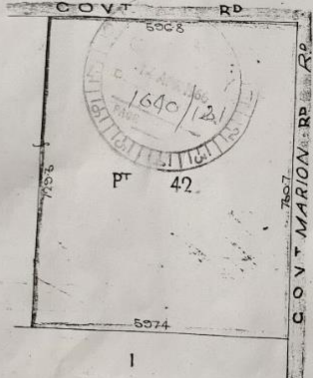
- Pursuant to Memorandum of Transfer No 64659 -

John Marles of Belton Gentleman is
the proprietor of an estate in fee simple
subject nevertheless to such incumbrances liens and interests as are notified by memorial underwritten or endorsed hereon in
that piece of land situated in the HUNDRED of Adelaide COUNTY of Adelaide
being PORTION of Allotment 42 of the subdivisions of Sections 18, 19, 156 and 2032
laid out as Nollery Estate and bounded as appears in the plan upon the margin thereof and thereon colored green Which said piece of
land contains acres of the above and measures on the northerly
side next a Government Road five hundred and ninety six feet and
eight inches on the east side on the south side next portion
of Allotment 1 five hundred and ninety seven feet and four inches
on the easterly side next a Government Road seven
hundred and thirty feet and seven inches on the north side and
on the westerly side next other portions of the said Allotment 42
seven hundred and twenty two feet and three inches on the north side
which said Allotment is bounded as appears in the plan deposited in the Lands Titles Registration Office No 22.10
which said Section are delineated in the public map of the said Hundred deposited in the office of the Surveyor-General.

In witness whereof I have hereto signed my name and affixed my seal this thirtieth day of October 1915

Signed the 30th day of October 1915 in the presence of
McGrigg } G. Wapman
Registrar-General.



WEST BEACH RD
COV'T SEC 8 RD

PT 42
5374
COV'T MARION RD
No 3

1

200 100 0 200 FT

Pursuant to Application 18190x7
Signed executor and parties bearing witness
where registered office is situate at 64 King William
Street Adelaide

John Marles
OF 1946 721
Charles
March 1915
James
W. L. Morris

Deed
Dep Reg Genl.
Vide L. 938/1943.

CT1040/121 Allotment 42, of sections 101, 106. 156 and 203 [John Lewis]

Preserving Memories

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

Jim White found the work too hard, so he relinquished his part of the lease and left it to Thomas.

On the 3rd of June, 1927 Thomas signed a contract with Bennett Marles to purchase the land.

He was able to discharge the mortgage of £2000 on August 1950. The property was transferred on 6th of February 1963 to T.H. Lewis and Sons. [Transfer was from John Marles who had inherited the land from his father Bennett Marles when he died.]

Produce

Thomas started the market garden with only a horse, a cart and a plough and they grew any vegetables that were suitable for the area. Mostly Thomas grew tomatoes, cabbages, french beans and onions.

He had some glass houses and as a windbreak he planted a row of bamboos that went east-west. They would grow tomatoes very early in the glasses houses so they could pick tomatoes by Christmas time, which was quite unique.

Eventually, the bamboos became too big and they were losing too much ground. John and his brother Ross removed them by hand. He says it was a big job to do this.

The garden was watered from a bore. Thomas dug a well around the bore and used a centrifugal pump in the bottom of the well. He originally drove it with a 1900's Hornsby-built kerosene engine. In later years, that was abandoned for an electric motor.

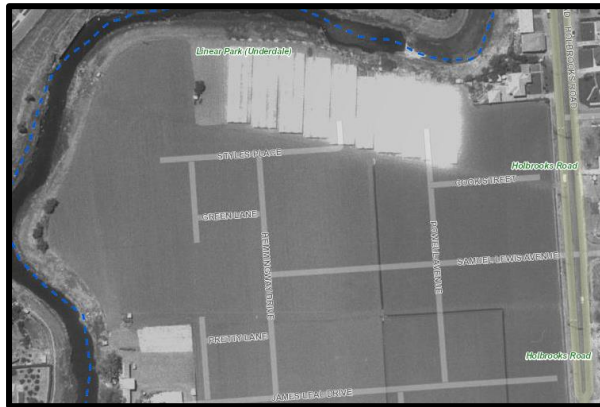


Lewis Property (circled) [[WestMaps Public](#) 1949]

Preserving Memories

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

John had a cousin that also grew celery. Gordon's property was in Underdale until sold for building the Underdale College of Advanced Education in 1976.



Lewis property 1969



Holbrooks Road/River Torrens [WestMaps Public]

CAE 1979

Memorial tree planted for Ernest Stanley Lewis

Thomas brother Ernest Stanley Lewis was killed in World War 1. In 1920 Thomas planted a Pine Nut tree on the corner of the Marion Road and West Beach [Richmond] Road in remembrance of him. John believes that in the 1950s it was registered as a significant memorial tree. He is concerned that there is talk of re-opening the Richmond Road for trucks to access the airport, and that the tree will be removed.



Memorial Tree, South West Corner Marion Road and Richmond Road c2011 [John Lewis]

Preserving Memories

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

Schooling

John started his schooling in grade one at Cowandilla Primary School and left in Grade 7.



John (circled) approx. Grade 4 or 5 [John Lewis]

John remembers being 'sweet' on the girl in dark cardigan in front of him, Rhonda Graham, whose father was a butcher and they lived on Marion Road. (The girl to her left - he recalls her surname as Parkinson)

After that he went to Thebarton Technical High School (for boys only.)

That is where I learnt to use my hands. At Thebarton, there was a tinsmith shop, fitting and turning shop, blacksmith shop, and a woodworking shop. I particularly liked the blacksmithing and the tin smithing. We learnt how to solder properly and make things like Pannikins. I didn't enjoy schooling especially some of the subjects but I was very interested in geography and I enjoyed the practical side of Thebarton Boys Tech. I remember making a metal poker for the fireside while there and it was used at home; quite skillful for a lad of 13 years.

Preserving Memories

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

Polio pandemic

Polio was epidemic during John's early life when going to Cowandilla School. They called it infantile paralysis and all the schools closed with lessons published in the newspaper those years.

Our next-door neighbour, Myrtle Turner taught myself, my brother and her son. All the lessons were published in the paper for those years. We stayed at home and didn't mix. People took it very seriously.

John remembers that the polio vaccinations were given from the council chambers.



*Allan Turner (Myrtle's son) with Ross Lewis (standing) and John seated in the tyre.
Circa 1936 [John Lewis]*

Preserving Memories

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

Mum cooking duck and goose

My mum was an absolute expert in cooking wild ducks. She would put those mountain ducks in an old cast iron pot on top of the stove in part fat, part water and afterwards, they almost fell to pieces. We didn't eat chickens like they do today, because they used to lay eggs you didn't kill chickens.

Mum also had a pair of geese. She used to dress them for Christmas and Easter. She used to dress these geese absolutely beautiful. They were dipped in boiling water in the copper just until they got wet then immediately into a tub of cold water. Boiling water, cold water. Then you could just rub the feathers off.

There used to be a pub on the corner of Wakefield Street and Pultney Street called the Orient. Quite often they'd ring up and ask Mum to dress a couple of ducks if they had something special on in the dining room. I used to deliver them on my pushbike when I was only a kid.

Early Richmond

John talked about Richmond being made up of few houses and rough roads.

Right through Richmond and up towards where the library is now, there were a lot of open paddocks. He used to catch tadpoles in those paddocks when they were flooded.



*The Richmond, West Richmond, Brooklyn Park, and Cowandilla area WestMaps Public 1949
(Lewis property (circled at bottom) / Site of the library (circled at top))*

Preserving Memories

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

I can remember the Adelaide Hunt Club. One year, they started the hunt near our corner and they used to hunt through the Barker Brothers stock paddocks down where the airport is now. Barker Brothers had a stockman named Paddy Stapleton. He used to live in a big old house just down West Beach Road down near where I built my first house. Ah, that was gobbled up with the airport and the building that went on it was for Department of Civil Aviation.



Members of the Adelaide Hunt Club out with the hounds 1922 [[SLSA PRG 280/1/30/24](#)]

Horse Racing

Ben Marles was a good man and every Adelaide Cup Day we used to borrow his binoculars and drive the old truck down to Park Terrace alongside the back of the Morphettville Racecourse and watch the start of the Adelaide Cup. We could see with Mr. Marles's binoculars right over into the grandstand and see who the winner was. (John was about 17).

I'm still a member of SAJC [SA Jockey Club].



Morphettville Racecourse, 1935 [[SLSA B44513](#)]

Preserving Memories

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

During the war it is a wonder the old boy didn't get locked up. He had Mick Medhurst, one of the leading lightweight jockeys, and Horrie Petching, he was a heavy weight jockey, and a little chap named Reg Shaw, he came up from the south east and the horse trainer, Jack Keily on the payroll just so they wouldn't get sent to the Northern Territory to build the airstrips and the road from Alice to Darwin. There was a government statutory authority called the Allied Works Council in charge of the projects. Anyone who was unemployed or wasn't in an important industry could be conscripted to the Allied Workers Council. Market gardening was an essential industry.

Electricity supply

The Netley property was still quite isolated and when Thomas wanted electricity put on to the house around 1920, the Adelaide Electric Supply Company said they would gladly extend the wires to the house if he put an electric motor on the pump.

Noarlunga Sand Depot / Don Rosewall

Sand from the sand hills was sent up to be unloaded at the Mile End Rail Yards.



Giant sand hills Port Noarlunga circa 1970

The train trucks were elevated so that the road trucks would be at the right level for the sand to be easily shovelled off. The husband of one of John's Mums friends from Foy and Gibson's (Ivy Miller) worked there.

The business won the contract to supply the Somerton Park foreshore rocks. It was owned by Don Rosewall who also owned an Earthmoving company. Don Rosewall married Eunice Stein. The Stein family lived in a wood and iron hut in the swamps that became the airport (near the West Torrens council dump).

I don't know how they lived in that house there. It would have been so hot.

Preserving Memories

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

Wood Delivery / The Bottle-o

The Hutchinson family on Bickford Street would deliver wood to homes in the area. They had 3 sons, Fred, Max and Peter.

The Marwick family delivered beverages and collected the bottles (a bottle-o).

Trucks

My dad had a Ford Model T truck. I used to drive it round the garden when I was ten years old. In 1943, my dad's cousins at Holbrooks Road, Underdale bought a new Lend Lease Chev truck. They came out under the Lend Lease plan from America. Lend Lease was an arrangement between America and Australia for primary producers. Prior to that they had a 1930 Chevrolet truck with single wheels. It was the first of the six-cylinder motors and the old boy bought the truck off of them.



<https://www.flickr.com/photos/132071411@N06/28246732680>

We ruined it carting horse manure. We use to cart all the manure from Lovells Bakery in Leader Street.



Lovell's Bakery, Forestville [SLAS B 77128/5]

Preserving Memories

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

Tractors

Tractor were becoming available and our first one was a Farmall Super A then after that, a Massey Fergusson 35HP with the reversible plough, a deep digging plough. We kept one horse because we could do things with horses that we could never do with a tractor. In the spring the soil would still be pretty wet, you couldn't get on it to work with a tractor, but you could still work it with horses.



TractorData.com



Tractorsinfo.net

Theatre 62

As kids, we used to get up to some mischief. We used to go the pictures at Theatre 62. Dad gave us ninepence; sixpence to go in the pictures, penny each way on the tram and a penny for a packet of chewy. Saturday afternoons was the kid's matinee. And as we got older we used to go on Saturday nights but the kids were restricted to the front three rows. 'Old man Unders' was the manager. And one night we're making a bit too much noise and he kicked us all out. He had a nice sky-blue Vauxhall car. So, the next Saturday night he got a spud up the exhaust pipe.



Theatre 62 Taken 1979 WTHS [LH0377-03](#)

Preserving Memories

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

Getting up to (more) mischief

Another time we got a new shoe box, wrapped it up in the brown paper with string and a bow on the top. And then put it out on the edge of Marion Road through a gap in the boxthorn hedge with a string attached to it. A horse and cart with mum, dad and couple of kids came along Marion Road and stopped.

He handed the reins to Mum but he made a mistake by not putting the horses head past the shoe box. When he bent down to pick the box up, we pulled the box back with string. The horse saw it and took off down Marion Road with the Mom yelling out, Whoa, whoa. Ah god, the things we used to do.

Richard Collett lived in Harvey Avenue near the bridge over Brownhill Creek and had an orange orchard. John and his brother Ross would steal his oranges. One day they got caught and could not deny it as he had taken a photograph of them. (Richard was a photographer and has many of his images preserved in the State Library of South Australia's photograph collection).



Collett house , Harvey Avenue, Netley 1925 [SLSA B71693]

Preserving Memories

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

Richmond Police Station, Drivers Licence

Just around the corner from the garden on West Beach Road was the Richmond Police Station. Constable Buxton was the Officer. Constable Buxton rode a Harley-Davidson motorbike with a sidecar and he would wait outside Theatre 62 at finishing time to maintain order after patrons left the cinema.

On the day I was 16 years old, I'd rode my bike up to the Richmond police station with 10 bob note (\$1) in my pocket and came home with my Driver's licence. All I had to do was answer a few questions about road rules.



147 Richmond Road (taken 1979) WTHS [LH0303-34](#)

Working Life

And the May school holidays in 1945, I said to my dad, I'm not going back to school, I've had enough. And he said, you'll have to work. I said, yeah, that's alright. I left school and went home straight into the market garden walking behind horses either ploughing or harrowing. We used to cultivate between the rows of beans and cabbage with a scarifier pulled by one Draught horse. We had two; the gelding was Prince, and the mare was Peg.

John says they were bought at the Barker Brothers Saleyards at Brooklyn Park around 1935 and had been used on the East-West railway line pulling dump scoops.

Preserving Memories

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

Manure

There was a lot of horse manure in Adelaide in those days and someone had to collect it and dispose of it. Horses were used for baker's carts, milk carts and for many other purposes. The Council used to pick up the manure from the city streets and leave it at the parklands then people would pick it up from there.

My brother and I made a mistake the first time and put it on the fresh manure on the garden. That's a no, no. In all the years that my dad carried the horse manure from the Farmers Union milk factory at London Road, Mile End he always put it in an area right down the back to rest there as a compost heap. It used to heat up and steam a lot. He used to grow all of his own tomato plants, and he used to use the fresh manure for that. Of course, the tomato plants would just go mad. We mostly grew the French variety, Rouge de Marmande. They are not grown now commercially, but ah, the flavour was beautiful.

Farmers Union, Mile End

Farmers Union had a milk processing factory at London Road, Mile End, further east from the Shell Oil Company. They used four-wheel carts with two horses for short deliveries. They would go to the grocers in the suburbs with milk, butter and eggs. Across the road from the milk plant was their grain store.

John recalls there were about 30 horses stabled at the Farmers Union property on London Road, Mile End. These were milk vendor's horses which would be exercised in a paddock of several acres. He also recalls that Farmers Union had an egg grading floor.



1922-1923 South Australian Farmers Union factory Mile End, S.A. [\[SLSA B 68755\]](#)

Cases of eggs in foreground are packed for export. Eggs were packed in divided fillers with wood wool top and bottom of cases.

The eggs would be pulped into 44 gallon drums for the bakery and cake manufacturers. Up until the 1940s John's dad would receive a daily delivery of egg shells from them and would plough them into the clay-type soil to break it apart. A Swedish man named Alf Anderssen was the teamster of the heavy two-horse trolley. John tells the story of how Alf would often stop off for a drink at the Flagstaff Hotel in Franklin Street, and on one day he had the Farmers Union CEO on the trolley to take him back to the Store. The horses automatically stopped at the pub and so Alf and the CEO had to stop and have a drink together.

Farmers Union also had a store on the corner of Franklin Street (west of the Post office). John recalls it was a two or three-storey merchandise store, where the farmers and stock owners bought their clothes and hardware when in Adelaide.

The Lewis's would sell the potatoes and onions to the station owners and farmers and as they would not hold cash money, they would get the money from the Farmers Union who sold their wool, sheep and lambs and had credit with the Union.

1945, 1950 Droughts

John recalls the droughts in 1945, and another in 1950. The government had to use the underground water bores to replenish the water supply to the town. They used modern Turbine pumps to lift water from the underground bores and they ran 24 hours a day. That lowered the water level in the bores, so they had trouble getting water for the market garden. They sunk a new bore on the property near the Marion Road side. They knew about the aquifer as Ron Gray and his brothers across the other side of Marion Road had two bores there.

They dug the bore over several weeks. The E&WS loaned us a big Grimwade air compressor to test how much water they had. The bore required an initial cleaning where a lot of sand came up with the water. To disperse this they pumped air down to push the water out, and they'd run this out through a pipe out through the fence on to Marion Road, this however flooded Marion Road.

Preserving Memories

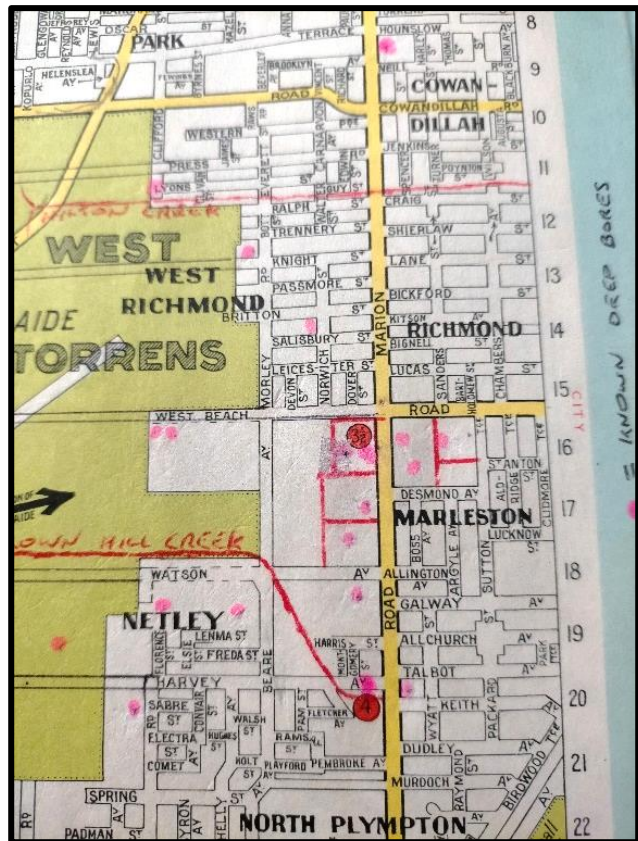
A joint project of the City of West Torrens and the West Torrens Historical Society

The aquifer and the western area bores

John is a wealth of information on the bores and access to the acquirer.

Thomas irrigated his gardens. He tried using the water from their well, but the water was too saline to irrigate vegetables in the summer. Around 1930, he put down his own bore on the western side of the block into the aquifer under Netley, which he says is about a mile in diameter, at 200 feet and goes under the middle of the airport. There is a water tower in amongst the airport buildings with a government bore underneath it.

Originally, West Beach Road, west of Marion Road was called Rosetta Road. There were a few small subdivisions there called Penryn and Twickenham, which is now West Richmond.



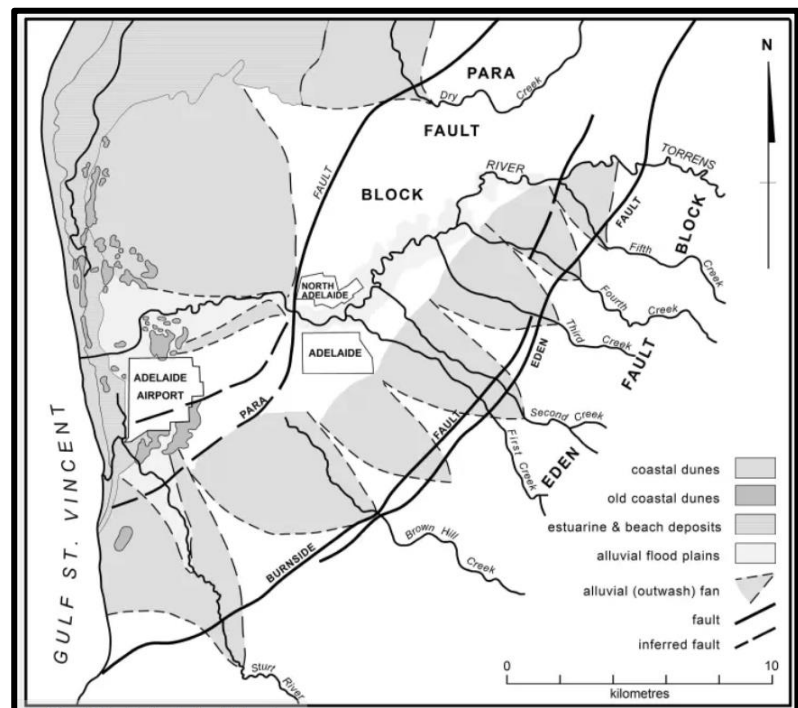
Gregory's Directory 1936 [John Lewis]

The other day I went down the bottom end of West Beach Road to have a look at the creek. There was a four-foot (1.3 metre) storm water pipe that was put underground for the water that used to come down from Keswick Creek. Before that, it came down West Beach Road like a river. I can still remember the foreman's name, Jack O'Donoghue. He was a foreman, a ganger for the West Torrens Council and he lived in Plympton. The Keswick Creek was diverted across the eastern boundary of the airport.

Creeks

The Hume Pipe Factory was located where RAA is now on the corner of South Road and Richmond Road. John recalls that the Keswick Creek used to flood and run over Hume's property.

The Keswick Creek is one of six creeks that come down from the Hills. John recalled that First Creek goes through the Botanic Garden and Second Creek goes into the Torrens at St. Peters. He didn't remember where Third Creek went, but that Fourth Creek comes down from Montacute, and Sixth Creek starts at Summertown from a spring.



Many years ago, when I was working for the old Horticultural Association of Fruit Growers and Market Gardeners Society, a weir was put across the River Torrens at Athelston. The weir blocked the flow of water down the River Torrens to the market gardeners that used to pump water out of the River Torrens from Athelston, Paradise, Payneham. An arrangement was struck with the E&WS where I would ring them and say, 'Look, we need some water to go down the Torrens.' They used to send guys up to the Athelston weir and they just used to leaver the weir up with a crowbar and let some water go. I was the contact and growers used to ring me.

Preserving Memories

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

The depression years

Through the depression years, Thomas was paying 7% interest to Ben Marles on the mortgage.

Tough times. No money around. Old friends and relations used to barter for goods. No dole money, you didn't get any money, you got a ration's ticket. He had a ticket for meat and a ticket for milk. Mum always had a cow, chooks and at one time sheep and pigs which she wasn't supposed to have because it was too close to where these subdivisions. The old boy was a great duck shooter so we ate ducks quiet often as well as hare and rabbits.

John didn't like eating the hare as it the taste was too strong. To prepare it for eating the hare would be jugged. He said this entailed hanging the dead carcass until it was tinged green

The nearby Birkalla Oval was a straight Greyhound track and when that ceased, the hares were let go and that's how they migrated to the airport.

Hansen Yunken and Harry Sarah

John remembers that on the southern side of West Beach Road, (before the area that is now the airport) was the joinery shop and yard of Hansen and Yunkens Builders. The state manager was Harry Sarah. He was originally from Victoria and Hansen and Yunkens sent him over here to build 1 King William Street, the Bank of New South Wales. That was the first major project that Hansen and Yunken's built in Adelaide.



www.sarah.com.au/history

Preserving Memories

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

He also recalls that they were building the gun emplacements for the proof range at Port Wakefield in the early fifties. That was to be used to test the cannons and the shells. They used to fire them straight down the gulf. It was always published in the paper when they were going to be firing so the fishermen around the Gulf, Ardrossan and Port Parham and places like that knew not to be in the prohibited area.



A group of men work on a 26-ton naval gun at Port Wakefield Proof Range, c. 1939
Courtesy of/Photographer: Betty Parsons
History SA, South Australian Maritime Museum Photographic Collection, 16302

Whilst there was petrol rationing, to save the travel, Harry Sarah used to drive to Port Wakefield once a week on a Thursday to take the payroll to his workers. John remembers that if a full moon came on a Thursday, Mick Medhurst, myself and my brother used to go in Harry's car and after he dropped the payroll off, we go shooting ducks in the hummocks near Port Wakefield.

Earthquake 1954

In 1954 Adelaide had an earthquake, with the epicentre at Darlington.

There were oodles of houses cracked and ruined from this earthquake. I remember in the middle of the night there was a woman over in West Richmond screaming her head off. Things were shaking. It caused a lot of damage. I don't think there was anyone killed. There is a fault line that goes along exactly where they built the new Adelaide Hospital. The new Royal Adelaide is right on the fault line. Before the hospital, that land was a train yard. Near Henley Beach Road and Glover Avenue, where the old Bakewell Bridge was, there's a dip before you go up to Carey Street, that's the fault line.



House, Seacombe Gardens March 1954 <https://aes.org.au/gallery/1954-adelaide/>

Preserving Memories

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

The fault line is near the old Newmarket Hotel on the corner of North Terrace and West Terrace. It is the highest point in Adelaide and is where Colonial Light started surveying with his theodolite on that corner. At the time there were cattle sales and abattoirs and that is how the location came to be called the Newmarket.

Neighbours

The corner block, across Marion Road [South-east corner of West Beach Road], was the Gray property originally owned by Charles Gray. His sons, Ron, Bill and Jim took over as a partnership. They had two bores on their property accessing the same aquifer.

Two of Charles brothers, Les and Sam, also farmed in the area.

Another neighbour was Ah Chung, a Chinese grower who also had a bore on the property he leased.



Grays property (circled) [WestMaps Public](#) 1935

Bob and Keith Mules also had a block to the south of Lewis' property. Their father Robert had the property before them. The Mules property was acquired for Griffen Press.

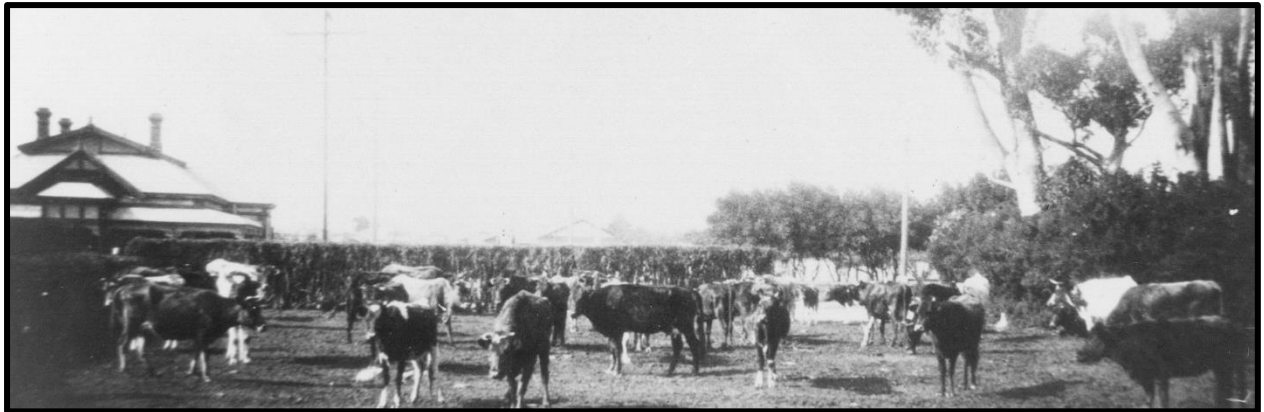
The Grays and Mules were related as Addy [Adelaide] Gray married Bob Mules.

Further south along Watson Avenue was Masons piggery and another piggery facing Beare Avenue belonging to Len Tiley. He would buy the sucker pigs at Gepps Cross and he gave John's mother have four or five of them.

Preserving Memories

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

Also, further along Marion Road was Mrs Underdown's dairy north of where The Pines retirement villages are now. During the spring, when the clover grew, she would mind her cows on Marion Road. Mrs Underdown rode an old Grey Horse and if it was cold, she would use a canvas cover to cover her up around her waist.



Underdown's dairy, Netley 1936 [WTHS LH0354-08]

Richmond Park Stud

Nearby Richmond Park Stud was surrounded by boxthorn hedge which was used to fence the horses in. The stud also grew lucerne and irrigated it from one of the underground streams. They also had agistment paddocks further down in Netley behind William Beare's original homestead.

Farming Celery

In those early days, the celery was sent to Sydney by train. It would be pre-cooled in the cold stores at Mile End, then loaded into railway trucks. The enclosed railway trucks had ice boxes at each end to keep the temperature down. The celery was packed in large pine crates and when loaded weighed around 90 pounds (41 kgs). John proudly declared that when he was young, he could lift them over his head.

If it hadn't been for young Italian migrants in the late 1949's we wouldn't have survived. Young Italian migrants were doing night shift work at Woodville Holden Factory and would have knocked off at say five o'clock in the morning. They be at our place ready to harvest celery or whatever at seven o'clock. They work until lunchtime and that helped us greatly. We couldn't have progressed without them. It would have been impossible.

The produce from the garden went to East End market. Whilst John was still school age, he would go to market with his father. A typical day was getting up at 5 o'clock, John didn't have a

Preserving Memories

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

licence, but would start the truck and wait for his Dad. The truck would be loaded the night before.

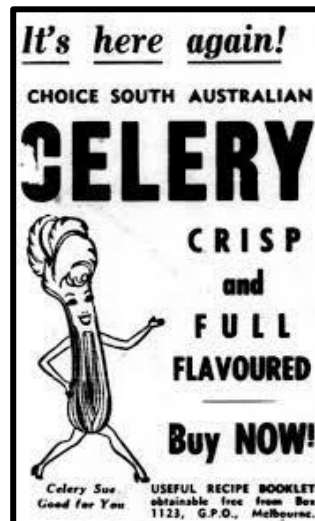
I used to have to hold my pushbike on the truck's running board through the open cabin on the old Chev truck. I would go to the East End market and unload the produce with a hand cart before I rode my bike to school. My brother did it before me.

Market day was Monday, Wednesday, Friday. When the produce was sold to merchants that distributed to the country, they would receive a docket. The dockets would be exchanged on Friday for the money collection day. That made Friday a longer day.

I enjoyed being a market gardener. It's a hard life but was it rewarding.

John was able to attend a 2021 SA History Month presentation 'When Celery was King' at the Campelltown library.

He was able to speak about his experiences and to reunite with other people of the industry from that era.



When Celery was King! 2021 [WTHS]

Preserving Memories

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

Supermarkets

John laments that supermarkets are the worst thing that ever happened to the market gardeners. Woolworths had their first fruit and vegetable warehouse at the East End market on Union Street in the early 1950s.

At first the farmers thought, this'll be good, I don't have to go to market, just take my produce and drop it into the Woolworths Warehouse. And you got paid through whatever Woolworths wanted to pay you and it still happens today. Once a grower started dealing with Woolworths and Coles they lost their other little clients and had nowhere to go. They found out that they were worse off when it was too late.

Woolworths also use to have a produce warehouse on Marion Road/Desmond Avenue opposite to where the Netley police station is now.

Trams

John remembers that the tram would come from the City along Henley Beach Road into South Road (Fisher Terrace), and on that corner was Acklands Chaff and Fodder store. The building had a few feet cut off the corner wall to enable the tram to traverse the corner they had to cut a few feet off of the brick wall. John recalls that they did the same on the corner near the Hilton Hotel.



Drop centre tram travelling to city along Marion Road 1950 [SLSA B 69703]

Preserving Memories

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

When the Housing Trust houses were built at West Richmond in 1938, they extended the tram (on a single line), from the Hilton terminus near the Council chambers, along Rowland Road (which became Cowandilla Road and now Sir Donald Bradman Drive). From a double line, it went around the corner into Marion Road, up to the corner of West Beach and Richmond Roads, the Richmond Tram terminus. This was right by the Lewis property.

Adelaide Airport

I can remember long before airport; it was swamp land, red sand dunes, box thorn hedges, undulating. We used to go down there trapping rabbits, and whatever. West Torrens rubbish tip was in the middle of the airport, not far from where the terminal is now and that used to be our Saturday sport with Fox Terrier dogs. We took home all sorts of treasures from the rubbish dump. When they built the airport, they had to cart away all the rubbish.



Adelaide Airport circa 1948 from [Masterplan 2015](#)

Preserving Memories

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

Shops and the Marleston Post Office

John recalls he would go the barber shop where the tram came into Rowland Road (now Sir Donald Bradman Drive).

The Marleston Post Office was near South Road and Richmond Road. The interstate merchants would contact us by sending a telegram.

*I remember we got a telegram from Sydney once,
'YOUR CELERY SOLD THIS MORNING AT 44 SHILLINGS PER CRATE.'*

That was £2, 4 shillings- a record price which was unknown before. Anyway, that telegram, the old boy had it framed and it was at home for years and years. We were very proud of that.



The last celery crop (circa 1966) [John Lewis]

Government Printing Office

John is resentful that his farming days were cut short when the government claimed back the land for the Government Printing Office in 1966. They held it for six years before offering to lease it back to the family. John says his dad spoke with the Town clerk of West Torrens, Vernon Shephard. At that time, he says, Vernon Shephard knew more about real estate and Land law

Preserving Memories

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

than any other person in the state. And his advice was 'It's law, you got no choice. You could fight it in court if you wish but the Government will front up with a QC. Don't waste your time arguing your point with the QC. If you lose the case, you pay the Government costs too.'

The old boy was against fighting it, I was against it, and my brother wanted to fight; it split the family. To think that he went there with a horse and cart in 1920 and you know the Government just come along and took it from us after all the hard work, breaks your heart. And the old boy only lived for six months after that.

Tough Times

John went on to work as a welder for Fred Melville Engineering for two years. He made wrought iron fences, gates and security doors. Sadly, John's wife was diagnosed with motor neuron disease about June, 1970. He stayed home and looked after her and the three children fulltime, until she passed away in January 1974.

All the cooking, all the washing while the kids were going to school. Oh geez, it was pretty tough. I don't know whether I could do it again.

Market Gardeners Association / Farmers' Federation

There was animosity between merchants and growers for years and years. Merchants would want to have the produced supplied to them cheaper to counteract the cost of transporting to the country. At the East End market, the growers would have a meeting under the clock in the morning and work out what they were going to charge for their produce.



East End Market circa 1988 Christmaslane.info

Preserving Memories

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

John later worked for the SA Fruit Growers and Market Gardeners Association, after the amalgamation with the Farmers' Federation. For 16 years, he did the market price reporting.

I used to make a chart of monthly average market price for most vegetables for them. No computer in those days. I used to do it all on a little calculator by hand and I also used to do another chart with those monthly averages for five years. Boy, those charts used to tell a story.

Growers and people use to ring me up and say, 'I've got a block of dirt and I'd like to grow some vegetables'. The first thing I used to say to them, 'Well, where is it? What sort of dirt is it? What's the quality of the water?' And I would say, 'It doesn't matter what you take on, you must grow it for five years.'

Cause in those five years, you would have two or three years that you would survive on. You wouldn't make any money, you'd survive. And, you'd have one year that you'd go broke. So, that was four out of the five. I used to say to them, 'You got to grow it for five years because the year you drop out will be the good one.' And it showed up in those charts time and time again.

John was a Market Liaison Officer for the Farmers' Federation, and he was responsible for closing the divide between merchants, growers and commission agents and this is something he is very proud of. He mentions that when he left, the Association regrettably collapsed.

Retirement

John retired in 1996 and wore his favourite bowler hat from his youth and same cheeky grin.



[John Lewis]

Preserving Memories

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

Bottle of wine

John has a treasured bottle of wine that was made just after World War 1 from the grapes that were planted on the Moore Farm property at Fulham (Davis/White property) in 1837/8 at the first Vineyards of the Reedbeds area. Samples of these grapes were sent to England.

John says this was on the sideboard of the old Lewis family home in Lewis Street Lockleys for as long as he could remember. Thomas put the wire and lead seal was put on the top to stop his sister's boyfriend from sneaking a drink of it.



Preserving Memories

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

This information have been compiled from interviews conducted on three occasions as part of the Preserving Memories West Torrens History Project 2021.

John is a member of the West Torrens Historical Society.

Date: 7th April 2021

Location: SOMERTON PARK