

**MANX HERITAGE FOUNDATION ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT**

‘TIME TO REMEMBER’

Interviewee(s): Mr John Norman Barron

Date of birth: 21st June 1909

Place of birth:

Interviewer(s): David Callister

Recorded by: David Callister

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Topic(s): Early memories of living in Kirk Michael
Bishops court
Memories of WWI
The wreckage of *The Celtic* liner
Early schooldays at Kirk Michael Elementary School
Working as a gardener
Working at Glen Wyllin
Working as a postman
Gunner during WWII
Retirement
Recitation of Juan Noah's poem, ‘Owl’ Bobby-Bob’
The Celtic Congress
Working as a lay Methodist preacher
Clerk to Michael Parish Commissioners for 24 years

John Norman Barron - Mr B
David Callister - DC

DC So this is going to be Norman Barron, in *Westlands*, born on 21st June 1909, and well I suppose, Norman – is Norman your only name, is it?

Mr B John.

DC John Norman, or Norman John?

Mr B No, John Norman, that's it.

DC John Norman, right, okay.

Mr B And what, one, two, three, four, Johns, I know, in line, but I was called Norman, I was always known by Norman, of course.

DC Was Barron a sort of Manx family, was it, then?

Mr B Well, not originally as far as – me sister went to New Zealand, and she got involved in the Mormon Church and you know what that means ...

DC Oh, yes, so you know all about it.

Mr B ... and she traced us back, we can trace ourselves back to 1812, I think it is, on the Island ...

DC On the Island, yes.

Mr B ... but she found out that we came from Ayrshire, in Scotland originally, so that's all I know really.

DC And did you – what sort of family life did you have when you were growing up, then?

Mr B Well, there was a family, I was, me father was a joiner with Kelly Brothers, me grandfather was a shoemaker, living at Rhencullen, down near Bishopscourt, and me great grandfather was a crofter in Orrisdale and he started about 1812 or something or other like that, I forget, I've still got it on things and so they were all Johns, me father was called Jack, I suppose because of distinction, so they put John Norman on me but they called me Norman, so that's how it was.

DC So born in 1909, before the First World War, you won't, I mean you'd only be very small when that was on, any memories of that?

Mr B Yes, I only remember bits; I remember a Belgian family living next door to us. We lived in a cottage in Michael, right directly opposite *White House*, we were lookin' straight up to *The White House*. We had a Belgian family next door; it was a summer residence for some people, people the name of Crook, from Southport, so that was taken over for this Belgian refugee family while the war was on. But I remember very little about them except that they were there, that's all. We were in this cottage, we were – I was one of nine in the family and we had two bedrooms and a living room and a kitchen, that's about all.

DC You had to share a bed then, did you?

Mr B Well, you had to hang on to the bed. Anyway we eventually moved down to the bottom of Rhencullen, we moved, father and mother moved, and all the family went with them, of course, down to the bottom of Rhencullen and of course I'd left school by this time.

DC Did you notice, I mean in that First World War were there any Zeppelins or anything across the Island?

Mr B Well, I remember an aeroplane going across. I remember the liner, *Celtic*, lying off Peel, and often looking across, and me mother said to me, 'It was torpedoed,' you know and it was lying there till they could repair it, kind of thing, I remember that and all, but there's very little – I remember these big, great big crates of, they said it was palmolive oil and coconut oil coming in on the shore, they were taking ...

DC From a wreck?

Mr B From wrecks, yes, and of course you couldn't, they were too heavy, you couldn't handle them, but I know we had lots of palmolive and coconut oil to grease our boots, afterwards, for a long time afterwards, yes. But that's about all I can remember, except when the church bells were ringing and the war was over, you know, everybody was – I remember that.

DC Well you'd go to school in Michael, I take it?

Mr B Just Kirk Michael Elementary School, that's all.

DC Happy days or not happy days?

Mr B Well, yes, in a sense, they were happy enough days. The schoolmaster in the wartime, of course, went away, he was called Jimmy Kelly, he went away, of course, because, in the war I suppose he'd be, and there was a Mrs Corkill took over but I didn't know much about her at all. But I were trained by a Mrs – first, Mrs Comaish, who was a distant relative of mine, really, and then Miss Mary Edgar was the middle class teacher and this Mrs Corkill, until Mr Fielding took over as headmaster after the war, and then I left school at, what 19 ... must have been 1923, was it?

DC It would be about that, wouldn't it, when you would be starting work.

Mr B When I was fourteen, anyway, the day I was fourteen I left school and looked for work and then I got a job up at *The White House* for them, Mrs Mylchreest, the Diamond King's widow, and I was in the garden there helping. There was two gardeners there and I was in there working for a few years with them up there.

DC Now, he wouldn't be around then, would he?

Mr B He was – the Diamond King had died in 1908, a year before I was born, you see, so ...

DC This was Joe Mylchreest, was it?

Mr B This was Joe Mylchreest, it would be his widow, the Diamond King's widow, and then there was ...

DC But the Diamond King was extremely well known in the area, wasn't he?

Mr B Well he was, he was, and they did say at the time, those houses looking up to *The White House* were called Park View because the Diamond King had visions of making all that field, that big field, into a park, but of course he died very suddenly, I believe, and then it didn't materialise. And the Wesleyan Chapel at that bottom end of the village, it was called Park View Chapel, that's the one I

went to all me life, really.

DC But when you went to work then you were going in as a gardener, really, were you?

Mr B Well we were learning, yes, it was gardening, yes, I was doing, yes.

DC You were being taught and trained, were you?

Mr B Well, yes, yes, but I had to leave there after two or three years because they sold the place, and it changed, all was changed, there was no garden kept on there then. But I remember while I was there, visitors coming to the Kirk Michael village and they would come up to the gardens for fresh vegetables and fruit and things, yes, yes. It was quite an extensive garden, they grew quite a lot of strawberries and fruit trees and gooseberries, all sorts, and there were vegetables of all kinds and visitors would be coming up there, that they would be keeping themselves, you see, and then they would come up and buy stuff for their meals, yes.

DC What did you do after that then?

Mr B Well that threw me out of work a little bit and I was doing jobbing gardening really, after that, going round on people, any person that wanted me, of course, and a bit of farm work, anybody wanted picking spuds or anything at all, as long as it was work, and I did two summers in Glen Wyllin, down in the pay box. I used to go down there at 8 o'clock in the morning and, you know, mow the lawns or mow so much each day and then at 10 o'clock I'd be in the pay box.

DC What was at Glen Wyllin in those days then?

Mr B Pardon?

DC What was at Glen Wyllin then?

Mr B Oh, a whole pleasure ground, there was a putting green, bowling green and three tennis courts, two were mostly used really and there was swings of course, of all ...

DC A children's playground there?

Mr B A children's playground there, was there yes?

DC Did people stay down there in tents those days or not?

Mr B No, I never knew of anybody, until later, and then of course they could get to the beach there quite easily, from the glen.

DC Where was the pay box then?

Mr B And the pay box was directly under the railway bridge, you know where the railway bridge – and it was actually over the river, there was a river going there ...

DC Yes, I know it, yes.

Mr B ... and then there was a path coming from the station down, and of course you could drive a car down from the main road, if you wished to come that way.

DC So you would be sitting in your pay box and the trains going overhead?

Mr B Overhead, yes.

DC Well of course the trains were bringing the people in, though?

Mr B Well, now then, there was many, there was lots of picnics, especially from Douglas ...

DC Yes, Sunday School.

Mr B ... they'd come, Sunday School outings would come by train and then they'd walk down the pathway to the glen, and spend the day down there, these big picnics, yes.

DC Yes, I've been on those myself.

Mr B Have you? ... quite a large number, too, that was coming, yes, oh, yes.

DC Was the boating pool there?

Mr B The boating pool was not in, in those days, no, no, there was none. It was when the Railway Company took over that they made the boating pool. Of course I was in other work by then. I did help, one of the jobs I did do was helping the Sayle Brothers, from Ramsey, with the sewerage when they were putting the sewerage works in Michael, so I worked with them for quite a while, and I also worked with Edmund Quayle, who built a garage there, up at the top end, where the garage is at the top end of the village, and he had a petrol station there, and I worked with him for a while. But things were all a bit haphazard really and they advertised for this, for an auxiliary postman, it was, in Michael. Well, I said to meself, why not, I could put in for it, why not, anyway I could try it. Well after two or three months I got the word to say to come and report to the post office and so I did auxiliary, a push bike it was.

DC So there was another postman and you were an assistant, were you?

Mr B There was a full time postman, an established postman, name of Gerry Kelly, and he was doing the – he got a motor van at that time and he was doing the top end of the village and up round Peel Road, Cronk-y-Voddy, Barregarrow, all up round there, even going out to Druidale. I was doing the lower part of the village, on a push bike, going up to all the farms, off the road, and that, and I started at 10 o'clock in the morning, we got our mail about quarter past, as a rule, airmail, and I had to be back before 1 o'clock to get the mail despatched on the twelve minutes past one train to Douglas and I had to be back by that time and do all the mail ready for, you know – and the postmaster was there of course, and then I'd cycle down to the station with this.

DC Was there just the one delivery a day?

Mr B Two, now that was the first part of the day. I was off then until 5 o'clock, when I came back and there was a mail despatched from Douglas on the train, the other postman would meet it with the van, before we had the van they had to wheel it on a truck from the station, but that was parcel mail as well as letter mail, you see, in the evening. The evening, the day's boat mail would be arriving then, you see.

DC So the van would pick it up and bring it up to the post office.

Mr B Post office, yes, and then it's sorted and then another delivery started and sometimes it was about half past eight, nine o'clock when I may be finishin' at night.

DC Yes? So that would be bad in the winter, wouldn't it?

Mr B Well, it was tough going sometimes. But the van driver, he had a bigger round and he only did the top end of the village before he finished off and Glen Wyllin there and up as far as *Erinville* and then he finished, but I had to do the whole push bike round, aye. But one good thing, the farmers was always good, they would say, 'Don't come up if it's only a bill.'

DC They'd wait to pay that.

Mr B That's it, that's it, not in any hurry for bills. But in those days a letter was the main means of communication.

DC Were the telegrams going in those days?

Mr B Very few, very, very few. There was an odd one from the post office but they would have people that would do it.

DC So they wouldn't – that would be done by head office, maybe, would it?

Mr B Well, yes, and the sub post office in Michael would have somebody who would take telegrams out, you see, if there was any come through.

DC So you were auxiliary, then, did you become a proper postman eventually, did you?

Mr B I was auxiliary until the war came, of course, that was September '38 when I started and in June '39 I was appointed full auxiliary, I was only temporary before that ...

DC And then you became ...

Mr B ... they were very particular those days who they took on. Anyway I was appointed a full auxiliary then, and of course the war came, and then 1940 I

went away, I was gone to the army.

DC What service was that?

Mr B It was October, 1940.

DC Which service in the army?

Mr B Artillery.

DC The Artillery?

Mr B The Artillery, Ack-Ack, it was really.

DC You were with the Manx Regiment, Manx Regiment?

Mr B I wasn't, no, I never was in the Manx Regiment, I was never lucky to get in them. But I got into – trained at Oswestry and then we were sent off to a firing camp for a month, and then we were posted – we were all over the place, London, Finsbury Park, you know, and Hackney, all over the place, out to Exeter where they had these Baedeker raids, as they called them, and all over the south of England there and then eventually I got posted out to Gibraltar and I was out there for a while and fortunately the battery that I was posted to out there, they were due, after about a couple of years, they were due to come home, you see, it was called a home station really, Gibraltar, so I got back home with them and then we were firing at the *Doodlebugs*. But I suppose I was fortunate really that I got to Gibraltar and not across the channel to North Africa, I suppose I was lucky in that respect. But I had one or two near squeaks in London, but I'm still all in one piece today.

DC So were you a gunner yourself then?

Mr B Gunner, not – I worked on what they called the predictor, it's a – I was a gunner really, but I really worked on the predictor which took information from the radar, the radar, and they transmitted the radar to this predictor and then I – whatever – there was five of us on the predictor, and then we had to get on target, as they say, and that information was transferred to the guns, and they had dials, of course, and they could set their gun to the proper level, heights and

level. So in 1948 they said they could offer me one in Douglas, an establishment in Douglas.

DC This is with the post office as a full time job then.

Mr B Yes, postman's job, so I said, 'Well, I'll take it, if I don't take it I might be a while waiting for another one,' so it meant travelling to Douglas, or staying in Douglas, really, over the week.

DC Because you were living in Michael ...

Mr B I was still living in Michael and in those you couldn't get houses, like, I mean, today. And so I travelled to Douglas for two years, on and off, and they said, 'Would it be easier if you went to Ramsey?' and I said, 'well, it would be, it would be easier to get to Ramsey than Douglas.' So there was a chap, the name of Black, he was off ill all the time until he eventually had to go so they sent me there to Ramsey, so I was two years in Ramsey. Uneventful except, well yes, but I had more of an assortment there, sometimes walking, sometimes motoring and sometimes push bike, it depends. You used to push bike up Port Lewaigue there, walk up and ride down mostly, I think.

DC Ride down again. There would be quite a few postmen in Ramsey though, would there?

Mr B Oh, aye, there was – you see we did the whole north of the Island, there was Sulby and all, Jurby, Bride and Andreas and all and Maughold, you see. But I went on a rota with three others, so we were on a four rota, a system, and one week I'd be out, maybe Sulby, another week I might be out Bride, another week out Maughold, another week you'd perhaps have to do a walk, or you'd have to cycle away again, so ...

DC So your hours would vary, would they?

Mr B Vary, yes. One duty I had to do was to get to Ramsey for 6 o'clock, half past five, I think, in the morning, so I got an old motor bike so I was trudging in on the motor bike, and that duty, you were finished at 8 o'clock and then you weren't on till about 12 o'clock again but it was difficult trailing home ...

DC Nowhere to go?

Mr B Nowhere to go, so anyway, and then I would have to go out, maybe Sulby, with the van, and go out all there and get home about six or seven o'clock at night, but that was for one week. Other weeks I wouldn't be starting till maybe 10 o'clock, you see. And other weeks you'd be 8 o'clock start, you know, they used to vary.

DC How long would you have been in Ramsey then?

Mr B Well, I was two years in Ramsey doing this, working all round, and a chap in Michael – in the meantime Michael had grown, and they had two established postmen in Michael and so the other chap that was doing the Michael district, he wanted a change, he wanted to get out from Michael, so I said, 'Well, you put in a transfer.' I said this is an opportunity; I could get back to Michael again, and that's what I did and within a week or so I was back in Michael, so that's where I finished me time in Michael up to 1974.

DC So you've seen a few rough days there, specially in snow, haven't you?

Mr B Yes, well, we've had our problems with snow. When I was in Ramsey, this was – the plane couldn't land at Ronaldsway and they landed at Close Lake so the postmaster said to me, 'Hey, you go and get the van and go out to Close Lake and pick the mail up,' so I had to go out there then. That's what happens, you see, now and again, you get these things. There was another one from Michael, while I was in Ramsey, the snow it was, the snow had stopped the van from getting out to Druidale, so he says to me, one day, he says, 'You get the motor bike,' they had a motor bike for telegrams and things, 'and go out to Sulby and go up.' I had to go up to Corady [sp ???] in Sulby, there, and walk up over the hills to Druidale to deliver some mail.

DC Really?

Mr B In those days it was imperative mail was delivered and they would ...

DC It had to go ...

Mr B That's it, yes.

DC ... got to get through.

Mr B And another time something happened out at Jurby there, that the postman that went there, he couldn't do it, and he said, 'You get out to Sulby, and they'll sort your mail out and you can go down and deliver it on a motor bike,' so I mean you never knew what you were going to do next.

DC But even in bad snow you had to get out with it?

Mr B But Michael with snow, yes, there was one ...

DC But there would be bad snows that you'd not travel through?

Mr B There was one occasion when we were eleven days cut off, Michael was, and that was '60 – was it '65? ...

DC I can't remember the year, but it was ...

Mr B ... it was round about that time. I think I've got a report of it, anyway.

DC And what happened then to your work?

Mr B Well, it was Christmas Day deliveries in those days, and I don't know was that the same time or not, but I went out with the van on Christmas Day and it was, in the meantime of course, we had, well two vans in Michael eventually because we took over Ballaugh eventually, so we'd two vans, and one of us, I took off with the van before – well by the time you had sorted your mail out and whatever – it would be eleven o'clock or so, you see, and went out with the van to deliver it and by the time I got to Barregarrow the snow had come on, and it was such a lovely morning that morning, the snow came, and it came down so thick I couldn't see me hand in front of me, hardly, so I tried to battle on a bit, but it was impossible, so I had to turn back, and I made me way, going mighty well down as far as Cronk Urleigh there, when I was going down the dip into Cronk Urleigh and I ran into a snow drift, which you couldn't see because the snow was driving that thick across, and I tried – I went down to a house, to get a spade from the lady, but it was useless, so I had to dig out, but it was filling in as fast as I could dig it. So I eventually locked the van up and took all the letters that were left in me bag, threw it on me back and walked back to the post office,

and it was a week before that van was brought back to Michael, yes. But it was all right, it was fine, the mechanics were down, got it going again. But that was one incidence of the snow, there has been other instances where – people got a bit impatient, another time, I forget when it was now, was it the same time or not, people got impatient, ‘We’re getting no letters, nothing,’ you know, but – no communication through at all, so Gerry and I, the other postman, we said, ‘oh, well, let us walk to Peel and see if we can pick up some mail,’ and that’s what we did, and we had to walk, because the roads, you couldn’t travel on them you see. So on our way, of course, we would – partly on the railway line and partly on the main roads, whichever was clear of snow.

DC Aye, and did you collect mail and bring it back?

Mr B We got to Peel and they sent word into Douglas, so Douglas despatched letter mail, we couldn’t carry anything else, to Peel, and we waited there till it came back and then we threw it on our back and we walked all the way back to Michael with it.

DC What happened to parcel post, I mean ...

Mr B The parcel post?

DC Did you have to deliver parcels as well?

Mr B As well, yes, yes, we had to deliver everything, you see, parcels and letters, yes, yes, and you had these carrier bikes, big strong bikes, that was.

DC Yes, I remember them, yes.

Mr B And that’s what made me muscles stronger, yes, stack the front of your carrier up with parcels and put all the letters on your back and away you’d go. Wet weather was a problem sometimes.

DC Keeping the mail dry as well.

Mr B Well trying to keep it dry, and we had leggings supplied, a cape and a cap for your head, and all.

DC One of the enemies of the postmen used to be the dog, didn't it? Did you have any trouble with dogs?

Mr B Well, I was ... in me whole life I've only had two. I had one dog which ripped the whole back of me pants right down, it was hanging down, oh dear, but that was the only one that ever ripped or done any ... there was another dog that I – it was a German pointer, I think, and the man was living alone in the bungalow but he had gone out and the dog was loose there, and I got up to the door and this dog turned and I thought she was going to tear me to pieces, oh, she was vicious, really vicious.

DC What did you do?

Mr B I backed out to the gateway, I wouldn't dare turn me back on it, so I backed out, I got a bit of a stick in me hand and she got it.

DC So you never got a bite then?

Mr B I've never been actually bitten, no.

DC There won't be many postmen who can claim that?

Mr B No, no. That was the only two instances that I've had of dogs. If you knew a dog was a bit – you just kept your eye, watched him, you see.

DC Was there any postal strikes in your time? Strikes.

Mr B Strikes, there was one, yes, which I was sorry for, really, but however, we were about six weeks, weren't we, I think?

DC Was it?

Mr B I'm sure it was, yes.

DC Did you have to turn in to work or not?

Mr B We signed on every day and signed off, but we didn't get paid.

DC Didn't you?

Mr B No, we still signed on and signed off, but we never got paid.

DC What happened to the mail, did it come out to the local areas like Michael?

Mr B No, it never left Douglas, what came in or what – I don't know if any came in or not, really. It was a big strike all over England.

DC The British Isles, wasn't it?

Mr B Yes, and didn't come in, we could have gone and signed on the dole and got money, from the dole, but I didn't, I got little jobs to do from people, painting jobs, gardening jobs and all that sort of thing, so I was getting a bit of money in that way.

DC But the men wouldn't have been too keen about losing their pay then, would they?

Mr B Well, they were on strike and that was it. I did try to get into Douglas with the mail the first morning but I was booted out of Douglas again. Because I didn't agree with it, I'm sorry, but there again ...

DC The Isle of Man had to go along with it then?

Mr B They had to go along with it, yes.

DC The postman must have carried the local news round the village, did he?

Mr B Round the village, not only the news ...

DC The gossip then?

Mr B Well, gossip and groceries.

DC And groceries!

Mr B It was, yes, well, of course, people would ring up, maybe Cronk y Voddy or

somewhere, you see, and they would ring up Quayle, the grocer, next door, you see, 'Will you give the postman something – a pound of bacon – we're running out of bacon,' or a loaf or something like that, or some cheese. If you weren't going with the letters – well they were very good really, people, and there was always, certain houses you got to, and you got very thirsty when you got there ...

DC And you always got a drink, did you?

Mr B A cup of tea was going.

DC Tea was going.

Mr B A cup of tea was going and some people, they wanted you to come in, you see, and they'd be wanting all the news, they were – all the *skeet*.

DC The *skeet*, yes.

Mr B And this happened going out to Bride and these places, too, there were certain old ladies, you know, and by gum if you didn't call, they would want to know next day, 'Why didn't you call yesterday; we were waiting here for yer?'

DC Well I suppose a lot of people, living on their own, wouldn't see many people in a day, would they?

Mr B Not really, not in those days, no, no, that's true, I mean, they wouldn't know what was going on, hardly, in those days, the distance. So we were really more than postmen, but I mean they didn't mind, nobody minded yer doing that, doing a good turn for people, really.

DC And then when did you retire from the postal service then?

Mr B '74.

DC How had it changed, I mean it must have changed quite a bit since you started.

Mr B Oh, yes, oh, yes, different altogether, I mean it was all, practically all motorised when I retired, it was all getting motorised, and we had Ballaugh taken in and

there was lots of places, well I think the south had taken the whole south into their – and it was, they were then contemplating us going into Ramsey, you see, and that’s what has eventually happened, you see.

DC Two things I’d like to cover in this tape, one is your interest with the church, the Methodist church, but perhaps first of all, the Manx dialect, tell me about that?

Mr B Well yes, and then I used – I only did a few of Juan Noah’s, you see, I’d do one or a couple maybe for the concert, so there was ‘Owl’ Bobby-Bob’ and one or two others.

DC ‘Owl’ Bobby-Bob,’ can you do a bit of that?

Mr B Perhaps I could, yes, if I can remember it.

*Avar heard tell of owl’ Bobby-Bob,
An’ his woman, Margat Ann?
She used to call him an awkward big slob,
And [If] the buthar’d slip urrov his han’.
An’ bless me sowl the fuss she’d make
When he’d slaa it with his thumb on the soda cake!*

*‘Bobby-Bob, thou slob’, she’d bawl
‘Where-avar was thou brought up at all?’
But Bobby would seldom answer her back
But aet away till his lips would smack.
‘Don’t noise like the muckyn when thou aet,
And put thy skedthan down on thy plate!’
An’ Bobby would say, that quiet and slow
‘Am purrin’ it down where it’s meant to go.’*

*Now, Bobby wa’n a bad sowl at all
But mighty fon’ of a drop, for all
But they’re sayin’ her constant naggin’ an’ frown
Sent Bobby to town his troubles to drown.
An’ then hersel’ would be avar on his track
To give him cur-da when he’d get [come] back;
But that’s where Margat vogh got [was] stuck –*

*Becos it was just
Like warther on the wing of the duck!*

*At las' she thought, A'll cure him thaw –
'A'll give me owl [bowl] Bobby-Bob "what-for."'
So, the nex' time Bobby went to town
Herself, with a friggan, got prowlin [prowled] aroun'.
An' worked herself all up into a fidge,
Then off she goes to the Dollagh bridge,
Just to wait [An' waited there] for Bobby to come,
Sayin' 'A'll cure th'owl rascal of rum!'*

*But Margat had'n to wait that long,
For yanda was Bobby 'comin' strong' –
For the narra bridge tackin' his way
Like a heavy [Jus' like a] ship in a heavy sae.
'I'll friken him urrov his wits [skin]', she said,
An [Then] flung a sheet right over her head,
An' rushed to meet him with a scream,
Just as Bobby was crossin' [Before he was half-way over] the stream.*

*'A've come to claim thee, Bobby Cowle –
'Come thou with me, for I'm the Jouyll!'
'Aw, 'deed, thaw,' says Bobby; as he [and] blinks an' leers,
Well, give me yer han' [Aw, give's te han', baw], - Friken? – no fears;
'For 'A've lived with thy sister for forty years!'*

Mr B That was that one.

DC Right yes, how did you get started with these sort of dialect plays and such?

Mr B Well it was, I suppose we were inclined to speak a bit old-fashioned, maybe, I don't know, but Mary Cannell, she was, she got us all together to do these things, I think the first time we had a ceilidh – they used to have these Celtic Congress and all, whatever they call them, every year, you see, in different countries, and they came over to the Island this time and they all met in the old school at Kirk Michael and we had a real good sing song and a carry on there, it was going well, and they had a bit of a short play, and from then on Mary

Cannell has got us together, a group, in Michael, and pushed on with preparing these plays, and then of course she had the idea of doing, get every – Old Christmas Eve, on January 5th and it was an annual event, it got to be an annual event with us and really the place was packed with people.

DC And you performed them in various places, did you?

Mr B And then when we'd done that, people would say, 'Come over to Peel and give us it,' you know, and we've been to Colby a few times, we've been to Laxey, we've been to Ramsey, performing there, and other places, like Ballaugh, I think we've done it in Ballaugh too, aye, you know, there's quite a lot of places. So that once we'd done it for Old Christmas Eve we expected then to be travelling about for a month, a couple of months, so, and it was all good fun, a good night out, yes, and all. And of course me wife was not involved in the plays, but of course every, all the members were involved in cooking for the night, you see.

DC Getting the cakes ready?

Mr B All the cakes, the bonnags, and the southags and the bunloaf.

DC Aye, that's right.

Mr B That's it, yes, and they had a real good tuck in afterwards, you know, going round with the cakes and things, yes. Oh, it was a good night out, yes.

DC Now, there's another side to you that I must ask you about, and that is lay preaching. How did you get started?

Mr B Well, it's funny how you get into these things really. I used to – me father-in-law was a lay preacher, he did quite a bit of preaching, and as he got older, he says to me, 'Will yer come and read the hymns out for me and read a lesson for me,' and so on. Well this happened a few times and I went with him to a little chapel at Ballaleigh, Kirk Michael, there, one afternoon, and he let me do the first part of the service and then he said, 'Well, I'm going down now, you carry on,' he said. Here I was standing like a *stob*, wondering what am I going to do next.

DC So you had no sermon or anything?

Mr B Nothing, nothing, fortunately it was about the parable of the lost son, the prodigal son, rather, so I spoke on that for a little bit, what I said I don't know, but I suppose nobody would ever want to know again, p'raps [perhaps], but funnily from that, you see, he reported it to the superintendent minister in Ramsey and they put me on note, you see, to take services. Well when you're on note you go out with a local preacher, you see, and then, when they're satisfied, they put you on trial.

DC So we're talking about the Methodist Circuit here?

Mr B This is the Methodist Circuit, yes, in Ramsey, and they eventually put me on trial. Well, I felt I could do a bit of this, you know, it'd be all right, so I got on trial and that meant I had to take exams, of course, there was three exams, the Old Testament, the New Testament and Worship, and I got through the three all right, yes, well satisfactory enough to put me on full plan, I got established then as a fully accredited preacher, as they call them. So I went out preaching until two or three years ago, I don't do any now because ...

DC Did you get paid as a preacher, then?

Mr B Not, no, oh, no.

DC No expenses?

Mr B No expenses, there was a fund, they'd said, in the circuit, which you could claim, but I never did claim at all, I thought well perhaps I can do this voluntary.

DC Would you have seen attendances drop over the years?

Mr B Yes, oh, yes, yes. There used to be – well the chapels that have disappeared since I started, well, I don't know, there's more than I could count on both hands, in the Northern Circuit.

DC The chapel would be nearly full when you first started?

Mr B Well there was quite a smattering of people in the chapels, yes, certainly, yes, at that time, and sometimes I would take two services, you see, afternoon and evening and that, and I would – well I had to walk or cycle in the early days, because I didn't have a car then, and then eventually Mr Frank Crowe – they used to plan it so that we could travel with somebody with a car, eventually, so the late Mr Frank Crowe was a Captain of the Parish, a Member of the Keys at that time, and he used to do quite a bit so we travelled with him, or we travelled with a Mr Sam Corkill, who lived in Ballacregga Farm, Michael, and they would – they took their cars and then they would give us a lift and drop us off at a chapel, you see, and then pick us up on the way back, you see.

DC Did you have favourite chapels?

Mr B No, not really. One chapel I used to go to – I was very keen on picking hymns suitable to the service, or sermon, rather, I was very keen on that and there was one chapel I used to go to and I had all these hymns prepared and I eventually got – but I still picked me own hymns in case – but when I got there she used to have her own. 'Oh,' she said, 'I've got me hymns all prepared,' and one was always, 'The sands of time were sinking,' it was always that.

DC That will take us on to something else in a minute.

Mr B A great hymn, really, but that was always one of them.

DC How did you, I mean when you did your sermons did you write them beforehand?

Mr B I did, yes, yes, some people don't, but I was, I found I couldn't cope with it unless I wrote – I wrote them all out, and then of course I referred to them, keep referring to them.

DC So you worked around the words, did you?

Mr B That's right, yes.

DC How long did a sermon have to be, was there a set time?

Mr B Well, I always thought to myself twenty to twenty-five minutes, but I think that

was getting a bit long for some of them so I started and I cut them down a bit, quarter of an hour or so I think I found was acceptable to most places.

DC Did you go back to certain subjects more frequently?

Mr B No.

DC Certain topics, I mean?

Mr B Topics, no, I just, I'd be guided by – you'd get books which would guide you, well you had certain readings for each Sunday in the Methodist, what they call the – I forget what they called it now, and I tried to take the sermons from those, you see. But it got – I've seen me up till, what, 2 o'clock in the morning trying to find – and getting the wind up for fear I wouldn't have a sermon for Sunday.

DC I was going to say, because it would actually take quite a long time to write, wouldn't it?

Mr B Well, you've got to – well, yes, you've got to concentrate on it and I can't do that now, of course. It's no use, yes, but, so I used to write them all, and practise – a lot in that drawer, I must dump them eventually, I don't know, I never got rid of them, a whole drawer, a whole box full in there. So anyway it got to be I was preaching, I transferred to the Douglas Circuit when I moved to Peel – Peel and Douglas joined eventually into one Circuit, there's just the three, Castletown, the South Circuit, and then Peel/Douglas and Ramsey, so I transferred from Ramsey to Peel or Douglas Circuit so I'm on that Circuit now, actually, although I don't take any services now. I started, I was fully accredited in 1958, but I'd been taking services for a few years before that, but I had to do these exams. I think it's gone too much theology now. Those days you'd get, there was one or two old men, and they were great men too, Willie Teare, Kirk Michael, he was a great preacher, just a layman, just an ordinary layman, a farmer, but he was a wonderful preacher, and I used to go with him quite a lot really.

DC Just mentioning the sands of time, there, well, that takes me down and back to Kirk Michael and that shore down there, which they say is eroding away, now how much erosion have you seen?

Mr B Well, quite a bit really, I don't know how much in my day, but there was no erosion, at the Mill, Craig's Mill as we called it, at Mill Bank, and Glen Wyllin. There was a lovely bank of sand there and we used to go down with the family and the children and in that sand and they'd be playing in that lovely warm sand on a Sunday afternoon, maybe, but once that jetty went ...

DC So there was a jetty there, was there?

Mr B There was a wooden jetty set in great big lumps of concrete, too, but the storm – once it started to break up, you see, it had all gone, but I firmly believe that if they'd have put one there and another further down, maybe, just beyond Balleira, they could have stopped a lot of the corrosion, the erosion, I should say.

DC Well, we've had you reciting dialect poetry, we've had you delivering letters, we've had you giving sermons and so on, but you've done other things as well, haven't you?

Mr B Yes, well yes, I was Clerk to Michael Parish Commissioners for twenty-four years I think it was, but of course there wasn't the work then, it was only the occasional house that was getting built in the Parish and it meant not very much going on really in those days, but I think I was getting about £20 a year or something, which was quite a bit – it was quite a bit going in to the [unclear] helping me...

DC In those days.

Mr B ...In those days, to fill the house, to pay for the house, and I was also Registrar for Births and Deaths.

DC Oh really?

Mr B There as a chap, name of Leslie Faragher, he used to do it, and when he had to give up, I was deputy, and then when he gave up I took it over for a few years until – it's transferred now all to – it's all centralised now, as these things [are].

END OF INTERVIEW