



# Of Pubs and Publicans

An edited transcript of Catherine Murphy's interview with  
Peter Brien and Bill McCawley

edited by Craig Hill

Cover photograph: Hotel Alberton, c1953  
Courtesy of the Brien family

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In November 1990 historian Catherine Murphy interviewed two well-known local publicans, Peter Brien and Bill McCawley (with occasional contributions from Katherine McCawley, Bill's wife) for her oral history of Port Adelaide, *Of Ships, Strikes and Summer Nights*. Her interview offers a unique insight, both informative and entertaining, into the hotel trade during a period of major changes in South Australian society as well as the liquor industry.

Understandably Catherine's focus was on these two local identities and on how they and their two hotels, the Alberton Hotel (Alberton) and the Exeter Hotel (Semaphore), influenced and were influenced by the Port Adelaide community from about 1940 until the 1980s. The original transcript of the interview published in *Of Ships...* and the version deposited in the State Library of South Australia therefore omitted segments of the interview, including some of particular relevance to the broader history of local, suburban and working-class pubs in the second half of the twentieth century. The main purpose of this revised version of the transcript is to add these missing parts. And, hopefully, to introduce these two great personalities to a wider audience.

This transcript is not a verbatim record of the interview. It has been heavily edited to improve its readability and comprehension. However, I have tried to maintain the integrity of the original interview and certainly no 'factual' information has been added or changed knowingly, even on the rare occasions that Peter's or Bill's recollections might not have been absolutely perfect. I apologise for any inaccuracies or inconsistencies.

In re-transcribing the interview, I acknowledge and sincerely thank Catherine Murphy, not only as the interviewer and author of the original transcript but also for generously permitting me to publish this revised transcript. Also many thanks to Lyn and John Cashen and Suzanne Farrington for their comments, suggestions and proof-reading. And special thanks to Peter Brien, the son of the senior Peter Brien and current owner of the Alberton Hotel.

Craig Hill, May 2020

## **Biographical notes**

### **Peter Brien**

Born: Southwark, South Australia, 22 July 1911

Father: Dennis Brien (1868–1947);

Mother: Jane Connolly (c1866–1931)

Married: Kathleen Coleman (c1912–1989),  
30 December 1939

Died: Alberton, 7 November 1992

Peter's father was Dennis Brien, licensee of the Southwark Hotel at Thebarton from 1903 to December 1937. Peter was the manager and later licensee of the Alberton Hotel at Alberton from September 1940 until 1987.

### **Bill McCawley**

Born: Adelaide, South Australia, 25 April 1921

Father: Edward Albert ("Eddie") McCawley  
(1890?–1946);

Mother: Kathleen Chisholm (1896? – 1977)

Married: Kathleen O'Connor (1922 – 2012),  
20 July 1948

Died: 26 January 2000

Bill's parents, Edward and Kathleen, separately or together, licensed and/or owned the Tivoli Hotel in Adelaide (1917 – 1922), the Maid and Magpie Hotel at Stepney (1923 – 1925) and the Exeter

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**Catherine Murphy [CM]:** I'll just start today by asking each of you your full names and dates of birth.

**Peter Brien [PB]:** I am Peter Augustine Brien. I was born at the Southwark Hotel or South Wark on 22nd July 1911. My father and mother were Dennis and Jane Brien and they had the hotel at Southwark. They went in there in 1902.

My father got his start through the Melbourne Cup. He was in a syndicate and they drew Merriwee, a South Australian horse which won in about 1900 and it was worth £5,000. That was a lot of money in those days, although it was divided amongst five. My father was in the Railways at the time and the rest of the syndicate was in Coburn on the New South Wales border. They got the £5000 between them.

My father had a bit of a holiday and then he got wed. My mother didn't know anything about the hotel business. Neither did my father, he just used to drink in them. He came to town and bought the leasehold of the Southwark on the Port Road at Southwark.

A couple of the other blokes also left the Railways and one, J.K. Lee, went to the pub at Port Pirie. He was also at Crystal Brook and then he had the Ramsgate at Henley Beach.

**CM: Do you remember what number on the Port Road?**

**PB:** Number 77, Port Road, Southwark.

**CM: And your mother's maiden name, do you know what that was?**

**PB:** Mother's maiden name was Connolly.

**CM: Peter, do you know when your parents were born?**

**PB:** My father was born in 1868. my mother I don't know.

**CM: Were they both born in the area?**



**PB:** No, my father was born in Dry Creek, near Northfield. My mother was born at Kapunda.

My mother's father took a pub at St John's near Kapunda. I don't know whether he drank much but he decided to sell it and went to the Snowy River diggings to make his fortune. He came back with a shovel and a pick, I think, that's all he came back with.

**CM:** Peter, were you born at the Southwark?

**PB:** At the Southwark, yes. I was the last of the children, 'cause my mother and father didn't marry 'til late. I was lucky to get in the team at all, I suppose.

**CM:** How many children were there?

**PB:** Four, that was with me, but the others didn't survive.

**CM:** So you spent all your early years at the Southwark?

**PB:** Yes. I was in the bar before I was born really.

**CM:** Your mother was pregnant?

**PB:** Yes. My mother died there in about the 30s but my father and I stayed there 'til 1937.

**CM:** Bill, can you tell me your full name and your date of birth and where you were born?

**Bill McCawley [BMcC]:** William Albert Ignatius McCawley and I was born in Adelaide, on 25th April 1921. I was born in a house at Tucker Street. At that particular time my family had the license of the Tivoli Hotel. The house and the hotel, their backyards ran into one another. After we left the Tivoli Hotel, the family went to the Maid & Magpie [in Stepney]. They were there for about four years and then they came down to the Exeter at Semaphore or Exeter.

**CM:** Did your family also have a history of owning hotels?



**BMcC:** They started just prior to father going into the Tivoli Hotel in town. His brother was in the hotel business. He took a hotel some years prior at Port Pirie and then came back to Adelaide. They came to Port Adelaide and he had the Clubhouse Hotel and the Commercial Hotel in Port Adelaide.

**CM: That was Chrissy?**

**BMcC:** That was Chrissy, yes.

**CM: Do you remember what year he would have come to the Port?**

**BMcC:** Chrissy would have been here in about 1923.

**CM: He and his wife were well known identities, weren't they?**

**BMcC:** They were well known identities down here, yes.

**CM: What was her name?**

**BMcC:** Her name was Emily Austin. "Big Emma" they called her. She was quite a large woman, a very delightful person. Her family also were interested in hotels. They had the Green Dragon Hotel in Adelaide. So at that particular stage, the whole family were more or less interested in hotels and had been just a few years prior to that.

**CM: Chrissy was noted for a couple of instances of bravery at the Port, wasn't he?**

**BMcC:** Yes he was. He received a citation during the "City of Singapore" fire and also he received the Royal Humane Society Medal for rescuing a fellow drowning in the Port River. He dived off the bridge when he saw this fellow in difficulties and pulled him out of the river and received the award from the Royal Humane Society.

**CM: Did you grow up in the Exeter Hotel?**





**BMcC:** Mainly. I was born while we were licensees of the Tivoli Hotel and then went to the Maid & Magpie.

**CM: How old would you have been when you moved to the Exeter?**

**BMcC:** Oh, I was getting on towards six, I suppose, when we came down to the Exeter.

I managed to survive the Maid & Magpie which was built on the junction of Magill and Payneham Roads. In those days it was a fairly dangerous spot for a little boy to be playing out the front. There was quite a possibility of being run over in those days by trams and a few horses would be going passed the site and you might be kicked to death by them! But I survived all that and got down here to the Exeter, I think, at about the age of six, and have remained down here effectively my whole life.

[**Kath McCawley:** You would have started school immediately...]

**CM: What school did you go to when you came to the Exeter?**

**BMcC:** I went to the convent, the Star of the Sea Dominican Convent at Semaphore and then left there to go to Rostrevor College where, after settling in – it took about 6 months to settle in – I spent a few very happy years. The Brothers were fairly strict in those days and we had different [sorts of ] fellows and some guys I didn't see eye to eye with. But, as most boys do, you settle down after a while and I thoroughly enjoyed it.

**CM: And how long were you at the Exeter, Bill?**

**BMcC:** All told we were there about 51 years at the Exeter Hotel – a long period of time.

**CM: So you married there and raised a family, a large family?**

**BMcC:** Yes, we married there, next to the hotel. Then we raised a family and then we bought this house at Military Road, Large Bay, and we moved in down here. The children were getting a bit of a



handful for Kath at the hotel. It's a bit awkward trying to rear all the children with the business. And it wasn't particularly good for them.

**CM: Peter, I'd like to ask you when you moved from the Southwark. Did you move straight to the Alberton hotel?**

**PB:** No, my father and I left the Southwark and we boarded in Hindmarsh. I wasn't working at the time. The first time that I'd done any work outside the Southwark was at the Mile End Hotel [about mid-way through the Depression]. I worked at the Mile End for Christmas Eve and Christmas Day and I got 30 bob for these two days, which was the first money I ever earned really. I'd get kept at the pub alright, I'd get anything I wanted, no worries about that.

When my father sold out to May Jones, a well known personality in the Port Adelaide area – she was a Knapman and her son, Billy Jones, become the licensee of the Southwark – my father and I stayed in Hindmarsh. I worked in various places during that time, mostly at the Red Lion Hotel in Adelaide. Then I got a casual job down at the Alberton. And finally, the licensee. Mrs. Boyce, said she'd like me to come there as manager, which I did, and I got married.

**CM: What year was that?**

**PB:** That was 1938. But things didn't work out alright so I left. My father and I and Kathleen, my wife, bought a place in Hindmarsh. From then on I worked at various places, at the Halfway Hotel at Kilkenny and I was down at the Avoca at Edwardstown, the Fountain Inn at Parkside, the Port Admiral [at Port Adelaide] and back to the Red Lion again. And finally Mrs. Boyce passed away and Kathleen and I were asked to come down to look after the Alberton. Kathleen was starting a family herself at that time, so we went there, and that's how it started at the Alberton.

**CM: And what year do you think that would have been?**



**PB:** I became licensee in 1940. Prior to that I used to work at the Alberton with a couple of fellows who also worked at the Red Lion. Mrs. Boyce would ask the licensee of the Red Lion, Mr. McLaren, to send somebody to go down to the Alberton on Saturday afternoons, for the football days. We used to get payed pretty well – 12/6 we used to get, it was lovely.

**CM: Peter, this all happened during the Great Depression. Did you sell the Southwark in response to the Depression?**

**PB:** Actually the Depression was over by then, in about '37-'38-'39, when the war clouds were coming over. Money had become a bit freer then, and there was work around. And in 1939 the War came properly.

**CM: So the Depression didn't have any bearing on the sale of the Southwark?**

**PB:** Yes, it did. My mother left me some money but I didn't get it until I was 21. During the Depression, I used the money up to keep us going. And finally, when we could see the light in the window, that's when we sold out. We got £1900 for the remainder of the lease.

**CM: Did you have to go through stringent procedures to become a licensee of the Alberton Hotel in those days?**

**PB:** No, no. You had to face the Licensing Court and, of course, they knew your past or your record. But I didn't have any bother. I held the license for the Alberton for almost fifty years.

**CM: What do you remember of the Depression in relation to the hotels?**

**PB:** As far as the Southwark was concerned, we had about three boarders who weren't working. They were getting rations and payed their board [partly] with ration tickets. They were single men and they would get 17/6 a week, I think, and they payed their board with that. We had three of them. You could apply for a rent



reduction through the Fair Rent Board or something like that. We were paying £4 a week [for the lease of the hotel] at that time. So that's when father said "Listen, I've had enough of this", He was there 36 years, from 1902 to 1937, and he said "Here's our chance, let's get out". Well, we got out – with £1900. Of course the pub wasn't very modern in those days. Mrs Jones put Billy in there and they did quite well.

**CM: Bill, what do you remember of that time?**

**BMcC:** We more or less arrived down the Port during the Depression when they had troubles on the wharf. We went through that period down there. Things were pretty tight and very tough in Port Adelaide in those days. There wasn't much money about. Fellows didn't have a great deal of money to spend on liquor or smokes. But we weathered the storm. Dad was very good. He put up with it. It didn't affect me greatly.

I was too young to really know what they were going through, it was just the fact that you didn't have very much. But of course nobody did, so it didn't really matter.

**CM: Your father was quite generous?**

**BMcC:** He was pretty good. I suppose he got to the stage where he was sick of being the only bloke in the bar and he'd get someone to go and bring them in to have a drink and a talk. Dad loved to have a yarn with somebody. He used to smoke a pipe and he always had this pipe sticking out of his mouth.

**CM: Were the hotels on rations too?**

**BMcC:** Hotels could get the beer alright, provided you could pay for it. But that was the hard part, getting the money in. Of course customers were very scarce, few and far between.

**CM: So they didn't actually ration the amount of beer that each hotel could have?**



**BMcC:** No, not at that particular time. We didn't have any rationing as far as I know until the War, the War in 1939-45. They were hard days, the Depression days – very, very hard.

**CM: And what were the closing hours like during that period?**

**BMcC:** Six o'clock closing had been introduced by then. Prior to the First World War hotels closed at 11 o'clock but that was rescinded and brought back to 6 o'clock closing. So during the Depression, hotels closed at six. They were allowed to open early in the morning but there really wasn't much business early in the morning in our area. So we didn't open very early in the morning. Father used to open at 6 o'clock in the morning, just in case someone was going passed and wanted to have a drink. We didn't get too many customers.

**Kath McCawley:** I can remember your mother telling me about your father, standing out the front at 6 o'clock, bitterly cold morning, and some old chap would be coming home on his bike after doing night shift, wet and cold, and he'd say "Come on in, Joe." "Can't. I can't afford it." "Come on in and I'll give you a rum."

**CM: ...to warm him up?**

**BMcC:** Yeah, that sort of thing happened. I can remember talk of Dad once opening the bar illegally, really a legal accident, and he wasn't aware of this fact. We had a young man working for us at the time by the name of Max and he used to get up in the morning with Dad and the two of them'd go down and clean the hotel and clean the bars out and open up and wait for customers. At about six in the morning we used to get the first train going passed the hotel. This was the thing that woke them up. Dad went to bed one particular night and, as often happened, some time during the night must have been dreaming and thought he heard this train – "My God, we're late, stuck in bed again," he hopped out of bed, roused Max out of his bed. Well, Max wondered what had struck him, felt as though no sooner had he got into bed and it was time to get up again! Down they came, opened the bar up, put the lights on and said "My word, it's dark this morning". They were



down there half an hour with the lights blazing away when he realised that it was the last train at night and they were opening up at midnight instead of six in the morning! It took him quite a while to live that down.

**CM: How was beer rationed during the War?**

**PB:** Rationing meant that we were selling a lot of draught beer and bottling it. Your ration of bottled beer wasn't very high, but draught beer was fairly good. Now, at the Alberton we had a ration of seventy dozen bottles of Coopers Ale. You couldn't bottle Coopers Ale because first of all it wasn't a Coopers pub. So I think that our quota of bottles and quarts was about 70 dozen. And we were getting up to about 15 or 16 "18s", [eighteen gallon] barrels of beer at the time.

My father used to tell me that, at the end of World War One, when the troop ships used to come back, the authorities would know and they'd ring up the pubs – "The ships are coming in" – and hotels had to close while the ships were in port. We were lucky because we didn't have a phone. When the ships used to come in, particularly in Port Adelaide, some of the returned soldiers used to get stuck into the pubs and there'd be trouble. So every pub, they'd ring them up. But we were lucky because we didn't have a phone line.

**CM: Did most hotels do their own bottling?**

**PB:** They always bottled wine and some spirits. But I think a bloke named Drake who had the Norfolk Hotel in Adelaide started bottling draught beer. It was about 10 pence a bottle, I think. Then gradually all the hotels started doing their bottling in flagons and then quarts and then of course it went on from that. Those were the main sales, quart bottles and flagons.

**CM: So until then all the beer was delivered in barrels, was it?**

**BMcC:** Beer was delivered in barrels, apart from packaged, that is, bottled beer. We had a quota of bottled beer. And so, in those

days it was very hard to supply your customers with enough bottles. You only got so many dozen a week and you had to try and make it go around. To give everybody 2 or 3 bottles of beer was very, very hard.

We used to do our bottled quota for the week on Saturday mornings. The fellows used to come in [with their kit bags] – in those days everybody had a Gladstone bag, a kit bag to carry their lunch or whatever in it. You got to know the bags after a couple of years as well as the faces of customers. You'd look at the bag and say "Oh, that's Joe Smith's" or "that's Jack's bag" or so-and-so's. We had a cellar and we would fill the bags up down there, you know, put the bottles [in their bags], however many the chaps were getting. They'd just open the trap door and throw their bag down and you'd go down, climb over this mountain of bags down there and sort them out. It would take you two to three hours. Of course, you'd get to the end and you'd have six bags left and only seven bottles. It just didn't work out giving blokes two bottles each. Very hard and it was a terrible thing.

**PB:** That was a shocking thing, that rationing of beer to customers of two bottles. A bloke might come home on leave and you'd give him some, then someone would see you give it to him and say "Where's mine?"

I had our bottles stored under the staircase and you'd have to get right inside the staircase to get the beer out. Someone would come into the bar with his bag and say, "Righto, what about my beer?" "OK," I'd reply and I'd come around to the bottom of the stairs, at the side door. And I'd fill it with his "special", six bottles in his bag, and then hand his bag out. "Right, see you later". Well, I'd lock up, go back into the bar and this bloke said, "Where's my beer?" I said, "I gave it to you." "You never gave it to me, and that was a new bag too. Where is it?" "Oh sorry..." I gave it to another bloke, beer and all!

**CM:** How was beer delivered from the breweries to the hotels?

**PB:** Horses and motors.



**BMcC:** Horses to start with, then motors took over.

**CM: What was delivery by horse and dray like?**

**PB:** A traveller would come around in those days and take your order. Then he'd go back to the brewery, file the order and then they would send it out.

Now, the Alberton Hotel was a depot for this area and they had the stables and two delivery vans there. The traveller would come around on Monday or Tuesday and if it was a brewery pub, he'd come for the rent and then took the order. The order was then dispatched to the Port. In those days they used to send the beer down by rail to the Port Dock Station and these vans would go to pick it up there and they'd have the cart notes and then deliver to one hotel or another.

**CM: What years are you talking about here, Peter?**

**PB:** The depot was closed at Port Adelaide, at the Alberton, when I went there first. So it must have been at the end of World War One.

**CM: And, Bill, how did they unload the beer and put it in the cellar?**

**BMcC:** The fellows would come around with their casks. They had wooden casks in those days and they were very, very heavy. We got to the stage of ordering thirty-six gallon barrels – we called them "36s" and they were double the usual size. These others, the kilderkins, were 18 gallons kegs – well, supposedly 18 gallons. The "36s" were enormous kegs. For some reason or another, just after the War, we started ordering a few of these great big blokes, and putting them down the cellar.

The guys would pull up near your cellar door. The brewery drivers would pull up and they'd have a bag they called the 'dump bag'. This was just sort of an ordinary hessian bag full of corks and they would put that down on the footpath and drop the kegs from the truck onto this "dump" to save breaking or damaging the cask.





Then they'd roll them and leave however many we were getting in a line by the cellar door. and then they would put them down the cellar. Usually you had a cellar with skids and the casks would be lowered on the skid with the aid of a rope. They'd put a hitch in the rope and put the rope around the keg and lower it down the skids. Of course these guys were quite expert at doing this sort of thing and handling these big kegs. We had a dump at the end of the skid down the bottom of the cellar also, so that the kegs slid down the skids and they'd hit this dump and we'd just remove them from there and store them in the cellar.

Of course, in most cellars, we had problems over the years with cooling beer. South Australia's always been a place which has prided itself on having cold beer – Australians love cold beer – and we went from the days of ice through refrigeration.

Originally we had ice. The kegs were put down in the cellar, because the cellar was a fairly cool place. Later a lot of hotels put in what they called "cold rooms" down in the cellar and you'd place the beer from the brewery which was cold when it was delivered into a cold room, which helped to keep the beer cool and made it much easier to refrigerate.

**CM: How would it the beer be cooled from the cellar through to the bar?**

**BMcC:** The beer was pushed through pipes from the barrels in the cellar to the bar by gas pressure. Gas pressure pushed the beer out of keg through the pipes, through the tap and into a glass. We used to use carbon dioxide to do that or even air pressure. Later on air compressors came into it because gas was fairly expensive. There was another problem with gas, especially when people had cold rooms. If the gas was left on the keg overnight, the gas would be absorbed in the cold beer. Cold beer absorbs gas but when it's hot, it expels gas and the beer would over-carbonate. The following day you couldn't "pull" the beer, it would be just like milkshakes – pulling like a glass of milk – and it was very hard, very unruly.

To cool the beer, we originally had an ice cooling system, an icebox with coils. The coils were in the bottom of the icebox. The ice was placed on top and the beer circulated through the coils and was chilled by the ice. But, of course, the ice melted around the coils and it wouldn't have the same effect. "Turn the ice over" was the cry, "Turn the ice". So you'd turn the ice block over and scrape the side which had all these indentations on it from the coil. You had to flatten it out ready to go. And, of course, the ice just kept melting. To keep the beer cold we used to cover the coils with as much ice as possible. You'd break the ice up into small pieces and fill it around the coils to try and keep the beer cold. One of the big cries in those days was "Where's the ice-man?" Many-a-time we were out running around the district looking for the ice-man!

**CM: Where was the local ice-man?**

**BMcC:** We had an ice depot at Alberton.

**PB:** ...and there was one in Dockville...

**CM: How would they keep the ice cold for delivery?**

**BMcC:** Oh, it was pretty hard to keep cold for delivery. They used to put bags over the top. The idea was to remove the ice as quickly as possible so it wouldn't melt on the cart or truck. Especially on a warm day, they'd start off in the morning with a great block of ice and if they were delivering in the afternoon you'd be lucky to get one half the size.

**CM: Do you have memories about that time too, Peter?**

**PB:** When I first went into the pub at the Southwark, the beer was pulled by hand pumps. They were like a pump with a handle and the beer was pulled from the barrels with no aeration at all. The beer at that time was Haussen's beer from the Hindmarsh Brewery. We didn't need any gas because of how they made the beer. You'd knocked the bung out of a keg, an "18" or whatever it was, with a hammer and chisel and then you'd put the tap straight into the hole. You could pull beer out of that for two days and it would still have a head on it.

And, as far as keeping the ice, we had a big trough that had a lid on and was used for sawdust. Like the old English pubs, we used to put sawdust on the floor of the bar and, of a night time, you'd rake all the matchsticks out of it and start again. The ice-man would come in the morning and he'd put the ice on the coils and then we'd get a couple of spares and wrap it up in paper and then bury it in the sawdust in the trough, and that would keep for days.

**CM: Who were the breweries in those days? Were there still breweries in the Port at that time?**

**PB:** No, there weren't any breweries in the Port at that time. The last brewery in the Port was Knapman's, in about 1908. There was Goodier's Brewery, where Bronson's was. Then, where the Central Hotel is today, was a brewery called "Something" Cellars and I think that belonged to the Knapmans.

**CM: Who were the major breweries that you were dealing with during the period that we're talking about? Up to the War, say?**

**BMcC:** We had the West End and Southwark Breweries in those days. Originally these were two breweries. Nathan Beer was made by the Southwark Brewery. Apparently Nathan was a brand name for German beer made by a particular method. They were forced to relinquish that name and they changed over to Southwark, and they were called the Southwark Brewery.

Originally we had the two breweries and eventually they amalgamated as the South Australian Brewing Company. But they still produced the two beers – you could still buy either Southwark beer or West End.

**Kath McCawley:** ...But before all that, there were other breweries...

**PB:** The other breweries were finished by the early nineteen hundreds, before we were born.

When I was at the Red Lion, the South Australian Brewing Company absorbed the Walkerville Cooperative Brewing Company, which is where the brewery at Southwark is today. Originally the Walkerville Brewery came from Walkerville, but they came to the brewery at Southwark which was the Torrenside Brewery, Ware's Torrenside Brewery. The Torrenside Brewery was owned by the Ware family and they had the Exchange Hotel in Hindley Street and they made their own beer.

**CM: And what were some of the names of the beers, some of the different labels that you might remember?**

**PB:** Haussens had Hindmarsh Ale. There was also Pike's Oakbank Ale. On the Pike label was a fish, like a snook. It was pretty good, like Cooper's Ale. Johnson's was also at Oakbank. And also there was the Waverley Brewery. They had quite a few pubs. But their beer was pretty potent, I believe. They said that no-one would need to go to the pictures for entertainment if they had a bottle of Waverley because they'd see all sorts of funny things without going to the pictures.

**CM: What were the labels like?**

**PB:** There were about 60 breweries, I think, and I collected most of the breweries' labels.

**CM: And were the beers different in taste and look?**

**PB:** Yes, they were. In those days a brewer brewed his own way, much as Coopers do today. Coopers had the red label which was brewed by a different type of fermentation, and it was brewed in the bottle. The others used the modern technology such as pasteurisation...

**BMcC:** ... "Passed your eyes very quickly"...

In the old days beers were similar, in a way, to what they are today. Different breweries made their own in different ways and the beers were different. Then with the advent of technology with

the bigger breweries, the smaller breweries went out of business and were absorbed by others. Then you only had the two large breweries and they made their particular beers and these were the types of beer we had to sell.

The only other beer I can remember, during the War, was Springfield, made down at Mitcham. Because there was such a shortage of beer at that time, Springfield came into being. Unfortunately it wasn't a very popular beer. People didn't really enjoy it, they merely bought Springfield because it was beer, it was alcohol and it was cold, just something to drink.

**PB:** During the rationing period, people would go out on Saturdays but we'd be closed because we didn't have enough beer. The beer would be delivered on Friday afternoons and we'd do about five or ten "18s", the remainder of the quota. And our customers would be waiting. We'd get it down the cellar by five o'clock and, you know, there'd be just enough left for the staff to have a drink at six o'clock.

And the next day, Saturday, in the Port, the Newmarket and the Federal had untold gallons of Springfield. They reckoned that people used to go around on their bikes and take a homing pigeon with them. They'd find out which pub had beer on and they used to let the pigeons go home. All the other blokes would then go to that pub. People used to go around looking for pubs that still had a supply of beer, they really did. You'd hear them on their bikes and cars. I remember one bloke, going home one night towards the Largs Pier Hotel and somebody said, "Eh, McCawley's are down there" and he turned around and rode the other way towards the Exeter.

**CM:** And did you buy from interstate at all, in those days?

PB: You did. But then there was no Trade Practises Act and the breweries could impose their own rules and regulations. Bill, at the Exeter, was freehold. Now the Southwark was Haussen's and you were only allowed to sell what they told you to sell. The Alberton was South Australian Brewing Company and you had to get permission to sell other people's beer.

**CM: Where did the wines and spirits come from in those days?**

**PB:** They were all separate companies, bar one, the Adelaide Wine and Spirit Company which was a subsidiary of Walkerville Cooperative Brewing Company. That would be about the only one. All the others – Tolleys, Noons – they were independent.

**CM: And wine and spirits were sold to the pubs by the bottle?**

**BMcC:** They'd be sold by the bottle, yes.

**CM: Did most people drink beer rather than wine and spirits?**

**PB:** Oh yes. Stout was pretty good too. We had a good quota of stout. They used to complain about it because you could put your finger in it and leave a hole – it was a bit thick! Coopers' Stout!

**BMcC:** People in those days drank mainly beer. Beer was the drink. People didn't drink much wine at all in those days, nothing like it is today. Wine wasn't popular. In fact, they wouldn't drink claret in those days It was sour, like stuff that's gone off. It was like vinegar!

**PB:** At the Southwark my father had one port. He had Büring and Sobel's "Spring Vale" and that was for anyone who wanted a glass of wine, but very few wanted it. They'd mostly go for the muscats, 'four-penny darks" they'd call them. And also he used to have claret, but that was for medicinal purpose. People used to come in and say, "My daughter's very sick, seems she's got anaemia," Father would say, "Right, claret!" He prescribed a bottle of claret for them! They used to like it. I don't know whether it did any good or not.

**BMcC:** Probably did, probably all in the mind.

**CM: You gave away some wines and spirits on special occasions?**

**BMcC:** Oh, Christmas time was the time for that. It got to the stage when everyone gave away wines and spirits at Christmas

time. The wine firms used to make up special little bottles – Hardy's Christmas Port or Penfold's Christmas Port. They used to put special labels on with holly all around and little berries and all this sort of stuff, and we gave these away to customers.

**PB:** Then someone comes along and says "You've forgot mine!"

**BMcC:** "I haven't got my Christmas present yet".

**PB:** And we used to lose a lot of glasses, particularly nobbler glasses. These were a nice little glass. They had a high water mark around them which was supposed to show when you had poured out an ounce of spirit. But it was only a warning, that's all.

We used to lose these like nobody's business. Finally I got an idea. I got them engraved with 'Stolen from Alberton Hotel'. I thought that'll stop 'em. It didn't. So I went to this fellow's place one night."Do you want a drink?" he asked. I said "Yes, what have you got?" He said "I've only got wine." I said "Alright, give us a wine." He said "Sherry?" I said "Yes, sherry." So he went and got the bottle of sherry out and I said "Listen, I can't drink it out the bottle." He went and got me a glass and puts it down. And I said "Where'd you get the glass?" He said "Oh!" 'Stolen from Alberton Hotel' was on it.

**CM: How long were you at the Alberton, Peter?**

**PB:** I was there from 1940 'til 1987, but before that I was there just as sort of a casual. But I reckon about 50 years really. I had the license for 47 years. My son's there now [1990].

**CM: And is the Alberton still [in 1990] brewery-owned?**

**PB:** Yes.

**CM: And, Peter, you would have seen some massive changes over that time.**

**PB:** ...Oh, yes, lots of changes

**CM: Can you give me some idea of what those changes are?**

**PB:** See, it mesmerises me how much has changed. Probably the same with Bill, too.

First of all, when I was a kid, you only had a till or a drawer and you'd put the money in that. Later on, when I left the Southwark and went to other pubs, they had cash registers and at first I didn't have a clue about them. But they were pretty good and eventually we learnt how to work them. Now they've got this computer thing. Someone gets in a round of drinks and the barman says "Hmnn, that's a 'dummy'." and he goes down and rings it up on this computer thing. Now the next round, probably the same round, he does it again.

I remember the first time that I worked at the Alberton. It was a 'football Saturday', and there weren't many people in the pub because they'd all gone to the footy. And at the time the washing of glasses was a bit antiquated. One time this casual barman came in and poured a butcher of Coopers' stout into the wash-up water. And I said "What's that?" and he said "You can't see the two bob coins from someone's change that might drop in there."

**BMcC:** The washing up of glasses wasn't particularly hygienic in those days and that's changed a lot.

**CM: What other changes would you have seen, say, after the War through to the present, like bottle shop departments, motels and so on.**

**BMcC:** Oh, there have been quite a few changes. The whole structure of hotels has changed, completely changed. Of course people today are more, let's say, more sophisticated. They demand more today than they did years ago. People today wouldn't put up with the sort of things that we put up with in the early days in the hotel. But that was par for the course. People were just that way. They didn't know or have anything that was any better.

There have been big changes going right through the hotel industry and with regard to the service given to people. Things





have changed a lot in hotels. Hotels have been upgraded enormously.

The hotels themselves used to do everything years ago. The hotel was the only place, more or less, apart from very few bottle shops, where you could buy liquor. You couldn't buy it anywhere else at all and there were only a couple of licensed grocers. At that time the hotels did it all. They had accommodation, they sold all the liquor, they did everything. The meals as well, they provided a lot of meals.

During the War, the Second World War, you weren't allowed to spend money maintaining hotels. So quite a lot of the hotels deteriorated. Before the War, people sort of upgraded places every year, but during the War there was nothing done at all. And when the War finished, the accommodation side of the business more or less disappeared and went to motels. Motels became the in-thing and were built everywhere. People wouldn't stay in hotels because motels were more advanced and offered better accommodation. In motels you had your own shower and toilet facilities. Hotels were still seven or eight bedrooms to a block of bathrooms and toilets. People demanded better.

After the War bottle shops started. Some hotels started specialising in bottle departments, only selling packaged beer, wines and spirits. That was something that hotels had exclusively for years, but didn't really push or market. People just came in and bought a bottle of beer. But the advent of bottle shops promoted wines and spirits. And gradually the culture changed, as did facilities.

Drive-in bottle departments then became a feature of hotels. Hotels were the only ones allowed to have a drive-in facility. Other bottle shops weren't allowed that. You had to get out of your car and go and pick up your liquor and put it in the car. Hotels were allowed this drive-in facility and mobility became the big thing. Prior to the War motor cars were, I suppose, more of a rich man's toy than anything else. But during the War mechanisation advanced so far and fast, that not long after the War motor cars became more or less a necessity rather than just a novelty.

Prior to the War you could judge the clientele and the patronage of the hotel by the number of the pushbikes that were outside. There would be hundreds of them, hundreds of bikes. After the War that gradually changed. Bikes disappeared, people got motor cars, Then hotels that had good parking facilities blossomed a bit. It was easier to park your car. Some hotels had very poor parking facilities and had to buy houses, probably knock them down, or buy vacant land to build parking lots.

So hotels have experienced great changes. People who lived in 1908 or 1910 would be amazed if they came back, say in 1950. to see all the changes in hotels.

**PB:** Regarding bikes, at our place, on a Saturday night after six o'clock closing, there'd always be one or two bikes that someone had left behind. On Sunday morning, I used to go to church. I didn't have a car then, I had to ride a bike, so I'd go around and see if there were any bikes left outside the pub and, if so, off I'd go to church. I'd leave the bike outside the church and, of course, the same thing happened. There were fifty or sixty bikes there too! When I came out I'd have to wait because I didn't know which bike that I rode over there!

Other changes included the bona fide traveller. In those days you couldn't get a drink after hours or on a Sunday in a hotel unless you were going to stay overnight and you'd travelled twenty or forty miles. But if you were only going down there for the day, you had to go sixty miles before you could get a drink. For fifty-five, you couldn't get a drink. But if you were going to stay the night you only had to travel about twenty-five, I think.

Every Sunday the copper used to come around to sign the "Boarders' Book". And six o'clock closing, Bill, the police come into the bar or stand in the door?

**BMcC:** They'd stand in the doorway to make sure that you didn't serve anyone after six. It was a real crime, in those days, selling liquor after six o'clock at night.

**PB:** We had this policemen, 'Batman' Allen, who used to come into the bar at six o'clock. One night he said to me "See the time?" "Yeah, it's five past six." I said. He said "There's a bloke down there," he said, "he's been serving beer. I've watched him two nights now. He serves beer at three minutes past six." I said, "Does he? Did you tell him?" He says "No. Come down and I'll chat to you and him too." So he came down and he said to this bloke, "You served three schooners just now over there, at three minutes past six?" He says "Yeah, why?" "Well," he said, "that's a breach of Paragraph H, section 7, of the Licensing, Food and Drug Act, you know." This fella didn't like it so he got a bit nasty and the copper said "I'll put you in for insulting language." Eventually this barman said "Take a week's notice, I'm finished" and away he went. "See what you've done?" I said, "Thanks to you, now I don't have a barman."

**CM: Can you tell me how the Local Option polls used to work and what period we're talking about?**

**PB:** In my time, as far as I can remember, they had a poll in Hindmarsh. I don't remember whether it was in all suburbs. But the Temperance people won that one.

The Local Option meant that the people voted to change the number of pubs in an area, to reduce the number, to keep the same number but sometimes to add more. If the opposition won, they could close one in three pubs. They won that in 1908 or 1909. In Port Adelaide alone they lost about, I think, 15 pubs.

But if the vote was to extend the number of pubs, the Local Option wasn't always taken up. The liquor trade didn't take it up because they didn't want any more pubs. They had enough.

**CM: Who was the opposition?**

**PB:** It was the Temperance Alliance, or someone associated with them.

**CM: So that movement could force the closure of hotels, could it?**



**BMcC:** Yes.

**PB:** See, if the Option said the people wanted less hotels, that was it. But if you won it, you could get another place.

**CM: Was it conducted like an election? Would there be ballot papers?**

**PB:** It used to come on at the same time as an election was on. You'd vote for that as well.

**CM: And they could close one in three?**

**PB:** One in three. On the last occasion before the Act was changed, Joe Talbot stood for Parliament just so that he could have a Local Option. He stood as Independent Labor for Semaphore or Port Adelaide. So the people had to go to vote and they voted for more hotels. He won it and he got the Osborne.

**CM: How often were they conducted?**

**PB:** They were available every 3 years.

**CM: So you could have an Option to keep your license and keep the hotel open, or to shut it down, and you had to vote "Yes" or "No" to either of those?**

**PB:** Whether you wanted more or to leave them as they were.

**BMcC:** You could vote to have more or less hotels.

**CM: Did six o'clock closing have much effect on peoples' lives and drinking habits and everything else?**

**BMcC:** Oh yes.

**CM: Did the Temperance Movement have a lot to do with six o'clock closing, in the same way they had to do with the Local Option polls?**



**BMcC:** Oh yes, the Temperance Movement was quite strong. Yes, they were very keen on the six o'clock closing.

**PB:** I was only a kid when the six o'clock closing came in after World War One. They reckon that was a shonky one because the vote was taken while the soldiers were away, while the War was on. I don't think they would have voted for that in France.

**CM: And when did the six o'clock closing rule finish?**

**PB:** About 1967.

**CM: Do you remember that, Bill?**

**BMcC:** Oh yes, I remember the night. I can't remember the date of the thing but I remember the night ten o'clock closing happened. Don Dunstan was the Premier of South Australia at that particular time. And we had an extra 4 hours trading at night and one hour in the morning. We were opened from 5 o'clock in the morning until 10 o'clock at night that day. That was the only day we were allowed to open for that length of time.

**CM: So it was a celebration?**

**BMcC:** Oh yes, a celebration. People came out and we were quite busy really that night. For a lot of people it was just a novelty. Families came out, chaps brought their wives out to have a drink and it was something different to taking a bottle home. They brought their wives out and went to a lounge. And of course women were just then really starting to go into hotels. Prior to the War not very many women really drank in hotels at all.

**CM: They just served in them, really?**

**PB:** They called them 'the jug and bottle department'.

My father used to say that the greatest anomaly was the nine to eleven closing. For years and years pubs could only open between nine and eleven. And the Act said that you had to close at eleven o'clock on Christmas Day. But in the regulations, they just put

"Hotels will close at eleven o'clock on Christmas Day". Then some bloke, a bloke named Bryan, my father called him, "the wise man from the East". B-R-Y-A-N, not B-R-I-E-N, he had the East End Market Hotel and thought, "Here it is, a loop-hole. It says you'll close at eleven o'clock on Christmas Day, but it didn't say what time you could open!" So he opened at midnight on Christmas Eve.

Of course, he only opened once because they hit him. But he got out of it, you see, because the regulations didn't say what time you could open so, he went from midnight 'til eleven o'clock on Christmas Day.

**CM: Were there a lot of Irish families who had hotels in the district? Who were they?**

**BMcC:** Oh yes, I think so, quite a few around here... [**KMcC:** That's right, there's two Irish families here.] The Shaughnessys were one – good Irish name anyhow.

**CM: What pub did they have?**

**BMcC:** They had the Birkenhead.

**CM: How were hotels important in the social life of a community? How did they provide the focus?**

**BMcC:** Oh, the hotels were the focal point for most communities. They were the sort of the gathering place. Clubs hadn't taken on the same aspect prior to the War as they did after. The clubs were more elitist in those days, than they became later.

**PB:** And there was no radio. there was no TV.

**BMcC:** The hotels were a convivial place. People went down there for a laugh and a talk and to have a few beers and relax and that sort of thing. Entertainment in the hotels was mainly for men.

[**PB:** ...quoits.] Women didn't really go to hotels much at all. Guys used to come down Saturday afternoons. That was the big day.

[**PB:** ...bit of "SP-ing".] They used to come down for the beer, their bets and and smokes. Quoits was a great game in those days. Fellows used to play quoits out in the back yard.

Generally hotels were the social hub. We had clubs, all hotels had social clubs, and we all had this Sunday club idea where we challenged one another to a game of cricket or football. And it became quite a thing, you know. Every Sunday there was something on, you were playing some hotel or another. Quite often we used to go away for picnics in the country, take the ladies and the children away [**PB:** ...to Belair National Park.] We had some wonderful days.

**CM: Would there be a Barmen's Picnic?**

**BMcC:** Oh yes. The barmen had a picnic every year. And the Liquor Trade Union had their picnic day every year. Theoretically it was a day off for the barmen. All the barmen were supposed to attend the Liquor Trades picnic.

**PB:** The Liquor Trades picnic used to be held at Devil's Elbow, is that right?

**CM: Do hotels still have social clubs?**

**BMcC:** Oh yes, they still have that sort of thing. But in our day it was probably a little different. I think during the period I'm talking about, just after the War or during the War, hotels had regular customers, people with families. who drank at hotels, sort of handed down from father to son. The father would drink in a particular hotel for many years and later on his sons would come along and join him.

**CM: So it created a sense of community?**

**BMcC:** It created a sense of community and family and loyalty to various hotels. Of course this is how we used to have our football games and picnic matches. Practically everybody down here knew what hotel a person drank at – "You know Jack Smith?", "Oh yeah, I know Jack, I worked with Jack, well, Jack used to drink at the Alberton Hotel".

**CM:** So if you wanted to see him one night you could call in there?

**BMcC:** Yes. You'd know where to go, you knew where to go to see Jack.

**CM:** And I suppose hotels were very distinctive in their physical character? They were very substantial buildings weren't they?

**BMcC:** Oh, they were and that was indicative of their community standing. They were substantial buildings. Quite often you'd find that the most substantial building would be the hotel. In country areas also.

**CM:** What's the history of that, do you think?

**PB:** Of course it goes back a long way. The inn-keeper, the publican, would be the second oldest profession in the world.

**BMcC:** Yes, that's right. He was the guy that people would call on. He was the jack-of-all-trades, wasn't he?

**PB:** And, as it states in the Scriptures, when the traveller was left for dead on the side of the road, along came the Good Samaritan and he bound up his wounds and took him to the inn. He didn't take him to a motel or to a hospital. He took him to the pub.

**BMcC:** That's right, he took him to the pub so the fellow would be looked after.

**PB:** He got away cheap, too. He gave him sixpence for looking after him!

**BMcC:** I think people thought that hotel-keepers then were responsible people.

**PB:** Yes. When I was a kid, my father used to get certificates from the Adelaide Children's Hospital. It was a working area and anybody who had sick children could go to him and he could give



them a card to authorise the children's attendance at the Children's Hospital and for free.

**CM: I suppose that there are a lot of stories about what used to happen in hotels in Adelaide in the old days?**

**PB:** At the Alberton, the Buffalo Lodge, the IOOF used to meet upstairs, used to meet there and there's still a peep-hole in the door. It's covered over now.

**CM: Why did they need a peep-hole?**

**PB:** Because the lodge, you know, was partly a secret society and you couldn't just go up the stairs to get into the big room. They had to have a look through the peep-hole before they'd open the door.

**CM: How has liquor discounting influenced hotels?**

**BMcC:** Years ago we had orderly marketing in hotels. Everybody sold at the same price. Wherever you went, a glass of beer would be the same price, except in the country areas, and in specified areas, and the price would rise maybe a penny a glass here and there. This went on for many many years. The only way to increase your trade in those days was by service to the customer. You'd have to provide him with very, very good service in order to win his custom.

Then discounting started. It was brought in by a fellow by the name of Ryan Warming here in South Australia and that changed the whole concept of hotels completely. And shortly after that the Trade Practices Act came into being which meant orderly marketing was thrown out of the window. This was sort of the law of supply and demand and there wasn't any fixed price whatsoever. The only price was a maximum price. You couldn't charge more. In South Australia it quickly established itself. Warming did a roaring trade with the advent of discounting and, within a very short time, everybody was involved with it. It became just a way of life, giving beer away. Beer was the main thing, because beer was the main product. And, of course, the brewing

companies weren't about to discount the beer to anybody at all. They sold theirs at the same price as previously. So the hotels and the bottle shops were the losers, by reducing their margins. You had to fight back a bit. So finally cooperatives or chains were formed. By joining a group publicans increased their buying power, a similar situations to supermarkets. You increased your buying power which meant that you could screw down the wholesalers and they were the guys who started losing money.

**CM: Is there a future for hotels? We've talked a lot about the past...**

**BMcC:** I think that hotels still have quite a big future. They'll probably change a bit. The concept of hotels has changed now. We're upgrading hotels the whole time, making them more family-orientated, making them places where people with families can come, which is a good thing. Hotels are no longer cast as 'dens of iniquity'. They're well respected establishments. Women and families come and that's a good thing. That's something that should continue and that will keep hotels going, because children will get accustomed to going to the hotel and, hopefully, in the long-term, they'll continue and bring their own children.

Hotels are still places where people can meet. Clubs are great but clubs are a bit insular in that many clubs are formed for a specific purpose. You get a golf club and you usually get golfers and a bowling club for bowlers and so on. In hotels generally you get everybody. Anybody can go to a hotel and enjoy themselves.

Drink-driving with the breathalyser is a thing that's had a great impact on hotels. It's a very serious offence. And it's a worry for people who don't really want to go out and get inebriated. Social drinkers who just want to go out and have a few drinks and are quite alright to drive the car home, they have really felt this impact.

**CM: So maybe that will bring back the community hotel thing?**

**BMcC:** This could bring back the community idea that people go to their local pub

# Liquid History

Exploring Australia's past - a pint at a time