CITY OF SYDNEY ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

PICTURES FOR CITIES – SOUTH SYDNEY

TRANSCRIPT

Name: Ernie Green and Ivy De Groen

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Interviewer: Geoff Weary

GW: Interview with Ernie Green and Ivy De Groen, recorded on the 25th of July, 1983 for the Visual History of South Sydney Project. Ernie and Ivy talk about their years at Wunderlich.

I wonder if you could tell me Mr Green when you first started working at Wunderlich. What year was it?

01:04 EG: 1920, in May 1920.

GW: And how old were you?

EG: 14. I just got my, qualified…

ID: Intermediate.

EG: Intermediate certificate from school and I applied for a job together with four or five others and I got the Wunderlich job. I could have got four out of the five at that time. Yeah, that's how easy it was to get a job then.

GW: In 1920?

EG: 1920.

GW: 1920. Where were you living at that time?

EG: At that time, Rockdale.

GW: So you've always lived out here? Have you ever lived at all in, around Redfern, Waterloo?

01:41 EG: No, we lived at Campsie and Petersham when I was a baby, about three years old. Lived at Petersham and then we moved to Campsie when I was eight and we lived there until I was 14. I was going to Chapel Street High School in Marrickville. When I put in for the position at Wunderlich I'd only been 14.

GW: Do you remember if there were many workers from the factory who lived around South Sydney?

EG: There was quite a few, yes. Many lived in the eastern suburbs – Coogee, Bondi way, all round that area which was easy access to Wunderlich by tram. A tram came past the door.

GW: Would you say that people generally lived away from South Sydney who worked at Wunderlich or was it a 50/50 or whatever?

EG: It's hard to say the mix of that but a lot did live within a reasonable distance. See they had no cars those days and probably transport then was something that had to be considered, because if you were too far out and expenses of travelling became expensive – wages were very low. For instance a first class sheet metal worker, and these were top tradesmen who could make the most magnificent metal work, beaten metal work in copper or bronze and statuary, that sort of thing, they got 6 pounds 15 a week – top class tradesmen in the early 1920s say before the Depression.

GW: And what – 6 pounds, I mean what would be that, what would the equivalent be to that now? I mean is that an average wage? Would that have been an average wage for those days?

EG: Oh no, the average wage, the basic wage then would have been I guess 3 pounds 10, 4 pounds. So that was quite a bit over a basic wage. That was a top class tradesman. Second class sheet metal worker 1 pound less than that. He'd get 5 pounds 10.

GW: How did you start? What was your first job at Wunderlich?

03:43 EG: I was the office boy for six months and then they transferred me into the Cost Department and that was costing – each month we had to

produce cost sheets covering the costs of production as against sales, every month for every product we manufactured, every section of the product that we manufactured. That included roofing tiles, asbestos cement and all that relevant factory metal product. We didn't make metal aluminium windows in those days.

GW: Aluminium would have come in in the '40s wouldn't it? '40s and '50s?

EG: Yeah, about '50s.

GW: So at the Redfern plant it was mainly pressed metal ceilings.

EG: And architectural metal work and castings. They had a foundry there. Cast some beautiful bronze work and bronze tablets. You've seen tablets on buildings. We made the bulk of those ones, honour rolls and that sort of thing – some magnificent pieces of this around Sydney.

GW: Can you remember when the Grace Bros dome was built or made?

EG: I don't remember. That was before my time and also the domes on the Sydney Hospital and also on the County Council building in George Street.

GW: The Town Hall?

04:59 EG: Yes, next to the Town Hall.

GW: Oh so they're all Wunderlich.

EG: I think they did that yes, because we had one of those domes, half, in a smaller…

ID: Sample.

EG: Sample of it in the showroom. That was before my time. They were done before 1920. I don't remember those…

GW: I didn't realise that Grace Bros building was so old. That's interesting.

EG: There are other domes in the city and turrets and that sort of thing we did in copper in those days. Oh yes, we did a lot of that sort of work then before I got there. In fact that tended to drift away a bit after, in the '20s. There wasn't so much of that sort of work done. Pretty expensive you know and all handmade except for the pressing.

GW: Very, very labour intensive.

EG: A later one done of that was the Presbyterian church in Macquarie Street nearly opposite the…

ID: Hospital.

EG: Hospital, at the State House.

GW: What, the spire?

05:51 EG: The spire. That's copper. We did that and…

GW: What was the state of play at Wunderlich when you first began to work there?

EG: What was the?

GW: What was it like to work there?

EG: Very fine company to work for. Very placid atmosphere. Everybody seemed to be friends. It was just like a big family really. Always did have that family aspect. There was nobody ever got sacked from Wunderlich's unless they did something pretty bad to warrant firing them. Very rare to have anybody sacked from there and rarely anybody left. They were the first, one of the first companies to introduce a type of pension or superannuation fund to employees without any urging from anybody else. This was done – the three brothers devised this, particularly Dr Wunderlich. At the end of each year they decided they'd issue to employees that had been there 10 years or more staff partnership shares.

GW: That's right, yeah.

06:54 EG: And this was something unique. In fact they thought of this one themselves and I'd been there 10 years when I got my first £100 of shares and you got paid, you were paid anything over 5% that they paid divided to shareholders. So if they paid 10% to the shareholders you'd get a dividend of 5% on them. You kept those shares. You weren't allowed to sell them on, or handle them on the Stock Exchange. You had to keep those yourself. They're not marketable shares. The idea was to build that up to a superannuation so when you retire you'd have something to retire with. It's cost you nothing. In the meantime you'll be getting interest on it and dividends on it.

07:34 Well after about 15 years I would say they changed that into a superannuation fund and I forget what I had then but I had several hundred pounds worth of these shares. Well they gave you the value of those and put that into a separate superannuation account and then that fund then invested the money and they averaged about 6% or 7% or 8% a year on that and that, your share of that went into your fund. So if you

had – talking in dollars now, I suppose if you had $5,000 in there and that proportion of the total invested and the total income you got your shares, so you might add $300 or $250 into that $5,000 that year, your share of the income from the fund. Now that, we didn't contribute anything to that.

GW: That would have been pretty interesting for 1920. When was it introduced? Was it introduced in the '20s?

08:22 EG: The share certificate was introduced in, I'd say before the First World War, yeah.

ID: 1918, the First World War.

EG: No, I'm sorry, before the Depression I was thinking, 1930.

GW: 1930.

EG: It was even before the Depression, just before that or what.

GW: I think it was. I've seen…

EG: We never made any money in the Depression I can tell you. Building stopped like that for four years. We hardly did a thing and we stopped making roofing tiles. Couldn't sell them. Nobody wanted them. They weren't even building houses. So there was no business but they managed to – they saw that Depression through and managed to pay the shareholders 4% on their holdings out of financial reserves. They stuck with the shareholders and still they sold them when they didn't want them to sell them, they sold them overheads. They stayed on 4% right through that Depression. It isn't surprising really why they were sold. We had no way of getting to them.

GW: Well no wonder Charles feels…

EG: Well yes, yes.

GW: So just getting back to the '20s, you began as an office boy and then you worked, what you worked your way through?

09:43 EG: Well I was in the Cost Department then for, until about 1930 and in the meantime about 1927 and '28 I started to study accountancy at home. Didn't go to classes in Sydney. Through Hemingway & Robertson and I passed all my examinations in about just over two years, through the whole accountancy because I did, I learned a lot of accountancy in the Cost Department. That helped a bit, but I got through the whole of the accountancy in two years. When I got through that they sent a letter to the company telling them that I'd got through accountancy, I was a qualified accountant. Then that week Dr Wunderlich called me up to the board room and he transferred me to the Works Department and made me Assistant Works Manager and from that day on I didn't have any more accountancy. That was the way they did things.

He said to me at that little meeting, it only lasted 10 minutes, he said, "I've been thinking about it," and they'd got this letter from Hemingway & Robertson telling them that one of their students had got through and he said, "Well, you know, Green, if I wanted an accountant," he said, "I could put an advert in, an advertisement in the *Herald* today and I could have half a dozen by the end of the week. We don't want any accountants." He said, "We want people who know how Wunderlich's materials and products are produced and how to sell them." So he says, "I'll arrange for you to be transferred to Mr Hansen, the Works Manager at Redfern and you'll be Assistant Works Manager." So I was transferred to the Works Department and from that day on, I did no more accountancy.

GW: What exactly does that mean, the Works Department?

11:28 EG: Well that's the Works Department of the whole Redfern factory that's just been demolished, all the metal work.

GW: So you were in charge of the – you were supervising?

EG: So I was Assistant Works Manager. I'd been there then about 10 years, 11 years. So I was then, I'd be 25.

GW: What did the job involve? Could you just give me some sort of description of it?

EG: Oh yes, well that involved going through the factory two or three times a day looking after – principle job – we had a staffer that was sitting there and looked after the main jobs and had to see they got out on time and answered problems and customers enquiring, builders whatever it may be, how the job was going and dealing with them over the telephone or going out to see them if necessary, and generally supervising the jobs to see that they were on time and ready for the builder when he wanted them or for when we had to install them at a certain time. My job was to oversee all that staff, so that that took that load off the Works Manager. He had the bulk of the problems of course of running the factory, and that was a great experience.

I did that for four years and by the time that four years had passed over, it got to around about 1936, the Depression had broken then and I got transferred then to the Sales Division and was made the representative for the city to the School of Architects and quantity surveyors and consulting engineers, some publics works architects, government architects, master builders and quite a big job. The building trade was just starting to revive and I was in that for 30 years, over 30 years. Got to know (UNCLEAR 13:11) pretty well, the architects from that fraternity closely and successfully. I got a lot of very big jobs for them and got to know them well. Your personal association with those people was very important, very important and I finally was made New South Wales Sales Manager and then I became General Sales Manager of the company.

GW: What year was that? What years were they? Were they '50s?

13:37 EG: I left in ’72, yeah. I was General Sales Manager for about 12 or 14 years, so that’s around about ’60. Sales Manager for about 12 years. I’d say that would be around about ’48,’50 I was made Sales Manager.

GW: The Wunderlichs really went in for promoting their products in a fairly lavish, in a very lavish way.

EG: Yes, we spent quite a lot of money on – not so much newspaper advertising but advertising to the building fraternity and government departments who were interested in building schools and office buildings and hospitals and all kinds of things.

GW: Was there a lot of competition? I mean what was the reason for such intensive advertising I suppose?

EG: It wasn’t intensive really. Ours was mainly catalogue work and for instance take all architects and quantity surveyors and master builders. Now that’s a lot of companies. We had a beautiful folder, we always had this, about that thick, a folder where you could add catalogues and extract the old ones.

GW: Oh yes I’ve seen them.

14:56 EG: Well now we used to – our representatives were instructed wherever they called with a new catalogue, often we’d deliver these by hand, get the reps to take one and say there’s a new catalogue, couple of new colours in there and so on. So it gives you an opportunity to talk about something. We believed in the personal approach on these things rather than putting something in a newspaper which 99 out of 100 don’t even see and if they did, they wouldn’t be bothered reading it and then we’d say well now if you’d ask your young lady to let me have your catalogue folder I’ll take this out and put that in for you and you keep it up to date, so that when they want something that all Wunderlich’s catalogues are there and they’re up to date. That was the system that we worked on in distributing these things rather than often just posting them out.

15:40 Now it wasn't always easy to get a rep to do this religiously, and as Ivy can tell you, we often sent them one through the mail anyway but we'd rather do it this way and even if they had one it's a reason to go in and say, "Here's a new book," and they'd say, "Oh I think we've got that." "Oh good, you've got it, have you? Good." At least you've approached them. We didn't advertise a lot in newspapers, no. In building journals we did where it was particular to the building fraternity but general newspaper ads – you'll notice there's not that much building material advertised in newspapers. I think they all woke up. Was not a good medium for us.

GW: What about pressed metal ceilings?

16:25 EG: Well pressed metal ceilings were a very big business until they began to fade out with – for two reasons I think. They became a bit old fashioned and I think the advent of other types of ceilings, for instance architects all of a sudden decided they wanted plain flat ceilings like these. We couldn't do that in metal. There's no way you can do that in pressed metal because it will ripple. It will do all sorts of things and you can't join in. See that's why the patterns linked up and you couldn't see a join. Each one had a little bead and it was pinned together by very small nails, galvanised nails or copper nails if you were using copper and the method of fixing it made a patterned ceiling which you wouldn't find a join, not by the naked eye anyway unless you were carefully looking for it on a ladder or something you might. So it looked a very first class job but then when they wanted plain ceilings, well we were stonkered. We couldn't go any further with it and it reduced our metal ceiling business quite substantially.

GW: When was that? When did the styles…

EG: Well now let's see. When would that be? I'll have to think hard about that now.

GW: '40s? '50s?

17:42 EG: I'd say soon after the war, 1945.

GW: I was reading in one of the journals…

EG: About that time.

GW: Down at the museum I was having a look at one of the journals from the '50s and it's an ad with a very modern kind of kitchen and living room with a pressed metal ceiling, you know. The idea was to sell them but the ceiling looks really odd.

ID: Yes, with the rest of the…

GW: In relationship to it.

EG: It does today, yes. because everything else is plain now. If you had a patterned ceiling it would be a bit out of place. You had plain walls, yet the days – when I first went to Wunderlich you'd have people with what we called dado panelling. It would be up to about three feet high right around the wall. That would be plain like the plaster, fibrous plaster sheets and the dado panelling up to there with a nice moulding along the top, right around your lounge room and a metal ceiling pattern, metal ceiling. Thousands of houses all over New South Wales like that, all over Australia.

GW: Of course they've disappeared now.

EG: Oh yes, they're gone.

18:43 ID: I should think so.

EG: There's houses now – somebody recently said I was in a house the other day. It's got a Wunderlich metal ceiling. He said it might be 50 years old.

GW: Well I knew a few in Redfern.

EG: That's right. Oh there'd be a lot round that area. Old houses with metal ceilings.

GW: With the pressed metal ceilings.

EG: Yeah.

GW: Just thinking about the introduction of art deco into Australia in the '20s. Were the Wunderlichs responsible for that?

EG: I don't think so. I think that would be introduced by architects in their designing of buildings and we would follow that trend of course. If architects went to that form of design and construction, well then we would follow it. We'd produce materials designed to suit that. We'd do that, "What are you going to do with the façade on the building?" "Well I don't know, I'm thinking about stone or what about your terracotta?" "Yeah." See we faced buildings, some of the most beautiful buildings in Sydney were faced all over by Wunderlich ceramic. That was a very fine product and the old Commonwealth, the old New South Wales Government Savings Bank which is now the Taxation Office, faces Castlereagh, Martin Place and Elizabeth Street. That's one of the finest terracotta buildings we've got in Australia. Beautiful, it's as good as the day we put that up.

GW: When was terracotta developed by Wunderlich?

20:18 EG: Early 1920s.

ID: The architectural terracotta?

EG: Mm, yeah the 1920s. It was…

GW: So what is it? It's a sort of glazed…

EG: That was one of the early jobs we did, that bank too, Bank of New South Wales, the Government Savings Bank.

GW: It's sort of like a glazed tile isn't it?

EG: It's glazed, yeah it's a white colour clay and it came from America. Gladding McBean in America were the originators of it. As far as I know, they were the originators. And we were lucky enough to get one of their top men to come out here and set ours up and he became our Works Manager and he'd been in the game for a long time. But we did a lot of work with that. There's many fine buildings in Sydney.

GW: What about the pubs with the tile work around pubs?

EG: We faced a lot of them. We often see them and say, "Oh look there's another one." The Campsie Hotel we passed the other day, it's got a lot of terracotta blocks, they're still there.

GW: All those cream tiles.

21:17 EG: Yeah, well a lot of those were already wall tiles, six by six where ours were bigger blocks than that and thicker. Ours would be that thick.

GW: Can you think of a particular hotel that is faced with Wunderlich?

EG: Yes, I think I could think of a few if I thought long enough.

ID: Hotels.

EG: Hotel. I'm thinking round the city for a start. I'll tell you a nice building. They're talking about pulling it down. It's a hotel on the corner of Park and George Street, diagonally across of the town hall. I think (UNCLEAR 21:57) were on the other corner one time and you've got the Town Hall and you've got the County Council building. On this corner that's a ceramic faced hotel and quite a nice job too. Not very big, about three or four floors high.

GW: Facing the…

EG: All the facing of the building is ceramic.

GW: That's ceramic, that's Wunderlich ceramic.

EG: That's it, that's it, yeah. Well there's a good example of it and that's in pretty good nick too but I think they're talking about demolishing it.

GW: They are. Woolies is going to put up something.

EG: That's right.

GW: So that, the creamy tiles were just ordinary…

22:30 ID: They weren't cream.

EG: They were many colours. Where did I put it, terracotta book somewhere.

ID: I don't know.

GW: I just asked because I mean almost every pub has been faced with those tiles.

EG: Well we done done a lot of hotels. I can think up a few but to have these would be helpful. I'll make a note of that one. Campsie is one. They're green, they're all the colour green, in Beamish Street, Campsie. We go past it when we go out to Concord, out the old home and…

GW: There's a pub called the Clifton in Redfern. I'm just wondering if that's something. That has green tiles but I'm sure whether they're…

EG: If they're large tiles, say that size, you can bet they're ours, yeah. The other tiles they put are probably six by six, more the thin facing tiles.

GW: Getting back to the factory, the type of men who worked on the floor, they were tradesmen. Well they were craftsmen really, weren't they?

EG: Well they came under the Sheet Metal Workers 'Award and some were craftsmen, some were semi-craftsmen. For instance, take the production of stamped metal ceilings, steel ceilings. Have you seen anything detailing in words how that construction started?

GW: No, no.

24:00 EG: Well to manufacture a pattern – start from the beginning, we want to make a new ceiling pattern and they were stamped usually in six feet by two feet sheets and the patterns would invariably be two feet square so you'd get three patterns in one big sheet. Now, to produce that, the pattern would be designed by our modellers who were very clever modellers in the modelling shop in plaster. They'd design that pattern in a two feet square allowing making it bigger, allowing for the shrinkage when they cast the die to make it two feet when it's cast. So they make it say for example two feet and three quarters of an inch by two feet by – well six feet and two and a quarter inches by two feet and three quarters of an inch. When that was made that would then go into the foundry and they would cast a metal die which would consist of zinc, lead and antimony in mixtures of various quantities.

GW: What's antimony?

25:00 EG: Antimony is a hardening substance to harden slightly, not entirely because you didn't want it like steel because these were soft dies. That would harden the metal but it wouldn't expand and it wouldn't shrink, but it would still keep its pattern but it wouldn't be steel. To stamp these we couldn't stamp them. We'd fractured the sheets on a steel die and they were done with a drop hammer, monkey (sounds like) stamp that came down and hit, if I can explain what they did with this. They would cast then – that would be the bottom die that would go on the stamping bed that went then out to the Stamping Department. Now that would then be the correct size. That would shrink from the pattern – when it cooled off it would shrink that much so it would be two by two, the pattern exactly. Now that would go down to the Stamping department. There'd be a die in metal that thick, three inches. They'd place that on the bed of the stamping machine and they would put a sheet strip material all the way round it, just sheet metal to build up a side all the way round it and then they would put a composition of, an oily composition on so the two dies wouldn't stick.

Then they'd pour molten, similar molten material of lead, zinc and antimony on top of that so that it would run into the pattern of this and before it got set hard, this drop hammer or what they used to call the monkey (sounds like) was cut in rings all the way round and the things

were back cut so that when the edge of the, the sharp edge of these rings hit the top of that soft die, it would sink in and lock it in if you're going like that and it would pick it up. There'd be 20 rings around there so it had a good grip. They'd set that die and when it got to a certain period of, when I say elasticity that's not quite the word you use in metal but that describes it, they'd drop this hammer on to it, bang. Then they'd pull it up and up would go your top die. So they now had a top die and a bottom die so when they put a sheet in there and they stamped it, pattern came through. It sounds all very simple.

ID: It doesn't sound very simple to me.

27:24 EG: It sounds all very simple but to see it you say, "Oh that's not hard," but all that had to be carefully thought out. You see the shrinkings of the material had to be consistent so you had to use the right materials in the right quantities and at the right temperatures before you set that top die on it and once that was cooled off, it would fit the bottom die exactly. Where the pattern's recessed in the bottom die, the projections in the top die just sit in there. Where it was reversed, where some pattern might be a bead like that came up on the bottom die, you'd have a recess in the top die. So this is exactly the same and they could hit out off that several thousand sheets. They're six foot two sheets.

GW: And then they'd have to make another moulds?

EG: Then they'd have to make – possibly the second die might do another series and the new top die or vice versa and they'd get a new top die from the foundry. Those would be melted down and you use all that metal again and keep using that indefinitely.

GW: Approximately how many patterns would Wunderlich have at any given time for pressed metal ceilings? What was their range?

EG: Of ceiling patterns?

GW: Yeah, approximately.

28:38 EG: At the one time, I would think it was an awful lot. It would be over 100. There could be over 100 die, what we called diaper, D-I-A-P-E-R sheets. I would say there'd be well over 100 patterns cut all the time and we'd have the dies of all patterns. If you said you owned a store in Sydney and your ceiling, something had gone wrong. Somebody had got up on a ladder there or something and knocking something and messed up two or three sheets and made a proper mess of it. They'd ring you up, "Can you do anything with this?" I'd go down or one of the representatives would go down and say, "Yes, we'll have to make some sheets. We haven't got those in stock. It's about 20 years since we put that up, but we've got the dies. Yes, we could produce some sheets exactly the same as that."

GW: So you retained the die.

EG: And we'd have to get the plaster die – only the plaster die would be kept if they had become what we called obsolete patterns which they would be and not appearing, that pattern not appearing in your current catalogue, we'd have to get the plaster die out back into the foundry. He'd cast his bottom die and they'd go down to the stampers and then put the top die on and they could stamp three sheets if that's all they wanted but that would cost you a little bit more.

GW: Sure, sure.

EG: But then they could renew their ceiling without having to pull the whole darn lot down. That would make a really expensive job.

GW: Can you think of any building in particular around town that has an art deco ceiling?

EG: When you say art deco…

GW: Late '20s.

30:10 EG: Yes, yes.

GW: The geometric…

EG: Well you've seen the Town Hall ceiling?

GW: Yeah.

EG: Another very good ceiling you could see is the Bank of New South Wales or now the…

ID: Westpac.

EG: Westpac Bank opposite the end of Martin Place, their Head Office in George Street right at the end.

GW: Yeah.

EG: Go to the ground floor there. All that ceiling is stamped zinc and beautifully decorated and is just as good a condition as the (UNCLEAR 30:42) the day they were put up. That's a good example of a ceiling of that period. That was built in the 1920s. Robertson Marks were the architects.

GW: Was the art deco style a very popular one?

EG: Oh it had its appeal, I lot of them do, you know. They had their time and then architects – architects do these things. They say, "Well I'm sick of that. The last two buildings I did were that style. I'm going to do something different." And they're all competing in this and trying to do something better than anybody else has done. Oh no, I knew them all so intimately that I'd know their thinking and this means a lot. If they can come up with a building that is different to anybody else and is really outstanding, that's terribly important to an architect.

GW: Sure.

31:37 EG: He gets other jobs that he's probably never heard of. Somebody might go, "What about Harry Seidler? We're thinking about that city building of ours. I think I better go and have a talk with him. I'll ring him up." Harry Seidler…

GW: Always, always the way it works.

EG: That's right. Very important for an architect to put up an exceptionally good building, well designed and well suited to whatever it was supposed to be. Sometimes they'd put buildings up that were not terribly suited for what they were supposed to be for and you can really miss out. It's happened.

GW: Oh sure.

EG: But generally in Sydney we're pretty fortunate. We have some very good men. Good architects, my word. I could name scores of them that would equal anybody I reckon.

GW: Were there many – what kinds of tradesmen/craftsmen were working at Wunderlich? Were many migrants?

EG: Well yes you asked me that and I didn't answer that properly, did I? When I first went there, no they were not migrants then, no. They were all Australian mostly, maybe English, but they were not migrants, no.

32:51 ID: There weren't many migrants here then.

EG: That's right. See when, during the war 1914-18 war, I wasn't there then but I know that, well I don't know, but I've been told and I've read a bit and I've been told by others that were there then, the Wunderlichs were a German name but they weren't born in Germany. Their father had a business -- it's mentioned in this -- in England and they were all born in England, educated in England and on the continent and Dr Wunderlich, he had a practice there and they had various jobs. Well, they didn't work very much. They weren't short of a few pounds and when Ernest got to about 28 or 29, he decided he'd go over to Australia and see what was happening there without any real intentions at all and that indicates, that story of him there, it will be in your books, is that it indicates he saw one or two things and he thought there was an opportunity for the building industry.

He didn't know the first thing about (UNCLEAR 33:47) and building. He gave it a go and within two years he was in so much trouble he wrote to Alfred to come over. Alfred was a pretty bright fellow too, his brother and he came out in two years and Doctor came out, closed his practice and came out three years later. And that's when they really started because old Doc, he had a very wonderful mind. He had several degrees in accountancy as well as a medical degree. He was one of these men apparently that didn't – when he became a doctor he didn't stop at that. He wanted to learn something else too, and he was quite a smart man on the accountancy.

GW: How well did you know the Wunderlichs?

EG: As well as you could know Directors. Once I got older I got to know them better because we used to go to our annual functions. We held a company dinner every year and you got to know them more intimately then but when I first went there I was only an office boy and we looked on them with awe, Ernest and Alfred and Dr Wunderlich.

GW: Do you think many of the staff looked on them…

34:49 EG: I think so, I think so.

ID: I think so.

EG: Yes, I think they all did.

GW: Why do you think they did?

EG: And there was no need, no need to look on them with awe because they weren't awesome. They were very nice people but you think they've built all this big organisation and we were only just working for them.

GW: Was it because there were three of them?

ID: No, I don't think so.

EG: I don't think so, I don't think so.

ID: That's the bosses I think.

35:12 EG: You see I think the attitude of workers those days wasn't quite like it is today. They're a bit more brash now than we were then. Those days, if you had a good job you decided you were going to hang on to it. You weren't going to let it go. But they were anything but rough. They'd often speak to the employees. They'd come through.

ID: Mr Alfred went through every afternoon.

EG: Yeah, went through the office every day. Doctor would come down…

GW: Would you call him Mr Alfred?

35:39 ID: Oh yes.

EG: Oh yes, Mr Alfred and Dr Otto.

ID: Mr Alfred and Doctor.

EG: And Mr Ernest, oh yes, we always called them that. It was a – you couldn't have found a company, a working firm like that with a greater family attitude than that had between the employees and the Directors and the owners.

GW: It's very interesting, it is.

35:59 EG: Oh they were a marvellous firm to work for. I can never remember in the first 30 or 40 years I was there anybody being sacked from that office. You'd have to do something pretty bad to get thrown out, my word you would. Oh no, there was one or two later that got into strife and they put them off but they would be very reluctant to fire anyone.

GW: About how many people would have been working at Wunderlich?

EG: In the office or over the whole factory?

GW: Overall, in Redfern.

EG: In Redfern, well in the office at one stage I suppose they had about 160, 150, 160.

36:34 ID: I suppose you would counting Head Office and Sydney branch.

EG: Head Office upstairs, see there was two floors. I reckon yes, we'd have been talking about 150 or 160 and in the Redfern factory, 200 but the biggest staff was when they got to Rosehill with the asbestos factory and the roof tiles.

GW: Oh yes, that's another story, isn't it.

EG: A lot of men working over there. Then of course they had their own office staff up there too, the Works Office. That was the Works Department.

GW: And you were saying that – was it Ernest or Alfred would come through the shop?

ID: Mr Alfred.

GW: Would always come through?

ID: Nearly every day didn't he?

EG: Yes, always there.

ID: He would come through of the afternoon, say good afternoon to everyone.

GW: Did he know everyone by name?

37:14 ID: Oh I don't think so.

EG: No, they wouldn't know all, no but I remember working, I was a bit late – he wouldn't leave before 5 o'clock, AW. I was working there. I was then the city representative and I'd been out in the city for a good 20 years I suppose. He came down, "What's the matter? Have you got too much to do?" They didn't like to see you working overtime. They thought you might be overburdened with work and you've got too much to do if you couldn't do it in the normal hours. They always felt well you shouldn't have to work overtime unless it was like in the Cost Department and you've got to be – towards the last two weeks of February – our year ended on the 28th of February each year. Last fortnight you'd be working back two nights a week to get all the final figures out for the board.

ID: Which you got 2 shillings tea money.

EG: That's right.

ID: No overtime.

38:05 EG: Do you know I worked 52 years at Wunderlichs and I never got paid one dollar or one pound overtime and I worked overtime, a lot of overtime. I'd bring work home with me at night sometimes when I was in the city. I would do. But they didn't pay overtime, but they looked after you. They gave you a free superannuation fund.

ID: The men, not the girls. Not the girls, not the females didn't get superannuation.

GW: And why didn't the women get any?

ID: I don't – you'd have to ask the Wunderlichs that. I don't know but we didn't.

GW: You can guess.

38:36 ID: Yes, because we were females. We were the underdogs really but we were treated very well just the same.

EG: Yes, they treated them well.

GW: Did you sense that when you were working there?

ID: Oh no, you didn't expect it, because you knew you weren't going to get it and I think probably half of them wouldn't know that the men even got it.

EG: No, no.

ID: You know because they didn't contribute.

EG: I don't know whether they thought the men was the breadwinner…

ID: Well I think that was the idea and also…

EG: I think that might have been their thinking.

ID: They didn't think that girls would stay there too long.

EG: Well that's true. They'd get married.

ID: Most of them would be there for three or four years and they'd leave to get married or something like that.

39:07 EG: They didn't stay there too long either.

ID: Only me.

GW: Why did you stay there so long?

ID: Well I liked working there and I left when I got married and after 12 years and brought up my two boys I went back. I was a bit like Madam Melba. I went back three times altogether because when I'd been there about two years my mother got very sick and I left for about six months, but they took me back then. So they must have liked me all right.

EG: Yes and then you worked then for another 30 years or so.

ID: Well I went back in 1948 and left in 1974.

EG: 26 years.

GW: When did you first start working?

ID: 1925 in May.

EG: She was the best typist and stenographer they ever had.

39:50 ID: You say the nicest things.

GW: You started working as a, what?

ID: A stenographer, yes. I went to business college. I wasn't allowed to go to work until I was 16 my mother said so I went – after I left – I learned it at school as well and then I went to business college for three months until I was 16 and then got a job there. My grandfather knew the Sales Manager, not Ernie but the other Sales Manager at that time, because he was a building inspector and he spoke to him and I went and had an interview and I got the job.

GW: And got the job.

ID: Mm, so that was it. Getting back to Mr Ernest for a moment, the first time I ever had to take a letter from him, I nearly fell through the floor I was that nervous. It was terrible. I'll never forget that but I got over it.

GW: What did you take letters mainly for? For the three of them?

ID: Oh no, I rarely worked for Mr Ernest, for the Wunderlichs. I worked in Sydney branch, you know, the…

EG: Sales Division, in the Sales Division.

40:42 ID: Sales Division, quotations and all that sort of thing but for a little while – in the Depression I had to go upstairs to work because they needed people around. That was when I had to do…

GW: So the Sydney – was it the Sydney office that – was that a separate…

40:58 EG: That was the Head Office, the Sydney office, where that has just been demolished that was the Head Office of the company.

41:02 ID: At Redfern, you know.

GW: Oh I see, so the Head Office…

ID: The Sydney branch was downstairs and head office was upstairs.

GW: Oh I see and then the factory was…

EG: That's right, all that were the Redfern factory.

GW: Behind it.

ID: Yes.

EG: And of course then you had the Villawood factory, the windows and aluminium doors and the Rosehill factory (UNCLEAR 41:17) and the Rosehill factory with all the asbestos cement.

ID: First of all the asbestos cement factory was at Concord.

EG: Originally that was at Concord.

ID: When I first started there.

GW: And how many women were on the staff?

41:29 ID: Oh my goodness me. There were – well there were three in the accounts section, about five in…

EG: At least three in the accounts section.

ID: Five in the sales section and then there were Head Office girls too and switch girls.

EG: About 20.

ID: Yeah, about that I think.

EG: 18 to 20 girls. There were some in the Estimating Department, typists.

ID: Yes, that's true.

EG: Oh yeah, there were about 20 at least all the time, mostly typists.

GW: As far as things like canteens are concerned, recreational facilities, were there common facilities for the male and female workers?

EG: Mm, very good. The girls had their own rooms of course. They had morning tea and afternoon tea and lunch.

ID: Yes.

42:17 EG: We had, the staff had the same conditions and well set up. Refrigerators in there and hot water and so on like a canteen. The factories had good quarters, same thing, good places to go and have their lunch and so on.

ID: Had cricket teams.

EG: They had one of the – I would say from a recreational point of view for the employees they had probably as good a, as good a set-up as any company could have established and this was done with the help of the company and by a few energetic people on the staff who wanted to find something to keep the employees together when they weren't at Wunderlich's. They had golf clubs, tennis clubs, cricket club, in the winter football, fishing, snooker and billiards tournaments. We used to have those at at Lindrum's Parlour in Pitt Street, Sydney. [UNCLEAR] Beautiful carpeted salon there with about eight or ten beautiful billiard tables. We used to have all those tournaments in there. They used to have dances, balls every year. The balls got a bit old fashioned. They dropped out a bit. Staff dinners.

GW: Where would they have the balls?

EG: All different places.

ID: The Wentworth.

EG: Yeah, the Wentworth.

ID: The place in Martin Place, I forget the name of that one but different places. They were very nice.

EG: Oh yes, all top class. Really good, they had some marvellous turnouts for the company ball.

GW: Were there any kinds of things designed especially for the women workers there?

ID: Not really, no. We didn't have any sport at all, the women, did we?

44:07 EG: Not sport, no. We had every year a Christmas party for the families and their children. Different locations.

GW: And the Wunderlichs would pay? It was on the company?

EG: Oh yes, yes, yes. Well they at least subsidised it to whatever you wanted and people like ourselves, in the executive positions would be members of the social club and we'd give them $10 or something a year. In those days that wasn't bad money. You got a few $10 and you soon had $100 and we didn't spend that much to run a golf tournament or something like that.

GW: Sure, sure.

EG: But in addition to that the company would subsidise it very generously. So yes, they had everything done for them to keep them happy. They were always like that.

ID: They had a library.

EG: Had a very good library, yes.

GW: What kind of books?

EG: Fictition, fiction I should say. Mostly fiction, but some technical stuff if you wanted to read it. Building and that sort of thing but I think most people had got enough building, they'd go for the fiction. Yes, they had a good library.

GW: Like the Tooth and Company had the same thing.

45:16 EG: Yeah. Yes, I would say as a company, from an employee's point of view I think it was pretty complete. I really do. I know lots of others don't do anything like that.

GW: Very true.

EG: They had a rifle club when I first went there. Alfred Wunderlich was a keen rifle shooter. They used to figure in the normal shooting competitions every weekend. They had a Wunderlich team. That went on for many years until the war came about and that's when it fell apart.

ID: They had the – J E Face won the Queen's Prize.

EG: That's right, one of those stamping department operators, the one who used to drop down the stamper, Jack Face, J E Face, he won the Kings prize. That was great excitement. Was Albert happy about that? Oh my goodness, one of his employees. He couldn't believe it. He was more excited than Jack was. That was a great day when Jack won that Kings prize. That's something to win that. That encompassed all the rifle shots in Australia. My word, it took some doing to win that.

GW: What about the showroom? I'm told it was a very impressive…

EG: Beautiful.

ID: Oh it was fantastic.

EG: Magnificent showroom. Parquetry floow. It was set up beautifully. Did you see any photos of it?

GW: Not yet.

46:38 EG: We have a lot somewhere. I think Barry's got some.

GW: He might have a few.

EG: There's some colour photos of that, that are really good. Had beautiful material in it. It was built of course of all our materials. When it was opened they had a very big function and had all the leading architects and builders, engineers and so on.

ID: I was just reading about it in a thing in here that said Mr Ernest played the piano and his wife sang. Wasn't that it?

EG: That's right, grand piano. Mr Ernest, a grand piano in there. He was a good pianist and organist, very good musician.

GW: How regularly did they sing and play?

EG: Oh only at this opening and that was especially for the opening.

ID: That was at the opening of the showroom.

47:18 EG: Oh yes the grand piano and then he took it back home after that. He wasn't going to leave that in there. I think it was worth a lot of money. Oh yes he had that moved in and yes, he played the piano.

[break in recording]

GW: And what about the merger with CSR? Would you like to talk about that?

47:44 EG: Yes…

GW: Just the sequence of events.

EG: Well the first news, I was in – Sid Moreby (sounds like) was our Branch Manager and I was the General Sales Manager. Our offices were adjoining and most mornings I'd go in there or he'd come into my office and we'd sit and yarn about something that's going to come up that day for consideration, whatever it might be and we were in there talking in his office when one of the directors came down and he said, "Have you heard the latest news?" and we said, "No, what's happened now?" "CSR have made a bid to take over the company." We were thunderstruck. We couldn't believe it you know. "They're going to take over Wunderlichs?" "They've made a bid, yes, it's official. Letter in the mail this morning." And so it started.

They had us in three months. Now they'd – we know since, well I've known since because it was told to me by a CSR man that they'd plotted this for some time, 12 months prior to this. They'd investigated the company as much as they could and before they made a bid to feel sure that they – they didn't want to make a bid and then fail obviously, that they could take the company over, that it was possible to get it and that's when they made their bid. That was started – investigations had started 12 months before that. We of course, it was unbeknown to us. We had no idea anything like that was going on. Yeah, otherwise it wouldn't have

given us an opportunity to do something. They might have made it more difficult for them.

GW: Do you think there was anything that the Wunderlichs could have done or Wunderlich could have done? You were talking about the share structure.

49:22 EG: Yes, they could have issued more capital in the right quarters. Wouldn't have been able to take that over too. May not have been so easy and they wouldn't have sold.

GW: Yeah.

EG: Oh yes, something could have been if you had a warning. In time I think you could do a lot.

GW: So just to recap on that briefly, the Wunderlichs only had 30,000, was it…

EG: Something like about that, 30,000 between them, actual shares in the company, which was surprising. We would have thought they had more than that. I don't know if that was terribly confidential if you use that…

GW: Oh no, well I wouldn't use it. I'm just curious.

EG: But that is so and we didn't know that. I think that was published in the paper anyway. It was in the newspapers.

GW: Out of a, something like…

EG: Seven million.

GW: Seven million operating capital.

EG: Yeah, so yes that's surprising. That was mentioned more than once in the paper. It was surprising that the Wunderlich family only had a small holding themselves and yet they'd been in the company ever since it was formed, Wunderlichs or one generation or another.

GW: Amazing.

50:42 EG: See even Alfred didn't have very much money in the company, his estate. So it was surprising. Charles had very little apparently, but we had no idea what their holding would be. That would have been kept to themselves, that, but it did surprise us. I knew they didn't have a very big holding in the company.

GW: And then what happened next? CSR made its bid and then within three months…

EG: Well they made an offer to Wunderlich shareholders of a certain amount or certain conditions. They made them two offers. I forget, our shares I think were about $1.70.

ID: I wouldn't have a clue.

51:26 EG: I forget now. This was 13 years ago, dollars and cents then. We were about $1.75 I think, pound, dollar share. That's only going from memory and they made an offer and I've forgotten what it is now but it was so much in cash per Wunderlich share and so much in a CSR share. So they give you a CSR share and so much or so much for Wunderlich shares in cash. And the offer was reasonably generous, so much so that, surprising to us we all knew that a lot of our shares were held by old age pensions. People had had the shares for 30 or 40 years and

they'd gone up in value and they always had a marvellous dividend. We used to pay 11½, 12%. If you got 7½ you'd say you were doing pretty well. So that was a good return and people didn't want to sell these. There's no way you can tell – if you own 500 or 1,000 shares in Wunderlich and you got that offer through the mail, they can get that (UNCLEAR). How do we know that they've decided to sell their shares to CSR and sent the form back and say, "Yes thanks, I'll accept that"? They know but you're sitting pretty. You don't know, so by the end of six or eight weeks, we had no idea how many shares they'd bought, none whatever and there's no way we could find out but they knew how many they'd got.

ID: That was it.

53:17 EG: The takeover fella's in the box seat all the time.

GW: How did the takeover affect the workers?

EG: Oh I don't know. They didn't like it, especially the true blue Wunderlich employees that had been there a long time such as myself and others but, you know, they couldn't imagine working for CSR after you'd worked for Wunderlich for about 50 years or 45 years. And so what sort of a deal are we going to get now? You didn't know. You had no idea. You had no idea whether they're going to get rid of half our staff and put some people in from CSR. Didn't know what they would dp. They had control. They could do what they like. But they were more sensible than that. In fact you couldn't criticise them really. The way they did it was quite good and you couldn't find anything to criticise and I couldn't imagine they could have done it much better really than they did because we had a meeting in the board room and four or five of their – four of their top management and the incoming Chairman of the Board was among them and their incoming Director and General Manager and they spoke and we had only the executives there ourselves, Bob Wunderlich – the other Wunderlichs had all – they left the company straightaway. When they knew the takeover was on, they just went out.

54:46 Bob Wunderlich remained and he spoke on behalf of us but two of the CSR people spoke and they spoke very well. They didn't have any sense of overbearing about them because they'd taken us over, nothing

like that at all. They spoke in a very friendly way and they hoped that we could all carry on just as you did before. We're not going to upset anything in the organisation. The fact that this company is now owned by CSR will not make any difference to any of you or anybody that works in the company. We don't want anybody to leave. We want to carry the business on as it's always been carried on and we hope we can do it better. Bob replied at this point and he spoke very well too. So nobody got upset or excited and it was quite a nice little function. There were a few drinks afterwards and everybody went home. It was as simple as that. Well then, within the next month or two they did transfer from CSR certain people and that is one thing I never quite understood. I think they must have felt that as they owned the company -- and it was a big company -- that they should have some CSR people over there doing something. So they found positions for them and didn't put anybody at Wunderlich off or anything like that.

56:04 But they found positions for their people in various departments and no doubt to just oversee what was being doing and whether possibly they could see that perhaps the way CSR do things could be better and they might alter something. But they never interfered with us in any way whatever. They allowed us to run the business and then as you got to understand them further and the managing director was Arch McIntosh (sounds like) and a very nice man. We were fortunate really. The people they sent over were very friendly and very nice people. Couldn't complain about that. I think they were sensible enough to make sure they didn't send anybody that would be aggressive and difficult to get on with and some people are like that, especially if you put them into somewhere, circumstances such as that but they could perhaps start throwing their weight around and say, "Well we own this now." Nothing like that took place. I thought from that point of view they handled it very well.

GW: When did the Redfern factory close down?

57:00 EG: A good 18 months after they'd taken over. They didn't do this immediately.

GW: And why did it close?

EG: It wasn't making profits. It was losing a quarter of a million dollars a year. See metal ceilings were out. This was a really profitable business…

GW: Was that…

EG: Because we had it on our own for one thing. We had no opposition in metal ceilings but that had gone by the board, nobody was using them. A lot of our products were outdated. Nobody wanted some of the products. For instance, bronze work ceased to be used by architects or anybody. You might want a memorial built for something or an honour roll for somebody at a golf club and they want to put it up in bronze but these days they put it up and put it on with gold letters done by a sign writer. Those things of course became costly too, as costs went up. They became redundant. No doubt a lot of our products were redundant. Bronze work died out. You think of all the bronze work we used to do.

58:11 ID: Oh yes.

EG: It virtually vanished. They weren't using bronze work in buildings, too expensive for one thing. So a lot of the work became redundant and ceilings were a bit part of it for our business. So the factory was – we looked at all kinds of things to replace them with but with our plant, the plant wasn't suitable, it wasn't modern. Arch McIntosh called two of us up individually to tell us about this because we were the longest serving people there. There was myself who was the General Sales Manager. My job was to get sales and we obtained our sales budget every year, every six months and every year. From that point of view overall we were doing very well but on Redfern there was no way we could sell the products at Redfern to make it profitable. We didn't have enough work for a start. You've got to get a volume of work to make a factory profitable and then you've got to be able to cost that you want too. Those machines were costly to run because of the wage increases, award conditions of the employees and all kinds of things. It put an upsurge on costs very rapidly for a period there so we had to admit that it wasn't an acquisition for the company, any profits anyway any longer.

59:43 Well when they decided to do this, he rang me and he says, “Could you come up Ernie, I want to have a talk to you,” and he said, “I don't know whether you’ve got any inkling of this,” and I did. He said, “I want to tell you we’ve decided we’re going to close Redfern factory and we want it closed down within the next six to eight weeks.” He says, “And I thought you being a long employee you’ll feel very sad about this.” I said, “My word I am.” I said, “Well I admit I had an idea that something like this was getting close.” Yeah, as I said it was a sad moment because it was the beginning of Wunderlichs and building the the basis of their whole business. They diversified into other products since but that was the basis of their beginning where they originally made enough money to diversify into other things. At one time that was a very big and profitable business, not only here. We had the same factories all over all the states. So I said, “Yes, I am.” Well he sent for Jack Mogg (sounds like) too who was the Works Manager of the aluminium factory but one time he was Works Manager at the Redfern factory too and he was still there. He’d been there 10 years, 12 years less than me but he was the oldest one associated with Redfern too so he got Jack in after and explained it to him too but he was very decent about it, Arch. As I say, he was a very nice man and nothing we could do, just accept it. A very sad day.

GW: That was the end of Wunderlich?

1:01:10 EG: That was the end of Wunderlich’s Redfern factory. The basis, the original business was gone where they started. Very sad day.

GW: So it really went into a decline and then…

EG: Oh yes, it was losing money when they took us over, the Redfern factory and we, we’d thought ourselves as to what we should do, whether we should carry it on or try and think of what – well I know they went into the costs of what it would cost for new plant to make other products.

GW: What sort of other products would you, could you have made from that plant?

EG: Well, you could have extended the factory and made aluminium windows there but it wouldn't have been big enough. When you saw the aluminium window factory at Villawood and the area of land we wanted for that factory and the business we got into, it wasn't big enough and we thought well it's no good putting those there. We were thinking we were going to get into the aluminium window business and to start that off we thought we should align ourselves with, ally ourselves to some large company overseas that's had a big experience in curtain walling and huge buildings and domestic windows, sliding doors and so on. So we did. We sent representatives over to America and we coupled up with Cupples Pty Ltd. We became manufacturers under licence in Australia and we had to pay them for a certain period, I think five years, a percentage of our sale. Not a very high percentage but to make their products here. That gave us a handsome start because they had that business wrapped up in America.

GW: But that wouldn't have been at the Redfern plant?

1:02:45 ID: No.

EG: No, well then we realised – we were glad we didn't waste money starting windows down there because we could have designed windows of our own but we were starting from scratch with this. We had all their know how and everything. They sent two fellows over here to kick us off. We soon became…

GW: Where was that plant located?

EG: Villawood. It's still there. It's been taken over by Com…

ID: Comalco.

EG: Comalco and they own it and they market it but they still call every door and window they sell Wunderlich's windows and doors. They don't call it Comalco. They still call them that.

GW: Wunderlich's.

EG: Yeah. The name sells them because they were the best quality window made and we stuck to our thoughts on all these things. With whatever we made we made good products and whilst they may cost a little more we found we always outsold most people.

GW: Oh well that always…

EG: So use them once, that builder's likely to use them again. That's why we settled up with Cupples to join their organisation on a licence basis.

GW: Can you remember the last day at Wunderlich's?

1:03:48 EG: Oh I can. Ivy can too.

GW: Can you tell what the last day was like?

ID: The day Ern left?

GW: Oh well the last day at Wunderlich, the closure of the plant at Redfern.

ID: Oh, oh, I don't…

EG: Oh I'd say, I think by then everybody had become so used to the fact that we were going to close, nothing. It seemed to me…

ID: What happened to all the employees in the factory? I've forgotten…

EG: Oh a lot of them got their superannuation and left.

ID: Because they were oldies weren't they, most of them?

EG: By then those that were left were old employees and they just got their super and away they went.

GW: That was the end?

1:04:30 EG: Pretty well. There was a few – what we did, there's some products of course were modern and we installed those in the Villawood window factory – pressed sheetings for awning fascias and ceilings and all kinds of things. Walling for outside buildings in aluminium, that was made at Redfern on presses. Those presses went up there and we still continued to make them. I think they're still there.

GW: What about the – you mentioned the aluminium framing for the Housing Commission?

EG: Windows?

ID: Windows.

GW: Windows.

EG: Were they were made at Villawood.

GW: They were made at Villawood?

EG: Oh yes, oh that's – I don't know how it compares for size of the window factory. I should imagine that would be one of the biggest window factories in Australia.

GW: What, they were made when – after CSR had…

EG: Oh no, Villawood, oh no Villawood's been going before then, oh yes.

GW: Oh no I'm just wondering whether that framing was made before the takeover?

1:05:26 EG: Oh no – wait a minute. Before that would be, I'd say before. Yes, we did those two jobs, the high street buildings before I'd say the takeover of that.

ID: I should think so. They've been in a long time.

EG: Oh yes, they've been there – see the takeover was…

ID: '72 wasn't it? No, before that, '69.

EG: No, '69.

ID: You read it this morning, '69.

EG: '69 so that's 14 years ago.

GW: And so what happened? The factory closed down and it just…

ID: Well the office was still there, still at Redfern.

GW: The Head Office?

ID: Yes.

GW: Were you working then?

ID: Yes.

GW: Oh you stayed on?

1:06:05 ID: Oh yes, I really went to CSR for about 12 months I suppose because I didn't leave until '74, 1974.

EG: I retired in '72. CSR had had us then for about three years, that's right.

ID: No, I was five years.

GW: So it was a Head Office with an empty plant?

EG: Exactly.

ID: Well that's right, yes and then after a while they moved out to Burwood.

EG: Because I'd go mad. I walk down there and it's like walking in a morgue. It used to be a busy place one time. Not a soul in the place. It was like that for a good 12 months…

GW: It must have been very strange.

EG: And what to do with it? And then they tried to sell it and for a long while they couldn't sell it until finally somebody bought it and that's what happened and then they demolished the lot. And they moved the staff out.

ID: We went down to have a look at it, didn't we?

1:06:57 EG: We went down to have a look at it. You've got no idea what a nostalgic day that was.

GW: When did you go back and have a look at it?

EG: Well they knocked most of the factory down. Some of the outside walls were still up. All the internal stuff had gone and that office building that was there when I first went there when I was interviewed when I was 14 years old…

ID: Was still there.

EG: That was still there but they'd taken the roof off and they had – you could see the windows had been taken out, the glasswork and they were getting ready to knock the whole walls down and so on which was being done by big jackhammers and knock it down in great heaps but

they hadn't done that and you could see doorways and I said to Ivy, I said, "How many times do you ever think you went through that doorway?"

ID: Because there was a side passage you see that you could go down between the garage and the office and there was a door there and you often used to go in that way. That was still there. Oh it was horrible.

EG: That's the thing. It was ready to be completely demolished and you think how many thousands of times did we walk through that door? It was there for years. Yes, sad. It gave you a funny feeling, it did really.

ID: It did.

EG: Very sad.

1:07:58 ID: And then we went back again to have a look at it after they built a supermarket and oh it was terrible.

EG: Oh my goodness, it's the worst looking supermarket you've ever seen.

GW: It's ugly isn't it?

ID: Yes.

EG: It's like a prison, it's all brick walls.

GW: It's almost as, well it's just as ugly as the high rise isn't it?

ID: Well at the back I think it's just like a prison really because I suppose they've done that for security reasons.

EG: There's hardly any glass on the outside. You see they break the windows down there. It didn't used to be like that.

GW: I think it's a bit of a tough area.

ID: Oh I think so now, yes.

GW: I think also that that's a problem with the Housing Commission and a lot of social problems have been created because of that.

ID: Yes, that's right.

1:08:37 EG: It's very difficult for the Housing Commission. They must spend a lot of money on repairs.

GW: They never should have built those things.

ID: No.

GW: Never should have built them.

EG: Well if you do go that way, at the back of that site, go down the side street up Baptist Street, the side street and you'll see those really huge blocks of flats on both sides. We did every door and window in that. There's a lot of windows.

GW: That's interesting. I might maybe think about that. It could be quite interesting.

ID: Yes, that's right because there's quite a few of them.

EG: That's a good example of large apartment blocks done with those windows. There's a lot of windows. I haven't counted them but I know the day they gave me that order, Villawood will be pleased to get this one. This will keep them busy for a while. It was a big job.

GW: And when did Ernest die? What happened to the Wunderlich family? I'm not sort of certain about the sequence of events.

EG: Yeah, Ernest died – he died, well he was 86. Yes, he's 86, Ernest and he died – I'll show you a book that he wrote called *All My Yesterdays*.

GW: Oh yes, I've seen that.

1:09:47 EG: You've seen that?

GW: Yeah, I've seen the book.

EG: Well when I got that he gave to some of the staff who had been there a long while, he gave them a copy of this but he didn't autograph them and by that time he lived at Waverley and he was home ill. And I thought I'd like to go out and see him and ask him would he autograph this for me. I asked – his chauffeur came in one day for something or other. He had a beautiful big car. I said "Do you think he'd see me if I went over?" and he said, "He'd be very glad to see you. Why don't you go over?" and I said, "Well I will," and I got time away and I wasn't General Sales Manager then. I took it over and he was in bed. I thought crikey, I didn't know he was in bed. Anyhow the maid took me in and said, "Oh he'll be glad to see you." He did. I sat down on a chair. He

was on the bed and we had a long talk and I said, "Well I've brought my book and I wondering if you would autograph it?" and he wrote a very nice verse in it, beautiful. Oh yes, I came home tickled pink.

GW: And you've still got that book?

ID: Oh yes.

GW: I'm wondering could I take some photographs of it?

EG: Let me find it, let me find it for you.

1:10:55 ID: 1945 he died at 86. He was 86.

GW: So in fact the company was well established by the '20s and '30s of this century?

ID: Oh goodness yes. Yes, definitely.

GW: What's this one?

[Break in recording]

GW: "The 1905 catalogue announced a plan by Wunderlich to eliminate antiquated design in favour of our most modern art designs originated by Australian artists in Australia."

[Break in recording]

GW: And when the time came Wunderlich design moved into the art deco mode. After visiting the 1925 Paris Exposition he commented, "The cubist decoration is the dizzy limit."

[Break in recording]

1:11:41 EG: The Head Office there and have a look at those – see if you look at those ceilings. Also look at the bronze counter screens around all the tellers 'boxes. You see how magnificently made they are, all in bronze. They're all made by hand, every one. We made all those. Some beautiful work in that building. There's a lot of buildings like that in Sydney I could take you into. You'd see some magnificent bronze work and work the company has done over the years that they don't do today. To put bronze screens in like that for tellers 'boxes today it would cost a fortune. Bankers (UNCLEAR) not on your life. They do away with screens altogether now. You just go over the counter.

[Break in recording]

GW: There was a fairly close relationship between architects or fairly close liaison between architects and…

1:12:28 EG: Wunderlich.

GW: And Wunderlich.

EG: Oh very much so. Our main business came through architects and then the big builders, but architects – see most big buildings, the architect's the first man you get to and see what he's going to specify and he's the mainspring of what your chances are of getting some of your products into the building. I'd say, "Well what are you going to face the building with?" It might be Harry Seidler and they were all personal, first names to me because I'd known me since they were young fellas. Seen them grow up, some of them from draftsmen… So, "What are you going to face it with?" "Oh I don't know, I'm thinking of either stone or – I might think about your terracotta." "Well I hope you do and if you do,

let me know and I'll be in again anyway sometime." I'd go and see them every two of three weeks, the main architects and sometimes often if they're really busy I'll go every week and you've got to get to know their draftsmen and their junior architects who are handling contracts and so on. It kept me busy. I had plenty of work to do, by golly. Like I say, I used to work every night with enquiries I got and write them all out and get them all ready for the estimators and the draftsmen in our office the next morning. No chance of doing it in there. I'd want to be back in town by 11 o'clock again next day. It kept me busy.

1:14:10 That's where you're products spring from, they spring from those into early interviews. "What sort of windows are you going for?" "Oh aluminium." "Yeah, I've got the drawings out for that. I'll give you a ring or if you're in you can take them away and give us the figures on it." And of course you had opposition in that. You didn't get them all but we got our share of them.

GW: But as far as pressed metal ceilings, ceramic tile facing, Wunderlich really had a monopoly?

1:14:34 EG: Oh yes, complete monopoly on both those products, oh yes, nobody else made them, and to a degree the monopoly would be brought about by two conditions or situations. With ceramic there's a fair demand for that but not as big as you'd think. There's a lot of things you can face a building with and in latter years the ceramic factory closed. It closed soon after CSR took us over. We were thinking about closing it then and the reason for that was that buildings were being faced with aluminium and glass. We were in that too. A lot of those big city buildings, we'd done them and when I retired I left them with four very big jobs that were all tied up. They were all tied up through the architects and major builders and (UNCLEAR) but there were three or four of those and I followed them up to make sure we got them.

GW: Oh thank you very much.

1:15:35 ID: Do you have sugar?

GW: No.

ID: We don't either.

GW: I stay away from it.

EG: Capital cities in Australia – aluminium windows all over Australia. Factories in Victoria and Adelaide and Brisbane.

[Break in recording]

1:16:00 EG: We lasted until about half past three in the afternoon. By that time we were dog tired. I took them down George Street, up Pitt Street and down Castlereagh Street and down King Street and Market Street. They couldn't believe these – even our own representatives, they couldn't believe that each building we came to I'd say, "Well now we're going past Farmers," it was then on the corner. "See all this awning, ceiling and fascia right around Pitt Street, Market Street and George Street. All that is in pressed copper. The fascia's the same, all those beautiful letters, Farmers all over it." I said, "We did all that. See all these bronze windows, beautiful bronze windows, we did those. If you look inside, you'll see half the ceilings there are pressed Wunderlich metal ceilings. We did those." They stand in awe looking at all this, you know. Go to the next building. "Now we haven't done a lot in this. We did the ceilings in there on the two floors and we did these shop fronts but nothing else." But nearly every building we went to we had something of Wunderlich's in it. They couldn't make it out. They said is there any buildings we didn't do anything? I said, "Oh there's a couple over there. I don't think we did anything as I can remember. They're pretty old." It was surprising and that was just in the City of Sydney. Wunderlich's made such a variety of products that on a commercial building, a thing like that, we were bound to be in it somewhere.

GW: And that was – I suppose there were branches in Melbourne and Brisbane?

1:17:27 EG: Oh yes but not in as big a way. We were about 55 to 57½% of the complete sales of the company over Australia in New South Wales, about over half the business.

GW: Just touching on Redfern briefly, did you – what was your impression of Redfern at that time, say in the '20s and '30s? What kind of place was it?

EG: Very busy, busy factory. Always busy. Always employed about 175-180 people.

ID: You mean Redfern generally?

GW: Oh no, I mean Redfern the suburb.

1:18:05 EG: Oh the suburb. I'd say a normal suburb, nothing – it wasn't depressed or anything like that. The people that lived there were hard working people and all their jobs, they lived a normal life. It's become more sophisticated as years have gone on and people have earnt bigger wages. The average worker then would probably have rented a lot of those terraced homes, those little narrow homes. They'd probably rent all those. As a matter of fact those at the end, we own all those. We still own them. Wunderlich still own them when it was taken over. They were let.

GW: Did you ever do any socialising in Redfern?

1:18:44 EG: Not in Redfern, no, no, no. We didn't have any social with the people that lived around there, no but nobody ever objected to the factory because it wasn't a factory that made a lot of noise or created any horrible smells. See, it was a clean factory.

GW: Was there much pollution created?

EG: None whatever, no. It was a clean factory. The only factory that had a fire in it was the foundry and they didn't even make smoke. They were fires that had to melt bronze and various metals and it created a great heat. So no, they never had a complaint that I can even remember.

GW: How did you get to work? By tram or by train?

ID: Train and tram

EG: Train and tram.

1:19:40 ID: I lived at Eastwood when I first started so I got the tram to Central, the train to Central, then the tram out.

EG: I was the same. We lived at Rockdale. I got a train to Central and a tram out but in the young days I didn't get the tram. I'd walk.

GW: Walked.

1:19:50 EG: Walked from Central, oh yes in fact for a long time in those young days. For a long time you wouldn't waste money paying twopence on the tram to get to Wunderlich's and back. So you'd walk.

GW: Oh well, nice walk.

EG: Most of the staff did. Yes, we walked. It was about a good half an hour.

ID: It wasn't that far really.

EG: No and you were under awnings half the time. If it was a wet day you'd get the tram of course but on a fine day you wouldn't. You'd walk down. After all you'd be sitting in a blessed office all day. Good exercise and we were young.

[Break in recording]

ID: Those letters up there are ours. Wunderlich ceilings – you don't see too many ceilings but you do some awnings.

GW: They've all been demolished I'd say within the last 20 years.

ID: Well we were in a shop just recently and it was a Wunderlich ceiling wasn't it?

EG: Yes.

ID: I've forgotten where it was.

1:20:41 EG: It's surprising where you see them and in good condition.

GW: As I said, the place I know which is a big kind of mansion really on Cleveland Street…

[Break in recording]

EG: I think 74¼ by 25½ or 25¼ to allow for the pull in when you pressed a sheet and put a pattern on it would shrink the outer perimeter of your sheet obviously and then you had to trim it on the cutting presses

and when they pressed those sheets they were then taken down to the cutters and they'd trim the edges off so that they were all exactly as they had to be to go on the job, exactly six by two and what I was…

ID: I don't know because you said that before. You told us about that one before. Excuse me.

EG: No, I told you about producing it but I'm trying to think what it was that led me to that. The awning sheets – outside work they were galvanised steel. Now to paint these sheets, when we got them from Lysaght we used to get them in 180 sheets in a case. They'd go up to the paint shop and they'd put them through a roller painting system just like a big, the old thing you used to use for washing. What do you call it?

ID: Ringer.

1:22:10 EG: Ringer, like a ringer. The rubber roller was about that diameter, six or seven inches in diameter, two of them and this, the bottom one was picking up the paint in the trough underneath and the top one, and both rollers – as you put your sheet through, it runs your sheet through and it paints the sheet both sides all over with an oil paint, quick drying oil paint. Now those sheets – such a special process to paint this was such that those sheets wouldn't stick together. You could pull them apart with your fingernails, pick them up, separate them. They were painted – from the time they hit our place we immediately painted them. Never got rust on them and then when they got on to the job they then would be painted with a flat oil paint, not a water paint, never water paints. Always used oil paints. So that's why those ceilings in many cases have been up there 50 years and they're still not rusting and they're made of steel. They've been protected [UNCLEAR] Lysaght's but awning ceilings outside, they were made from the same sheet, same gauge, 30 gauge but they were galvanised steel and of course we didn't paint those.

GW: What are your recollections of the city 50 years ago? From an architectural point of view I mean it must have been a very different place.

1:23:34 EG: That's a good question. It's obviously changed greatly. My brother – I've got a lot of very fine books on architecture and old buildings throughout the world here and many others inside and he'll give me these for presents, Christmas and birthdays. Some of them are beautiful. Ted's got one, my brother, Old Sydney and Present Day Sydney. My brother. He got it for his birthday and he doesn't collect these. He brought that one when we play snooker at the club every Wednesday morning. He was the Chief Accountant for Sydney City Council when he retired. This shows on that page beautiful black and white in nearly all the old pictures, that part of say King Street running towards the Market Street corner of George Street and so on, down to the Quay all over the city. And then on this page a coloured picture taken today from exactly that same position. So when you say how do you compare the City of Sydney 50 years ago to what it is now, to see this book you say it's completely changed, but it isn't. There's some buildings still there that have been painted, repainted. You can see the same old building but not many big ones. Most of the big buildings have been taken down and skyscrapers on these. Glass and aluminium walls.

1:25:18 EG: I've got an article in there, a paper article, a full page that was written about me when I'd been at Wunderlich's 50 years and a reporter was coming to see me and wanted to know what I had to say about being 50 years – it's not common in lots of companies. "What can you tell us?" and I spent about an hour and a half telling them. This all appeared in the building magazines that go through all the building companies in the building fraternity every week and in that it asked me, "What do you think of present day architecture?" Now this was in 1970, that's 13 years ago and I said, "Well I think the architect is becoming more restricted in his scheme of design now than ever he could have been before." I said, "You've only got to look at each building. This from our point of view is very satisfactory because we have a lot to do in those buildings. If they're 40 floors high and they've got aluminium windows and huge stainless steel entrance doors and screens, we're very interested." So I said, "It doesn't affect us from the point of view of a business," I said, "but you'll notice that the buildings they're putting up one after the other are very similar. An architect surely must be finding it very difficult to put a design of a building up under this construction to look completely different to anybody else's."

GW: Exactly.

1:26:48 EG: And it's happened that was more so now than since I retired than ever. Ivy and I go into town. "Look at this, they nearly all look alike." In the old days, all those buildings were different so yes it's restricted an architect's opportunity to design a building in my opinion.

[Break in recording]

EG: … and work in the rural bank in the housing section, Frank, and he's a very good friend of mine. He, when they asked him to do that job, design it, they hadn't actually given him a job at that time I don't think but he designed that building like that. And they accepted it

GW: A lot of Martin Place is sort of deco isn't it?

1:27:23 EG: Oh yes, my word and they accepted that and that's a lovely old building. In today's design I suppose the ceilings are higher than they make them now. They've probably got a couple more floors in it, but from an economic point of view that's very good. It was a nice building and you know how much the architects fought to keep it there. Johnson, the President of the Architects of Australia, he was there with meetings on the site. They never got anywhere.

GW: And the Rapallo's coming down as well.

1:27:53 EG: The government hasn't sold it. It's owned by the government, the state government.

GW: Could I just have a look at this?

ID: 1928 or ’29 it was.

GW: Oh it’s a fabulous photo.

ID: There’s Mr Alfred.

EG: Yes, Alfred’s in that.

ID: It’s Alfred.

GW: And this is what, 192…?

ID: ’28 or ’29, I’m not sure.

GW: I’m just identifying it for the tape.

ID: Oh I beg your pardon.

GW: Oh no, that’s all right. 1928 or 1929. I wonder whether – where’s the venue?

ID: Where’s who?

GW: Where’s the venue?

1:28:31 ID: The Wentworth that one I think.

EG: That was the Wentworth I think from memory.

ID: I don't think, you weren't in that because I think you were just married in 1929. I don't think you were there.

GW: Which one are you?

ID: I'm here. Just found myself. I'm dancing with the Secretary and that was the Secretary.

EG: Arthur Keegan. He was the Secretary when I went there.

ID: And this was the girl that used to be on our switch.

GW: And that's Alfred, that's Alfred Wunderlich?

ID: That's Alfred, yes. She was a girl in Head Office, this one.

GW: This is fantastic. Could I take a photograph?

ID: Yes, certainly. So many of them are not here anymore.

EG: No, all passed on, my word, the bulk of them I'd say.

1:29:21 ID: 1929, how old was I then?

GW: And these were annual balls?

EG: Annual balls, yes.

ID: Yes.

GW: How old would you have been there?

ID: Well 1929, I was 21. No.

EG: 1929, that's about three or four years.

ID: 20, 20.

GW: You'd been working for Wunderlich for?

ID: For four years, four to five years.

EG: Well I'd been there then – what was that, '29? I'd been there nine years. It was 1920 when I went to the company as a school boy.

GW: That's a fantastic photograph.

EG: It's a good picture, that. It's so clear and sharp isn't it?

[break in recording]

1:30:05 **GW: Recording with Mr Green and Mrs De Groen. We're looking at a number of photographs and identifying them from their days at Wunderlich. Recorded on the 18th of August, 1983.**

Okay, well look here we have the photograph, the ball photograph dating from when? What date is that?

ID: 1929.

GW: Yeah. Would you like to tell me about the photograph?

ID: Well it was at the annual ball at the Wentworth. It was attended by nearly everyone in the office and some from the factory.

GW: What sort of people from the factory would have been…

ID: Oh well anyone that cared to go. They were all welcome.

GW: Did many people go? Like was it – oh well obviously they did looking at the photograph but I mean did a lot of people, say, from the factory floor and the office workers all attend?

ID: Oh yes, there's quite a few there from the factory and nearly all the office staff went because they'd…

EG: You could virtually say that that evening everybody was on an equal basis.

ID: Yeah, well they were too.

1:31:10 EG: Office boys and…

GW: That's great.

ID: Yes, they were too. There's people from Cabarita and from Rosehill. They're there.

GW: And people from Redfern?

ID: Redfern, yes. They were the main ones of course because that was where it all started and it included Mr Alfred Wunderlich and his son and daughter, Mr Charles and…

GW: They're on the – where are they?

ID: They're, the son and daughter there and Mr Alfred's over here.

GW: Over on the left and Charles is on the right.

ID: On the right and that's his sister next, just next to him.

GW: And where are you in the photograph?

ID: I'm right in the middle dancing with the Secretary. Secretary – where am I? There.

GW: You can see some, you can see a little bit of your face can't you?

1:31:48 ID: Yes, just the top half.

GW: And all down the front are all the office – women who worked in the office?

ID: Oh no, no. No, there's only two of them that worked in the office there. That was his wife and that was his wife. I don't know that…

GW: Oh I see. So it's the girl on the left and the girl on the right?

ID: Yes, well she was the switch attendant, the second one.

GW: On the right?

ID: Yes and that lass worked in Head Office.

GW: On the left here?

ID: Yes.

GW: Oh I see. And what do you remember of – can you remember anything of that night? I mean what was it – did those kind of functions, were they enjoyable?

ID: Oh well, very enjoyable. The food was always lovely and everyone had a lovely time. That's all I can think of really. They're all happy together. Must be if the Secretary had come and danced with one of the office girls don't you think?

GW: It looks very lavish there.

1:32:37 ID: My boyfriend at that time's up there.

GW: Where's he?

ID: He's there. He worked at Cabarita then I think, or at Head Office, I'm not sure. He was a draftsman.

GW: You can't see much of his face there.

ID: No, oh you can see more of his than mine. Oh, I've lost him.

GW: There?

ID: I don't think so.

GW: Is that him?

ID: That's him, that's him, yeah. There.

GW: Oh yes. What a picture. That's great and these photographs here, there are these other ones. These are the office girls at Wunderlich in Redfern.

ID: That's right, yes and they were on a, the annual – at closing at Christmas we always had a lunch and that, they were taken on the day because the girls used to get it ready for everyone.

GW: Oh I see and that would have been the 1960s by the looks of it?

1:33:36 ID: Well I suppose it would be, wouldn't it Ern? 1960? I think yes, about that. We still see her and we see her and we see her, and we don't see those anymore.

GW: These girls are wearing pants. You said…

ID: Well that's right. They were only allowed to do – because that was a holiday day, you know, the luncheon. Christmas Eve we always those dos.

GW: That would have been the early days just when women were just starting to wear…

ID: Yes, it was a long time before they allowed them to wear them in the office and then they had to have a matching top and bottom. It must be a suit.

EG: They were pretty strict over dress in the office.

GW: Yeah, yeah but that would have been the same with the women and the men wouldn't it?

EG: The men wanted to wear shorts. They got knocked back.

GW: They couldn't wear shorts?

ID: For a very long time and then they had to…

GW: In the middle of summer.

1:34:19 EG: About two years later they tried it again. The management agreed to it in the finish but they had to wear golf socks and then…

ID: Proper socks, you know and a tie.

EG: Shirt and so on. They could wear an open neck shirt but it was a good shirt, not a sport thing with short sleeves. They wouldn't have that.

ID: With a tie of course.

GW: And just looking at these other photographs, this one here – which ones did we photograph? We photographed this one.

EG: Yeah.

GW: And that's of…

EG: That was the cricket match. Do you remember the name of that ground?

ID: No I don't Ern, I'm sorry, I don't remember that.

GW: Well these were Wunderlich employees?

ID: Oh yes. It was between Rosehill and Redfern wouldn't it?

EG: I'd say it was over towards Ashfield. Oh yes.

1:35:05 ID: Rosehill and Redfern?

EG: No. This was the, Villawood..

ID: Oh Villawood.

EG: Villawood and Redfern and Villawood won it. This was the captain of the Villawood team giving the trophy to…

GW: Oh yes and this is out at…

ID: Villawood.

GW: Villawood.

EG: That's at the Villawood factory, the aluminium works.

GW: This is of you showing various representatives from…

EG: They're all from the Goulburn – builders and storekeepers from the Goulburn and the South Coast area.

GW: 1960s.

EG: These other photos were in the showroom where we had groups of architects. You couldn't get them all in so we got them in in groups like that. We'd have about 30 and we'd give them a very nice supper and take them round and show them various products, particularly if we had some new products to show them.

GW: And this was…

1:35:55 ID: Bob, Bob Wunderlich.

GW: And this looks like a dinner.

EG: Oh that was a dinner too. I forget who that was to. That was up at the North Sydney Leagues Club. That was a private thing.

GW: Yeah. That's great.

ID: Thank you.

GW: Thank you very much.

EG: Pleasure.

GW: Okay.

Interview tape/end transcript