



ACT Heritage Library Manuscript Collection

Engineering Heritage Canberra Professional Career Series



ENGINEERS
AUSTRALIA
Canberra Division

Robert J (Bob) Nairn



Interviewed Wednesday 20 July 2011

CD1 = 58 minutes		
Time	Subject	Proper Names & Keywords
0.00-0.60	Interview introduction. Robert J Nairn of 13 Tanumbirini Street, Hawker, ACT, born in Morgan, South Australia on 11 January 1936.	Morgan, South Australia
0.60-3.58	Family Background – details of mother and father and grandparents on both sides. Father – Robert Alexander Nairn, born in Broken Hill, New South Wales, an electrician by trade, operated a service station and road house in Morgan. Mother - Marie Louise Adam, born in London, England. Came to Australia in about 1910/12, first in Hobart then adopted to a farming family in Haslam, (Streaky Bay) in South Australia. Describes father's work during Depression years and where he met his wife. Described what they did during the Depression and what it was like during those years.	Father: Robert Alexander Nairn Mother: Marie Louise Adam Depression Haslam, South Australia Streaky Bay, South Australia
3.58-4.48	Grandparents on his father's side – where they were born, where they met and their lives and work.	Kapunda, South Australia Duncan (grandmother's maiden name)
4.48-9.35	Grandparents on his mother's side – grandfather was a Russian diplomat; grandmother and children came out to Australia but returned to England after WW1, left her daughters in Australia. Talks about his mother and her sister's adoption.	Grandparents Adams (English family) World War 1 World War 2 Forgotten Australians
9.35-14.55	Great-grandparents and Nairn family description. Alexander Nairn was a mathematician and wanted to prove Einstein's theory – big challenge of early 1900s. He travelled to China to view an eclipse for this purpose – caught up in the Boxer Rebellion. Accepted to Royal Society for his writings on his travels on horseback from Canton to Shanghai.	Nairn Family History Scotland Alexander Nairn China Royal Society
14.55-16.70	Scottish family were business people. Describes family – 13 in grandmother's family. Some dentists and farmers. Describes small village of Morgan in South Australia. Uncle Dave became the village undertaker; Uncle Colin ran the dry cleaning store.	Nairn Family continued Morgan, South Australia
16.70-20.20	Family life during the war years (WW2) in Morgan. Describes his first cousins as brothers and sisters. Nairn family arrived in Australia about mid 1850s. Talks about ship voyages at that time and infant mortality rates.	World War 2 Ship Passages (19 th Century) Infant Mortality
20.20-25.00	The Russian family connection – still a mystery. Traced link back to Russia via National Archives, London. Great-grandmother published short stories.	Russian/Austrian Family Connection National Archives, London Adam (grandmother's surname)
25.00-29.35	Earliest memory – hearing Menzies declaring war [Sept 1939]. Describes growing up in Morgan = going to school, fishing and swimming in the Murray River, fossil hunting, finding Aboriginal burials. Mentions Charles Sturt in 1844 recorded Aboriginal deaths from imported diseases 'which travelled down the river	World War 2 Morgan, South Australia School years Murray River Aboriginal Burials

	before any white man came'. Recalls reenactment of Sturt's visit, followed by an evening ball.	Charles Sturt Morgan Hall
29.35-30.30	The life of the Murray River – Murray River Cod and other fish including description of Murray River catfish. Catching a Carp. Weather and other conditions around Morgan and the River.	Murray River Murray River Cod
30.30-33.45	Conditions in Morgan and vicinity. Grandfather had a mill as Morgan produced wheat at this time. He ran a general store and had a paddle steamer. Also set up electricity supply for the town and how Bob's father became an electrician. Describes signal to town to go to bed as switching to low power. Early home refrigeration.	Morgan, South Australia Wheat General Store Paddle Steamer Electricity (diesel powered) Home Refrigeration
33.45-40.20	Young Australia League – youth organisation for young males and females. Father went to Europe and came back with coins. This started Bob's coin collection. Schools days during War time – slit trenches, air raid drills, aircraft identification. Recalled spitfire crash. Collecting metal for war effort. Playing on wheat stacks. Morgan was a busy place during the war – petrol rationing and gas producers. Local butcher, his racehorses and horseracing. Father was secretary of the local racing association.	Young Australia League Collecting Coins World War 2 Schooling Morgan, South Australia Horse Racing
40.20-43.48	Growing up with cousins as an only child. Talks about schooling – parading, marching, singing the national anthem; limited schools in local area; at 10 was sent to boarding school in Adelaide	Schooling continued Boarding School Adelaide, South Australia
43.48-50.30	Describes attending boarding school in Adelaide at one of the oldest schools in Adelaide – St Peters. Subjects and teachers. Traditions of education – if rural 'eldest gets the farm'; 'if good at maths you did engineering'; 'if you were reasonable enough at school but not good at anything then you went into the army'. Thoughts of an army career, keen on cadets and followed up with CMF and National Service.	Schooling continued Boarding School Adelaide St Peters College Education and Careers Engineering Army
50.30-53.40	Beginning studies for engineering career. After St Peters went to St Marks at Adelaide University. Attended the engineering school. Describes working in its laboratory and working with the honours students; describes courses and studies. Learned to understanding the first principles of engineering. Learned directness – as an engineer 'you had to find a solution'. Commonwealth Scholarship and small income for his laboratory work.	Adelaide University Engineering Degree Commonwealth Scholarship Laboratory Work
53.40-58.00	Work experience, first at the university laboratories, then with the South Australia Highways Department during university studies. Worked in the Bridge section learning drafting, then moved into design and detailing project work. Stayed on after graduation. Influenced by his uncle, Frank Jackman, the Commissioner of Highways. His cadetship, working hours, studies and engineering environment. Describes length and breadth of engineering course, included geology in his engineering studies.	Work Experience Laboratory Work Highways Department, South Australia Frank Jackman Engineering Course
End of CD 1		
CD2 = 60 minutes		

0.00-3.25	Continued with engineering course work including importance of understanding geology. Using this in his work in Canada. Different to Australian geology.	Geology and Engineering Canada Australian Geology
3.25-9.45	Project based work with the Highways Department, SA. Talks about his final year at Adelaide University including research on Parsons and turbine engine. Another research exercise: assessing digital versus analogue computers. Major project: build an analogue computer to analyse multi-cell box culvert structures; conducted tests.	Highways Department, South Australia Adelaide University Parsons Turbine Engine Computers Box Culverts
9.45-11.45	After graduation continued work with the Highways Department. Describes working there and some of the staff.	Bachelor of Engineering Highways Department, South Australia
11.45-14.00	Frank Jackman – a gentleman and an engineer. Describes his Aunt and Uncle Jackman. Adelaide Society. Continued with Highways Department.	Frank Jackman Adelaide, South Australia
14.00-17.25	Country project work and conducting rotations within the Department and in country areas. Worked in the field four days then back to the office on Friday. Work involved reporting to a foreman and checking on materials and machinery. Describes the details of this work and living and working on site. Problems with material theft.	Yorke Peninsula Bridge and Road Construction/Maintenance
17.25-22.00	Negotiating with land owners – describes process involved. Research project to test the grid roller and build roads with the resulting material. Mentions project in Whyalla and Aboriginal cultural issues. Tested a nuclear density meter.	Land Ownership and Road Construction Grid Roller testing Whyalla Aboriginal Culture Nuclear Density Meter
22.00-25.45	Opportunity to test the meter when newly constructed road was damaged by BHP equipment following a rail derailment and lifting engine back onto track.	Nuclear Density Meter BHP
25.45-29.15	Describes meeting Jennifer Ann Marr on a blind date arranged by Pam Dryden, daughter of Jules Dryden, Chief Engineer for South Australia. Jenny was a nurse at a nearby hospital. Engaged for two years. Married in the hospital chapel on 6 January 1962. Jenny's family background (Adelaide).	Jennifer Ann Marr (Jenny) Jules Dryden Pam Dryden Eudunda, South Australia Adelaide, South Australia Marriage
29.15-32.35	Moved to Canada to live and work. Describes applying for jobs and getting a job on the first day. Planned on arrival in Canada in early March when engineering jobs became available. Prior to Canada, spent short time in England visited Jenny's sister, then New York. Had to break service in Highways Department	Toronto, Canada Foundation Engineering Corporation (FENCO)
32.35-34.10	Asked for permission to break service in the South Australia Highways Department. Relates story about an opportunity to meet the Ontario Highways Commissioner.	Ontario Highways Commissioner Highway 401
34.10-40.05	Describes working in overpass construction and interchanges. One with 16 bridges and 10 lanes in one direction and 6 in other direction. Responsibility for the geometrics. Had team of	Bridge and Overpass Construction Interchange Construction Surveying

	surveyors to work with undertaking all the calculations. Introduced to computer print-out for testing accuracy of computers on this project.	Geometric Calculations Computers Frederick R Harris
40.05-47.05	Transport planning work in Canada. Describes projects – new bridge in Nova Scotia. Difference between former work in Highways Department in South Australia and working in a Canadian company, especially in concrete design work. Checking and managing tasks and first principle issues. Planned a freeway underneath Casa Loma in Toronto and subsequent public reaction and protest stopped the construction of this freeway. Changed perspective on the way an engineer worked in society.	Transport Planning Halifax, Nova Scotia Concrete Design Freeway Planning Casa Loma, Toronto Public Participation
47.05-51.10	Describes other work and projects during Canadian period. Served with Royal Canadian Engineers – lectured civilians on nuclear survival practices during Cold War period. Concerned over Cuban Missile Crisis. Prime target was hydro-electricity plant at Niagara Falls. Decided it was time to go home to Australia and took on a second job to raise sufficient funds to travel home.	FENCO Royal Canadian Engineers Cold War Nuclear Survival Practices Cuban Missile Crisis
51.10-56.20	Jenny and Bob had one child, Robert, at this time. Both had planned to work but Jenny was pregnant on ship to Canada and had Robert in Toronto. Left Toronto in October 1963. Travelled during summer months every weekend. Toured to places such as New York, Washington DC, Detroit, Ottawa and Montreal	Toronto, Canada Family Life Touring
56.20-60.00	Travelling home to Australia. Drove to Vancouver via the Grand Canyon in Arizona. Met President Kennedy in Jackson Hole, Wyoming (shook hands at the airport). Then onto Yellowstone National Park and Seattle before arriving at Vancouver. Sold car and returned to Australia via ship. Sailed into Sydney Harbour, picked up by parents and travelled back to SA via Canberra.	Grand Canyon, Arizona, USA President J F Kennedy Yellowstone National Park Seattle, Washington, USA Sydney Harbour, Sydney, Australia Canberra, ACT
End of CD 2		
CD3 = 58 minutes		
0.00-4.15	Parents met them in New Zealand on the way home to Australia. Returned to work at the Highways Department in Adelaide and posted to Whyalla, provided with a house and set up house and garden. Described the town and BHP's role in the town. Joined the Freemasonry Lodge. Joined other clubs and organisations.	Highways Department, South Australia Whyalla, South Australia BHP Freemasonry
4.15-9.35	Part-time lecturer at South Australian Institute of Mines. Lectured in structural engineering and surveying. Also was the examiner and conducted a course in structure for naval architects and mine engineers. Enjoyed working with the students and lecturing. Important to provide certainty and 'the first principles'.	South Australian Institute of Mines Structural Engineering Surveying Naval Architecture Mine Engineering
9.35-16.25	Learning to fly light aircraft. Describes first experience with CMF and viewing trenches from the air. Used aircraft to fly to find missing grader. Learned to fly on a Cesna.	Flying CMF
16.25-23.05	Working with Aboriginal people at Whyalla and understanding Aboriginal culture. Relates story about bone pointing.	Aboriginal Culture Whyalla, South Australia

23.05 - 25.45	Returned to Adelaide to live and worked in the planning section of the Highways Department. Enrolled in an economics course. Used economics in engineering via the planning process for engineering projects. Investigated benefits of road-building/maintenance/construction. Talks about federal grants road scheme and planning five years ahead.	University of Adelaide Economics Degree Planning and Engineering Planning Department, South Australia Highways
25.45-32.00	Worked as a liaison with the Commonwealth Bureau of Roads (CBR) and the Roads Grant Act of 1968. Describes formulas and funding sources for roads. Recalls Norm Fisher, economist with the CBR in Melbourne, and later head of CIT in Canberra. As liaison officer had to be innovative and examine all the issues.	Commonwealth Bureau of Roads Roads Grant Act of 1968 Norm Fisher
32.00-35.55	Transport Studies work. Seconded to Metro Adelaide Transport Study (MATS) run by US company – De Leuw Cather. Appointed to Minister of Transport's Office as a public service appointment as a technical adviser.	Metro Adelaide Transport Study (MATS) De Leuw Cather Transport Ministry
35.55-41.30	Highways Department was commissioned by Minister to explain MATS to the public. Sent to a public speaking course to give talks to clubs, societies, organisations, local government. Involved in process of public consultation as it was then. Describes talk given to the Communist Party, South Australia, as part of this process. Talk to Rotary Club involved TV interview awaiting Cabinet decision on MATS.	Public Speaking Public Consultation Communist Party, South Australia Rotary Club Television appearance
41.30-44.15	No decision made – Dunstan government now in power. Conducted a further review. Asked to attend Committee meetings and report back – beginning of a 'true consultation process'. Describes meeting people with causes, such as protesting against aircraft noise.	Dunstan Government Public Consultation
44.15-47.30	Premier Dunstan brought over a US transport planning consultant, Bruening, to conduct a review. Seconded to arrange his itinerary in South Australia and introduce him and his team.	Premier Dunstan Bruening, US Transport Planner
47.30-51.18	Describes involvement with transport modelling and computers. Fortran computer language. Did an economic evaluation study on computer. Mentions Wilbur Smith & Co's software package. Later known as TRIPS. Describes punch cards and working with CSIRO computer in Canberra. Later controlled by computer in Maths Department at Adelaide University.	Computers - Fortran Transport Modelling Wilbur Smith & Co TRIPS (software package) De Leuw Cather CSIRO computer - Canberra
51.18-52.55	De Leuw Cather's software called TRANPLAN. Commissioned by DOT [Department of Transport] in Washington, US and eventually used in Australia.	De Leuw Cather TRANPLAN
52.55-58.19	Continued with work in Minister's Department but wanted more technical involvement; interested in undertaking consultancy work. Public Service becoming too political. Began to submit CV to companies. Relates connection to Malcolm Kinnaird, a classmate at university, and invitation to join firm. Describes his role as Development Manager. Talks about Malcolm Kinnaird being a visionary and his style, including being a yachtsman.	Consultancy Work Kinnaird Hill de Rohan & Young Malcolm Kinnaird America's Cup Yacht Race Jim Hardy
End of CD 3		

CD4 = 59.35 minutes		
0.00-5.45	Continues talking about role as Development Manager for Kinnaird. Monitored every block of land in Adelaide CBD [central business district]. Also conducted an economic evaluation of Western Australia mine. Involved in major planning exercises, including a new oval for Adelaide. Looked at reuse of the West Terrace Cemetery.	Development Manager Kinnaird Hill de Rohan & Young Adelaide Western Australia Mining Boom West Lakes Oval, Adelaide West Terrace Cemetery, Adelaide
5.45-8.55	Involved in planning West Lakes centre and housing development. Returned to reviewing adjacent area for a new oval. Doubted whether parking/people movement and access in and out would be adequate.	West Lakes, Adelaide
8.55-21.00	Major project at Ayers Rock (Uluru) 1970-71. Talks about the Aboriginal groups living the in area. Describes the project and the various government departments and organisations consulted with. Engineering works included roads, accommodation, infrastructure – undertook computer modelling. Investigated flora and fauna. Problems with damage to Aboriginal rock paintings. Researched information on Aboriginal history, art, culture and customs. Reviewed all preservation issues to achieve balance. Talks about land rights issues.	Ayers Rock (Uluru), Northern Territory Aboriginal Culture Charles Mountford
21.00-28.10	Had worked with Larry Dondanville (De Leuw Cather) who left an open invitation to join them. Concerned with Kinnaird's ambition Returned to talking about time with Kinnaird Hill de Rohan & Young; worked with critical path planning – innovative planning management tool. Project: Darwin abattoirs.	De Leuw Cather Larry Dondanville Malcolm Kinnaird Kinnaird Hill de Rohan & Young Critical Path Planning Darwin Abattoirs
28.10-33.10	Presented with an opportunity to move to Canberra and establish an office for De Leuw Cather in January 1973. Previously living in Melbourne. Firm had road design, management and construction work in Tuggeranong, ACT. Office had a regional role, not just Canberra based. Described its 'champions' role. Hired landscape architects which were required for Canberra's development work. Also employed graphic designers. Took on the planning and construction role. An exciting time to be a planner in Canberra. Worked with NCDC and DURD. Also involved with Albury-Wodonga and Bathurst-Orange regions as transport planners. Describes Canberra in early 1970s and its state of development and construction. Liaised regularly with NCDC engineers. Talks about the NCDC style of management – as a multi-disciplinary operation.	De Leuw Cather Tuggeranong, ACT National Capital Development Commission (NCDC) Department of Urban and Regional Development (DURD) Transport Planning
33.10-39.05	Location of office – first in Woden, then when firm grew moved to 221 Northbourne Avenue. 1976 was a recession year – talks about issues of management at that time, e.g. sacking staff. Difficulty of explaining leave loading to US head office of De Leuw Cather. Restrictions on capital expenses – difficult times. Husband and wives couldn't work in the same office – had to ask someone to	De Leuw Cather Woden, Phillip, ACT 221 Northbourne Avenue (Qantas House) Management Issues

	leave as a result. Describes other management problems.	
39.05-46.45	Length of time running Canberra office = 1973 – 1976. Describes major projects undertaken for De Leuw Cather, including the major arterial roads in Tuggeranong, development along the Left Bank in Tuggeranong – planning graphically the views drivers would see along the route. Describes process of this task as innovative.	De Leuw Cather Tuggeranong, ACT Roadworks Site Planning NCDC Landscape Architects Left Bank – Tuggeranong, ACT
46.45-53.05	Describes working with government minister – Tom Uren and his style and influence. Highlights of career and meeting people – mentions working with AusAid in Western Samoa. Belconnen Town Centre planning – describes interaction on traffic engineering. Describes conference in the attic of Old Parliament House.	Tom Uren AusAid Western Samoa Belconnen Town Centre Traffic Engineering NCDC ACT Legislative Assembly Federal Government Old Parliament House
53.05-55.50	Thoughts on the national capital idea. Conducted a study of ‘what the national capital should have in it’. Main issues: centre of Canberra was the national triangle and Belconnen and Woden were planned as local. The National Capital Plan was viewed in its national context – Canberra to grow to 500,000 and over the NSW border.	Canberra as the national capital National Capital Plan NCDC
55.50-59.35	Family of small businessmen - working for oneself rather than government or someone else. Patrick Pak Poy – friend from Highways Department days asked him to work with him. Contacted him regularly re: running a consultancy. Found some frustrations working for De Leuw Cather including an unfulfilled desire to work overseas. Wanted to go out alone, especially as it was a recession year (1976) and a good time to start when the market was low.	Patrick Pak Poy De Leuw Cather Larry Dondanville
End of CD 4		
CD5 = 59 minutes		
0.00-7.40	Continues story of the establishment of consultancy firm, the mechanics of this, research undertaken. Received support from Jenny. De Leuw Cather maintained office – continued a work relationship, but office didn’t last long. Three years afterwards Larry Dondanville sent to Australia to sell its Australian arm of the business. Sold to a Queensland Company, Cameron McNamara.	Private Practice – R J Nairn & Partners De Leuw Cather - Canberra Cameron McNamara
7.40-11.40	Relationship with Landscape Branch at NCDC. Talks about staff from De Leuw Cather’s Canberra office. 20 staff, mainly dealt with roads and transport issues.	NCDC Richard Clough De Leuw Cather – Canberra Bill Bohnhof Nick Lyons
11.40-14.25	First light rail study with De Leuw Cather Canberra. Probably about five studies since then. Explains why light rail hasn’t been	De Leuw Cather – Canberra Light Rail – Canberra

	constructed yet – ‘not highly attracted to private enterprise’; also problem with three year term governments and decision making. Infrastructure Australia bids; ‘dial a ride’ concept.	Public Transport Dial a Ride
14.25-19.20	Looked into computer-controlled ‘dial a ride’ public transport system in Germany; ‘dial a ride’ for Shellharbour Council, NSW. Explains operation and benefits. Looked at computer software packages for bus systems.	Dial a Ride Germany Shellharbour, NSW Computers and Public Transport
19.20-25.00	Explains type of work undertaken by R J Nairn & Partners: traffic signals in Canberra; traffic planning/traffic engineering; some construction – exclusive bus lane (no longer there). Describes the make-up of the company – eventually had three partners – as a small, specialist company. An international practice. Staff – up to 16, but didn’t want it to grow too large. Extended offices to Sydney, Melbourne and Perth. Set a premium on research and development.	R J Nairn & Partners Traffic Planning Traffic Engineering
25.00-29.30	First office was at home in Hawker. Jenny also worked for the firm. Moved to MTIA House, Northbourne Avenue, expanded office space. Office was close to NCDC office. Working in the Philippines with AusAid – describes visitors to office. Shows an artwork in dining room which was a gift from their Embassy.	R J Nairn & Partners Hawker MTIA House NCDC Philippines and AusAid
29.30-32.15	Describes transport planning and software packages available; role of computers in developing new clients, such as local government. AusAid became a major client re: transport and roads; also World Bank and other international aid organisations.	Transport Planning AusAid World Bank
32.15-36.40	Explains software packages in transport planning including TRANPLAN (De Leuw Cather software). Developing technology and transport planning systems. Albury-Wodonga kick-started this type of planning. TRANSTEP was converted and amended to run on desktop computers. Involved writing of the software.	Transport Planning TRANPLAN De Leuw Cather Montreal University TRANSTEP
36.40-42.50	Worked with this package in Manila. Travelled regularly to Manila – relates story re: meeting up with a Japanese consultant and ensuing working relationship. Describes Tokyo’s subway transport system. Asked to devise software to integrate the transport systems. During mid-1980s spent more time overseas. Four children by then, all in high school. Jenny still working with the firm.	Manila, Philippines Transport Planning Software Development Working with Japanese planners TRANSTEP Tokyo, Japan
42.50-45.00	Returned to talk about Canberra – thoughts on self-government and how this affected R J Nairn & Partners. A turning point as it wasn’t as easy to work with DCT (Department of Capital Territory) as with NCDC. As they were strict, formatted, not the multi-disciplinary style of the NCDC.	National Capital Planning Authority (NCPA) National Capital Authority (NCA)
45.00-48.50	Company project highlights – diverse range of projects. In particular, working in Shanghai – first Chinese project – a challenging one. Worked with the bus company – traffic control systems and to assist in rationalisation. Describes work entailed. Thoughts on Shanghai and changes taking place. Planning subway	Shanghai, China Transport Planning

	system	
48.50-53.15	Involved in bid for Maglev train in Australia between Sydney and Canberra; went to Germany. Other Maglev projects. Explains why the project didn't go ahead, political issues and reluctance to 'be the first'. Issues re: freight – couldn't carry heavy freight.	Maglev Train
53.15-59.00	Winding down R J Nairn & Partners [1999]. Had hoped other partners would carry on but they left for other positions/jobs. Scott Wilson made approaches to purchase consultancy. Describes the sale process. Stayed on for four years and firm became Scott Wilson Nairn. Exchange of staff between England and Australia.	R J Nairn & Partners Scott Wilson Nairn
End of CD 5		
CD6 = 46 minutes		
0.00-5.15	Scott Wilson Nairn work – more conservative firm. Talks about developing own software and its advances as opposed to commercially available packages. Different work habits and getting the best out of your staff. Being innovative and an asset.	Scott Wilson Nairn
5.15-13.00	Highlights include: working in Korea with Macquarie Industries as a result of the country's economic stimulus and major infrastructure development programs. Projects included subways and toll roads. Explains the process of funding the projects. Describes working with Koreans and gaining an appreciation of their culture. Supported by PhD students from Seoul University Transport Planning Group. Overcoming language issues with interpreters.	Scott Wilson Nairn Macquarie Industries Seoul, Korea Seoul University Transport Planning Group
13.00-16.15	Explains traffic arrangements in Korea. Altered software to incorporate the large number of bus express lanes in peak hour. Describes underground pedestrian tunnels connecting subway stations – too crowded on the streets. Left Scott Wilson Nairn after four years and formed Bob Nairn Consultant in [2003] undertaking local work mainly.	Seoul, Korea Bob Nairn Consultant
16.15-19.45	Member of the Institution of Engineers (Engineers Australia) since university student days. Concerned why only 40% of engineering graduates join when all did in his day. On the transport group for a long time and chaired its committee. Also a President of the Canberra Division (one year). Explains the workings of the Divisions at state and national levels. Was on Congress for six years.	Institution of Engineers Engineers Australia Canberra Division
19.45-23.35	Achievements during term as President. Designated National Year of Women in Engineering during his term. Projects initiated to gain more women engineers – talking to schools to encourage girls to consider engineering as a career. Spoke several times to Canberra Girls Grammar. Inspired by the women who lectured during the year.	National Year of Women in Engineering Canberra Girls Grammar
23.35-24.20	Concerned about university courses in engineering. Attempting to reinvigorate University of Canberra's engineering course. Role of	University of Canberra

	Adjunct Professor at University of Canberra.	
24.20-28.20	Interested in ethics and engineering started when judging young engineers awards. Asked candidates if they had ethics training in the workplace. Ethics = resolution of problems, understanding loyalty. Prepared a presentation on this topic and provided case studies.	Ethics and Engineering Code of Ethics
28.20-30.10	Engineering Heritage issues. Engineering required to get on with the job.	Engineering Heritage
30.10-32.45	Interests, volunteering, hobbies. Member of the Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE) – was Canberra representative. Part of the lobby to Washington on climate change. Engineers Australia has a climate change and energy issues policy. ITE has one also but around transportation issues.	Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE) Climate Change
32.45-34.50	Active in the Anglican Church – Synod for Canberra and Goulburn and on the governance group for the reconstruction of Jamieson House. Active in Freemasonry. Coin collecting is a hobby. Member of Probus and others. Represented Adelaide University in five sports. After his bypass found it difficult to return to tennis. Walks as much as possible.	Anglican Church Freemasonry Coin Collecting
34.50-37.15	Explains why writing own memoirs. Talks about his eldest son, now living in the US and his interest in his family's history and his father's career and parents' story.	Memoirs
37.15-46.30	Talks about children and grandchildren – children's careers and activities. Finishes with plea for engineers to continue to be trained in basic mechanical, basic civil, basic electrical engineering.	Family
End of CD 6	End of Interview	

Biographical Notes


Prepared by Dr Margaret Park from the oral history interview conducted on 20 July 2011 for the Engineering Heritage Canberra, from Bob Nairn's CV and work history. 5 August 2011

Birth & Family:

Born 11 January 1936, Morgan, South Australia
 Bob grew up in a small village on the Murray River. His mother, Marie Louise Nairn nee Adam, was born in London, England and came to Australia with her mother and sister about 1910. She lived in South Australia on a farming property. His father, Robert Alexander Nairn, lived in Morgan, South Australia and was an electrician. His parents met at a ball in Haslam, a local farming centre, during the Depression.

Attended the local primary school in Morgan until ten when sent to boarding school in Adelaide (St Peters College). Bob then enrolled in an engineering degree at Adelaide University with the





assistance of a Commonwealth Scholarship. Bob completed his engineering degree in 1959 and ten years later an economics degree.

Qualifications: Bachelor of Engineering (Civil) University of Adelaide 1959
Bachelor of Economics (Public Finance, Sociology) University of Adelaide 1969

Memberships: Fellow, Engineers Australia
Life Fellow, Institute of Transportation Engineers

Work History:


Jan 1957 – Dec 1969: Bob worked with the South Australian Highways Department on the design, construction and maintenance of roads and bridges. He also worked on Metropolitan Adelaide Transportation Plan. Prior to completing his engineering degree Bob worked in the engineering laboratory at the University of Adelaide and then with the Highways Department.

Jan 1962 – Oct 1963: Bob wanted to extend his engineering experience and took up a position with the Foundation Engineering Corporation in Toronto, Canada. He worked as consultant designing freeway interchanges and gained valuable experience in transport planning and engineering. Upon his return to Australia Bob took up his former position with the Highways Department of South Australia.

Jan 1969 – Dec 1970: Appointed to the South Australian Minister of Transport's Office as a Technical Advisor.

Jan 1971 - Dec 1972: After completing his economics degree Bob ventured into a more managerial role with the consultancy group, Kinnaird Hill de Rohan and Young Pty Ltd. He became their Feasibility Group Leader and had a primary responsibility of managing the firm's promotional activities and land development projects.

Jan 1973 - Mar 1976: Bob had a previous working relationship with the American transport planning engineers, De Leuw Cather and was asked to joined De Leuw Cather of Australia Pty. Ltd. to open up a new Canberra office. During this busy time in Canberra and for regional Australia, Bob was Director responsible for the Company's ACT operations and a variety of multi-disciplinary transport planning operations in Australia.



Mar 1976 - Sep 1999: Deciding to open up his own consultancy, Bob established R.J. Nairn and Partners Pty. Ltd based in Canberra. His firm specialised in traffic engineering and transport planning and economics and carried out projects Australia-wide and in thirty overseas countries.

Oct 1999 – Nov 2003: When Bob decided to wind up R J Nairn and Partners, the firm was purchased by Scott Wilson Pty Ltd, a British engineering firm. Bob's contractual arrangement was to stay on for four years. During this period he was the Managing Director of Scott Wilson Nairn Pty. Ltd. and was responsible to its Board for all operations of the Company. They provided traffic and transport consulting services to the Scott Wilson Asia-Pacific Group and operated extensively in China and Korea.

Nov 2003 – Present: Completing his obligatory four years with Scott Wilson Nairn, Bob set himself up as a sole operator consulting company, Bob Nairn Consultant Pty. Ltd. He works on project-based contract work in Australia and overseas.

Note: Refer to interview log and interview CDs for full details