

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

‘TIME TO REMEMBER’

Interviewee(s): Mrs Mabel Bean [‘Mab’]

Date of birth: 7 September 1899

Place of birth:

Interviewer(s): David Callister

Recorded by: David Callister

Date recorded: 22nd August 2000

Topics(s): Early childhood memories
Memories of WWI
Obtaining a driving licence
Father’s involvement with Billy Morris of Morris Motors
Various jobs during WW1
Watching *Zeppelins* flying overhead
Boyfriends and getting married
End of WW1 and Armistice
WWII
Joining the WVS [Women’s Voluntary Service]
Becoming a Land Girl
Rationing and selling cigarettes
Husband in charge of Recruitment Centre
Bombing and bomb shelters
Memories of father’s car racing in the Isle of Man
Moving to the Isle of Man
Celebrating 100th birthday
Resident at Cummal Moar

Mabel Bean - Mrs B
David Callister - DC

DC So it's Mabel Bean, isn't it, Mabel?

Mrs B Yes, unfortunately, but I'm never called Mabel, always called Mab fortunately.

DC Mab, yes.

Mrs B It's much easier.

DC Did you have another name apart from Mabel?

Mrs B Oh no, no, no, just one.

DC Just Mabel?

Mrs B Yes just one, just one.

DC Yes. When you were single what was your name? What was your name when you were born? Your Christian name?

Mrs B My Christian name is Mabel.

DC Your unmarried name, I mean.

Mrs B Oh, yes it was Mabel all right, on whatever you have when you are born.

DC Yes. What are your first memories of childhood then, because you were born in 1899, weren't you?

Mrs B Yes. Well when I first started to think about things, I don't know, I was horribly spoilt, I don't mind telling you that for a start.

DC You were spoilt?

Mrs B I was very much younger than my brother and sister, you see, so a spoilt baby, I was spoilt always, definitely spoilt.

DC Yes.

Mrs B Oh no, first things I remember doing, I can remember this, this is a very long time ago I had a wheel chair and there were two horses bobbing up and down in front, you see, wonderful little things, yes I remember being wheeled out in that but I can't remember, now where did I go to school the first, to the High School in Retford, it was a very nice private school, very nice school indeed. And then I went to boarding school in Buxton, when was this, as soon as the war broke out, I went to a school in Buxton and now let me see what happened after that? Well the war started of course after that.

DC The First War?

Mrs B The First War, yes, my war as I call it.

DC So what about your father and mother, what were they like then?

Mrs B Oh, they were grand, I don't know, I've not got any photos of them here, not here handy.

DC Was he in the First War, your father?

Mrs B No, no, my brother.

DC Your brother?

Mrs B Yes. No, I went to boarding school and the war was on and I had something wrong with my throat and I had to go and have an operation on my throat, and I refused to go back to school after that you see. After I was better I never went back to boarding school at all. Well first of all I was busy driving a man, our manager of some Works, to Birmingham, or two of the staff, to two or three places, on business you see, he couldn't concentrate, he had to be driven. I was driving like this you see.

DC What age would you be then, about sixteen was it?

Mrs B I hadn't got a driving licence or anything like that in those days.

DC No?

Mrs B No, no driving licence and my father one day, the chief of ... you got your driving licence from the County, the County Council you had to write up for your driving licence. The man in charge was seeing my father one day and he said – my father was in the motor business you see – I'll show you the motor car in a minute, and he said, 'Oh, bring me up to the station will you, to catch this ...' he hadn't got a motor car of his own, but my dad said, 'I'm a bit busy, Mab will take you,' you see, and as we were going up he said, 'how old are you, Mab?' 'Oh,' I said, 'I'm sixteen,' and he said, 'good God! You haven't got a licence?' I said, 'No, no, I've got a licence.' He gave me a licence a year earlier.

DC Oh, right, have you still got it?

Mrs B Yes.

DC Oh, you've got it here, wow!

Mrs B All ready for you.

DC Now, look at that.

Mrs B Yes, look at that.

DC 'County of Nottingham Motor Car Act, 1903. Licence to drive a motor car Miss Mabel Clarke, 48 Budgegate, [Bridgewater ?] Retford in Nottinghamshire.'

Mrs B Do you know that part at all?

DC Yes ... it doesn't tell you how much – oh, yes, five shillings you paid for it.

Mrs B Yes.

DC Five shillings.

Mrs B Yes, but look at the business of small print, that was always something that amused me.

DC 'This licence must be produced when application is made for renewal. In the

event of loss or defacement a duplicate can be obtained from the Council for a fee of one shilling. Licences are renewable on the date of expiration and must be renewed during the month previous.'

Mrs B Ridiculous.

DC Yes, well it is signed by H. Godfrey, Superintendent, Nottingham.

Mrs B 'Well,' he said, what he could do, he said, 'as long as you are in the county,' he said, 'if you are in any trouble,' he said, 'I can always get you out of it, but,' he said, 'you are not in every county; you are all over the place.' You see, I was driving this man all over the place, you see, so he said, 'You'll have to have a licence,' so he sent me the licence.

DC Yes.

Mrs B No, I say that.

DC So that was driving just about the end, just coming to the end of the First World War really that wasn't it, just at the end of the First War?

Mrs B Oh no, it was during the war, because he was on war work you see so it was – yes – no, it was wartime, because I had various friends, odd boyfriends, that had – sometimes if I didn't know anybody anywhere near where we were going, I could usually find some boy that was stationed somewhere, to take me out for lunch you see, but otherwise I had to go with these men, all these businessmen, you see, for lunch. But anyway, I used to – I'm going to show you something here first. Now my father, I told you, was in the motor business, now that was the first motor car that he built himself.

DC So your father was Mr Clarke ...

Mrs B Charlie Clarke.

DC ... Charlie Clarke and he built a car which – well, it wouldn't go very far today would it?

Mrs B No, it would, it would if – it had coffee box steering.

- DC** It's not much more than a couple of bicycles and a seat, is it?
- Mrs B** No, no, a little engine. Well he told my mother, he said, 'Look, I'm going to take you to London, to take you to London in this,' you see, so mother said, 'oh, I don't like the engine; can't you do something about that engine in front?' you see. So, it's only 144 miles mind you to London, it was. And so he said, 'Oh yes, I can make a bonnet or something for it.' So he covered it up and they had to throw that into a field after they had gone about five or ten miles, about half an hour, because it got too hot you see ...
- DC** Too hot.
- Mrs B** ... and he took her to London in that, my father did.
- DC** Well of course we're looking at a vehicle here that's got no hood, no cover of any kind, has it?
- Mrs B** Oh, no, no, no – coffee box ...
- DC** Only a little box.
- Mrs B** ... and then my father kept that old relic and I used to play with it when I was a kid, I used to – they used to – well the garage, there was a little bit of a slope you see and I used to – the men used to push me up then I used to go sailing down with this little thing you see.
- DC** Yes. So he was pretty good then as a mechanic was he?
- Mrs B** Oh, yes, he was a marvellous man.
- DC** An engineer really.
- Mrs B** Actually he started making bicycles and then when motor cars came on the go, you see, he said, 'Oh!' – he was immediately on to it you see, went up to London, took mother up to London to see this motor car – at the Albert Hall or somewhere it was held and he was going round and round you see and you could have a ride in it and so then he comes back and makes himself one, you see.

- DC** Oh right, he must have been a real pioneer then?
- Mrs B** Oh he was, he was of the motor business. He was making bicycles before he made the motor car, with Billy Morris.
- DC** Of Morris Motors?
- Mrs B** Mmm ... both of them were making bicycles together.
- DC** Were they?
- Mrs B** And he got a long way on didn't he, by jove?
- DC** Yes. Did he make a bicycle for you?
- Mrs B** Yes, I had a bicycle.
- DC** Where would you go on your bike?
- Mrs B** Go to school, before I went to boarding school.
- DC** Ah yes, yes. Anyway we get to you driving these people round in the First World War then. You didn't – there was no bombing or anything was there?
- Mrs B** I got my licence during the First World War, yes, because Mr Godfrey said, 'You'd better have a licence,' you see.
- DC** So what happened after that then?
- Mrs B** Well I was doing all sorts of war work – that was First War. Well what I did, they sent a lot of tractors, motor tractors down with army – with the army to drive them, only they were lads, people that couldn't do any ordinary service you see but they could look after – to just plough all the land up they could do and I used to go around then, then they had digs, and I had to find them digs in the villages then I had to – one job was to go round and pay all the lodgings for these men, you see, I was always doing something, all the time, during the war. And I used to take a barrel of paraffin up for them and then they used to – the other car, an old FN, French make, and it had a long back, it was a two-seater,

and they used to – my father used to roll a barrel of oil on it, you see, and I had to go up to a place once in a village and turn sharp right and it was rather a long steep hill, you see, so my father said, ‘Now look,’ he said, ‘as soon as – when you get to the bottom, you just put her in bottom gear and go, just go up the hill steady.’ So I said, ‘Right,’ so of course, I, clever dick, thought I could get a bit further than that you see and I go sailing round the corner, because there was never anything about you see, there was no traffic around, so I go sailing around the corner, so once I get up to a certain little bit where I used to reckon to change gear you see, so as soon as I changed gear you see of course she slews a bit and then went on again and the barrel rolls off the back you see. Oh well, I was sort of young then and so I got out, out of the car, and ran up to this barrel, it was only going very slowly from side to side and I saw a heap of stones so I sort of steered it round to this you see and then I thought well what can I do now. Well I knew there was a pub round the corner, Clayworth Village, no, not Clayworth, Clarborough, and so I went into this pub and I said, ‘I’ve got a barrel of paraffin,’ I said, ‘it’s gone astray,’ I said, ‘I want to get it back on the car, can you help me?’ ‘Oh yes, we’ll help you,’ they said. Everybody knew me for miles around ...

DC Of course.

Mrs B ... so these men came and rolled it up on to a heap of stones, and I backed, you know how they used to have stones on the roadside, I backed the car up to that and then they put it on, you see and they said, ‘Now we’ll follow you up the road,’ so I said, ‘thank you very much.’ I had no money with me or anything, I said, ‘Thank you very much,’ and as I was going off I thought I should buy these men a drink, I’d fetched them out of the pub, so anyway I just sailed up and sailed off again you see ...

DC Yes.

Mrs B ... so I had to go back, the next time I was in the village I had go into the pub and ask them – to pay and ask them to give all these men a drink you see. So ... oh, there was lots of fun, I was doing daft things, all sorts of things during the war.

DC Yes, yes. So you spent a lot of time really driving then, did you?

- Mrs B** Yes, yes, I did really, more than anything else.
- DC** You enjoyed it?
- Mrs B** I enjoyed it, oh yes, I enjoyed it, I am very fond of driving. When we got to the stage of getting new cars, Dad used to give me a cheque to pay for the car at the works in Coventry, *Humbers*, you see, he was a keen *Humber* man, and I used to go, well somebody would take me, a man would take me and leave me you see, and I used to go into this office and pay for this – you'd got to pay for them all as they came out of the works you see, and I had to check up in the back the tools that were given with it, oh yes, very important. And what would I be, how old would I be then about?
- DC** Eighteen?
- Mrs B** Eighteen I should think, check up how many ... if the tools were right in the back and the rest of it, and I had change to give that man for doing that, you see, then I used to come sailing back from Coventry with these brand new beautiful new motor cars, you know.
- DC** And what would they cost, can you remember how much you would have paid for them in those days.
- Mrs B** What the cars were?
- DC** What would they have cost?
- Mrs B** I can't remember.
- DC** A couple of hundred pounds.
- Mrs B** Oh, a lot more, I would say more than that, not a lot I don't expect, they were beautiful cars, the *Humbers* were.
- DC** Yes.
- Mrs B** Beautiful cars. But it was about eighty or ninety miles I think from Coventry.

DC And where would you get petrol in those days, was there just a roadside, roadside? ...

Mrs B Oh, the garage would be serving me with the petrol.

DC He had his own.

Mrs B Yes. Oh yes, and I can remember we lived in – we didn't live – first of all we lived in the – when he started making motor cars then he wanted a bigger place so he bought an old pub which had a lot of room and a field at the bottom, right at the very bottom, so we had all this garage business and the petrol store was all at the bottom there in the field more or less and we were able – we were about six miles, Scrooby, out of Harworth and the Pilgrim Fathers, that's the history of that, another history, and we saw a *Zeppelin* going over ...

DC A *Zeppelin*?

Mrs B Yes, yes, we used to see these *Zeppelins* occasionally you see, we could hear them, just the engine you see, just hear the noise, and we looked up you see and it wasn't very long before there was a most terrible flames coming up, six miles away mind you. My father looked out of his bedroom window and he said, 'Good God!' he said, 'that's my petrol tank, my petrol's all gone up.' He couldn't think of anything else making such a blaze in the town you see, but it wasn't – it wasn't his petrol store, it was the gas works they'd hit.

DC Oh, right, the *Zeppelin* had hit it, had it, no?

Mrs B Yes, yes, they dropped the bombs, they dropped them in fields and just landed on the gas works and they were off, nobody was hurt or anything.

DC So the *Zeppelin* got away?

Mrs B Yes, oh yes, it went sailing off, of course – so that was a thing, that was all, all among everything else that happened, such a lot happening those days you see.

DC A bit of excitement was it?

Mrs B That was a bit of excitement, yes.

- DC** Did you have boyfriends in those days?
- Mrs B** Oh Lord, always boyfriends, I've got a suitcase under the bed there of photographs of all my boyfriends, oh Lord yes, plenty of boyfriends. And of course mother was awfully good to these lads, used to invite them over and they used to come over for – they used – well of course when they came to the Flying Corps you see, when they began to fly, you got aircraft then.
- DC** The Royal Flying Corps?
- Mrs B** The Royal Flying Corps, and they used to come over, they used to come over, these lads, come round the house where we lived, six miles out you see, and they'd drop messages down to us you see ...
- DC** Did they?
- Mrs B** Yes, and I had a message bag – there was a lad who used to fly, he was supposed to be going to make an exhibition up at Jurby of all the old stuff and I parted with – I gave him all sorts of things, which I should never have parted with really, for this exhibition. And they used to drop about that width, bunting, all different shades of bunting and a bag on the end and they used to lean out, these lads, and then drop these down for me, you see, with these messages in. But I had this one brother, he'd joined up, so my father was all on his own, and now what was the next [thing] happened after all that, oh, I kept sorting these lads out, you know, some of them were killed and I used to cry a bit, you know, and then they got on to the Air Force, came to Retford, you see, where they opened an aerodrome there for them.
- DC** Now you were telling me about this fellow who was coming over, flying over, he was an RFC flyer, and he is dropping messages to you, now tell me a bit more about him now?
- Mrs B** Dropping messages, yes. Well when we were married, this is when you want to know?
- DC** Yes, now you decided to get married then, I mean your parents didn't want you to?

Mrs B Yes, yes, yes, Oh, yes, they couldn't do anything about it at all, because we were absolutely determined we were going to do it, so I had always been spoilt in my own way, and so mother said, 'Well there's only one thing, we shall have to go to Sheffield to get you a dress,' and then it was only – it was only a week, within a week we got – mother said, 'now we'll take our dressmaker with us in case anything wants altering,' so we went off, sailing off in a train, Chris with us, because he got this three weeks leave, you see. Went to Sheffield, as we were going into Sheffield you see, I said, 'There's flags going up all over the place,' – the Armistice had been signed you see.

DC The end of the war.

Mrs B Yes, the war was over you see, and we could see them. Well when we got into Sheffield, mother said, 'Well the shops will be closed, everything will be closed, we can't do any shopping today at all.' So they said ... well they'd go, well they'd be all right, they wouldn't dash straight back by train, they'd go in the hotel and we'd meet in the hotel at 4 o'clock to go back to home on the 5 o'clock train or something, because we'd gone by train, and so we were to go, Chris and I. Chris said, 'We're going to town,' because we knew, we'd been in the habit of going to Sheffield to the theatre, and we used to go to the hotel, this was *The Grand Hotel* in Sheffield ...

DC *The Grand?*

Mrs B Yes, you know it?

DC Mmm.

Mrs B So we went, we walked up the town, you know where the station is in Sheffield, don't you?

DC Yes, yes.

Mrs B Yes, We walked up into town, well the only shop, the first shop we came to, one of the first shops we came to when we walked into the town, was a jewellers shop so we went into this jewellers shop and he bought me my wedding ring, you see, which we put on, of course. Anyway we made for the pub, you see, well we spent the whole of the time until it was time to go –

because all the place had gone mad you see because everybody was getting drunk, and oh, a wonderful time, and when we – after we'd – when we got back to the station and went into the hotel there to find mother to go back, you see, so we said, 'Oh, we've had a wonderful time,' and she said, 'oh, we thought you'd find a lot of your pals,' sort of thing and so we said, 'what did you do?' Well, my mother had the cheek of the devil. When they got into the town there was all the people, the important people in Sheffield, all going trooping into the church you see for a church service, you see, so mother said, 'Come on, Lottie!' So she said, 'We can't go.' 'Well of course we can, come on,' so they joined in with that lot you see ...

DC Yes.

Mrs B ... my mother had the cheek of the devil, so they followed them, they'd been to the church service and thoroughly enjoyed all that you see. Anyway that was that. But we got home and we had a very good reception, we had invitations from Princes, invitations for the wedding, all done in a week, and then the caterers were to come out and make – with the meal, the caterers did it for mother, mother didn't do anything like that, they brought it all out because we were six miles out, for this wedding, you see, for the reception and everything and then we got to the train eventually and went off to London to start the honeymoon.

DC Honeymoon in London, yes.

Mrs B And then on down to Bournemouth, I'm very fond of Bournemouth.

DC But the war was actually over so ...

Mrs B Yes, the war was over as we were in the train going to Sheffield, you see.

DC So your husband then, was he demobbed from the services, was he out?

Mrs B Oh no, it was another year before he was demobbed; they didn't get out very early, you know.

DC No, no.

Mrs B So we didn't – no we were quite a year if not more before he got out.

DC Yes, yes.

Mrs B And we thought we'd – well what we'd do, we were going to South Africa to grow oranges, well we had worked all this out, you see, oh, yes, oh, yes – and you could – Chris put a few thousand pounds down for it, for his share – and they looked after the place for you until they were – they'd employ you when you got out there, but they'd look after the place until there was money coming in you see. Oh, wonderful arrangement, we never got there though.

DC Oh!

Mrs B No, so we went – when we got home to my father, we told him what we were going to do, you see, he says, 'You're not taking my babby [baby] out of this country.' So Chris said, 'Well, oh.' He said, 'Why can't you grow fruit in this country?' So Chris said, 'Well I could do, I suppose, but,' he said, 'I rather fancied this,' you see. 'No, no, you're not taking, you're not taking her out of this country,' and he said, he said, 'there's a place to sell,' in the village where my father was born, it was quite near, and he said, 'there's a place to sell,' he said, 'it'll be just wonderful for a farm,' he said.

DC A fruit farm?

Mrs B Yes, and it was for sale and so Dad said, 'Now come on, come on, what about buying that?' and it was about six miles, East Markham, six miles from Retford and anyway we bought this. 'Will you get your money back?' and Chris said, 'yes,' and father put some money into it and this is where we got this fruit farm.

DC Yes.

Mrs B Well we had that for some time.

DC Was that successful?

Mrs B No, not really.

DC No?

Mrs B Well there was very little, very little doing in those days you know I'm sure, and we went back to East Markham eventually after the Second World War. We went back to East Markham but no, we had to pack that in, we had to pack that in, which was very unfortunate.

DC Yes. Well your husband would be too old for the Second World War, was he? He wouldn't be in the Second War as well, your husband, was he?

Mrs B Of course he was, well he was on the Reserve, he was called up first day, he was off first day.

DC Was he, yes, right. So what do you remember of the Second War, what were you doing in the Second World War then?

Mrs B Well we had a lot of refugees just before war broke out really, refugees from Leeds, I think they came from. Oh, I belonged to the WVS, I was doing anything that they wanted me to do, I never made any money though, I never got a job with anybody ever. But anyway these schoolchildren all came to Retford and they were all in the old house and we had to spend – before they came, we had to go down and find a village where we could put them in, you see. And we used to, I used to say, 'Would they take some children and these children were coming and we've got to find homes for them,' you see, well they'd say, 'well I don't mind having girls.' Well I said, 'I'm afraid I can't do – I think we've more lads than girls really,' but anyway they'd say, 'all right.' Well I went all round, I'd been asking people the day before they came if they'd take any, taking these kids, all round, started about, Oh, soon after eight I think they were there, very early I know, and taking all these kids round. Well I lived not very far away from where the school was and we went to – the headmistress came up to me, 'Oh,' she said, 'oh, this is terrible Mrs Bean.' 'Why?' I said, 'what's happened?' She said, 'We haven't thought of anywhere for the staff, we've got nowhere fixed up for the staff, what are we going to do?' 'Well,' I said, 'I've got a room with two beds in, single beds, a spare room,' but I said I didn't push the first part, just [to] see what happened, you see, and she said, 'would I have these two mistresses,' you see, so I said, 'yes, as long as they're good looking,' you see because my husband will play hell when he comes home when he finds that I've got them. Anyway they came and one was good looking but she wasn't half as nice as the other one and the other one came and they both came, these two came in, Oh they were – they made a great fuss of

me, they were very pleased about – they were very nice, both of them, very nice women, one liked a hot bath in the morning and the other one liked one at night and it was the days when I had a kitchen range where they kept hot water you know.

DC Yes.

Mrs B Anyway they were very nice so I gave them another room, I had another spare bedroom, I gave them – I let them have a room each you see and they used to come home and they used to – they had all their meals of course and everything, so after they'd been a few days they said, 'Well we'll have to make up, see what we are going to have to pay Mrs Bean.' So I said, 'Well,' I said, 'well I don't really know,' so they said, 'well, we've had a meeting,' – all these teachers had you see, and they'd decided a pound a week ...

DC Oh, yes.

Mrs B So I was given a pound a week for each of them, you see, and they had four meals a day.

DC Four meals a day!

Mrs B Well they had breakfast, then they came home for lunch, then they had tea and then they had supper, you see.

DC Right.

Mrs B Actually I gave them, I gave the dining room up to them to have on their own, you see, and they used to come in and they used to have their coffee after they'd had their lunch, they used to put the – in this fireplace – I put a big settee in, and they used to – off they used to go. It wasn't long of course before they wanted to – asked – would I mind if they brought somebody else to tea because I made such nice teas. Well I got a bit tired of this making tea business so I used to, I said, 'Well, if I put it all on the trolley for you and leave it all, you can manage?' And they said, 'Oh, yes, they could manage that all right,' so I used to go and shop with a friend, out of the way. And so then Chris came home on leave, so he said, 'This is a damn soft game,' he said, 'that you are on.' He said, 'You are not having this, you are going to do something more useful than this, I

think,' he said, 'to hell with this, we're packing the house up.' So we put all the furniture in store, everything was put in store, and I went off with him.

DC Did you, was he serving in England?

Mrs B He was in England, yes. So we had to ...

DC So you went off with him then?

Mrs B Yes, I went off with him, I moved round every time he moved anywhere I moved with him, you see.

DC Oh, yes.

Mrs B And of course I had to do something so I used to have to go to report, because I was the age when I still could work you see because they could send me out, they could put me on some work somewhere and anyway I used to go to ask them and they used to send me out on – all sorts of jobs I did, anything and everything. Even to pulling peas in the fields, yes, I enjoyed that though, with people, we had a lot of fun.

DC Sort of land girl?

Mrs B Yes, land girl, I did all sorts of things, anything. The job I liked the best was driving a mobile – my canteen, I got that, that was a better job I got, and there was – I used to go up to the aerodrome, oh, I would say to them, 'Have you ... who's in charge of this canteen?' – they would say, 'Mrs Somebody,' or somebody else would go with me you see, and I'd say, 'who's in charge?' and they would say, 'the driver's in charge,' and I would say, 'oh, all right, that's all right then.' So they'd introduce me to the woman that was going with me then, each day, and one day she said, 'I always take a little bit of something for ...' – she'd say, 'they give us a little bit of lunch in the [unclear] in the aerodrome, but I have a little hut especially for us,' and she said, 'they give ...' but she said, 'I take a little bit of something up as a rule.' So I said this to Chris, and he said, 'You're not taking anything, not taking anything damn well up,' he said, 'you see the sergeant in charge of the Mess and tell him you expect to have a proper dinner,' you see.

DC Yes, yes.

Mrs B So he said, so we had to go to the kitchen first, and they used to have the water boiling ready for us, and they used to fill two big things you see, for us, and there was a tea chest, yes, a square tea chest full of sugar and that sort of thing you see, and they said – one woman that I had with me one day – and she said, ‘We don’t put any sugar in the tea and they won’t notice you know,’ so when she wasn’t looking of course I go and put lots of sugar in. But anyway we had cigarettes to sell and bits and bobs like that you see. Well these lads used to – as soon as ever the thing arrived they used to come straight up and queue either side for us, and they said it was cigarettes they wanted and there was a tea chest full of cigarettes you see and so I used to – this woman used to pick them out one, two, three, picking them out, you see, so I put my hand in and got a big handful and I just managed to get one or two extra in and used to pass mine over to these lads you see, and then I used to just stare at them very hard when I did it, you see. They knew there was something going on so they just used to – and there was a queue at my end always, you see and this woman she said, ‘I don’t know what it is, they always seem to queue up at your end?’

DC Because they should have been rationed, shouldn’t they?

Mrs B Yes, and we had, oh, we had all sorts of bits of doughnuts, and all sorts of different cakes and things that they could have, you know.

DC Yes, yes. Was your husband still flying then or not?

Mrs B No, he wasn’t flying in the Second War ...

DC No, no.

Mrs B ... no, he was in charge of the recruiting centre, what would that be, the recruiting centre, I don’t think I can remember that now. Anyway he was in charge of all this lot, all these recruits. I used to go up in the bus sometimes to the camp, on some afternoons, because they had a ladies’ knitting party, supposed to be [a] knitting party and I used to go on the bus and see these lads with their mackintosh over their arm and I used to think oh, you are all laughing and talking now but you’ll soon not be laughing and talking because, you know, you’ll never be coming out of that gate again, because the train used to come

right into the camp you see to take them off. But, no, so I said to these women one day I said you know, 'Why don't we have a ... go and have a drink before we go up,' you see. So they said, 'That's a good idea,' so we used to meet then and have lunch and a drink and then go up to do the knitting but we never got not much knitting done. Anyway we used to take a lot home and do it, I used to send it home, send wool home for my mother and a woman that mother had working for her, they used to do the knitting for me.

DC You sent the knitting home to your mother – and I'm just, I was asking you then about whether there'd been any bombing nearby, did you get into any sort of action like that?

Mrs B Yes there was a house, it was a proper house, but you could only see the roof behind the hedge, you know, it had all collapsed.

DC Really, and that was right next door.

Mrs B Yes, next door to us.

DC Did you have shelters to go in?

Mrs B There was a shelter, Oh, yes, some of these women used to go across to this shelter, but you see these women used to go across to the shelter but I didn't go to the shelter.

DC Which women?

Mrs B The ones that were in the flat below us.

DC Yes.

Mrs B They used to go scuttling across and into the shelter every night, you see.

DC You didn't go to a shelter?

Mrs B I never went to a shelter.

DC Shouldn't you have gone?

Mrs B And they'd say to me I bet you've got some wonderful clothes to sleep in, sort of thing, you see. I said I'll put my best nightie on, and I said I might as well go, because if we're blown up I'll be blown up looking decent, no I didn't, I just – well Chris wouldn't let me do it, it was nonsense he said.

DC Yes, well then, by this time he was out of the Royal Flying Corps, and it was the RAF, wasn't it, the Royal Air Force.

Mrs B Yes, but he didn't like it, it wasn't the same.

DC Wasn't it?

Mrs B No, I mean the uniform was different, and he wasn't flying, he wasn't flying this time you see so he was very old for a job, but ...

DC How did you go for food then, I mean you had these people staying with you before you moved house, was there plenty of food or were you working on rations were you?

Mrs B I don't know whether we were on rations or not but I was never short of anything.

DC No.

Mrs B No, I never remember being short of anything very much.

DC No, no, but you took to cooking then, you must have spent a lot of time in the kitchen, did you?

Mrs B Oh, yes, I did cooking.

DC Yes, yes. What was it that brought you over here to the Isle of Man because you came here, what, thirty years ago?

Mrs B Yes, when the war was finished my husband was with Esso Petroleum and they – in fact they paid him more until he got to be a Squadron Leader – they paid him more money than – to me they made it up for him, and anyway when he got to be a Squadron Leader then they didn't put anything in, I don't think. So

that job was waiting for him when he came out, you see, so he went back again then to Esso.

DC Yes. Did he work for Esso here on the Island then?

Mrs B No, and I was just thinking how long he – no, we built a bungalow – that’s a painting of it up there – a bungalow down in Wareham, outside Wareham, when he retired, well we built the bungalow a couple of years before he retired you see, which was very handy to go down for our – well, we popped down every time we dare – we used to go down there. Then when he was retired we went to live at Wareham in this very lovely bungalow we built, I often look at it and think fancy leaving that. And anyway, I don’t know – do you know Bournemouth way?

DC No. I don’t.

Mrs B Oh, it’s very, very busy, it was very busy there after the war and everything and we used to – well we went off the main road from Swanage to Bournemouth went along but we lived – where the bungalow was, was up a little rise, nicely up and when we used to have to go down there, to join the main road to do our shopping, especially on a Saturday, you had to sit and wait for these cars going by, oh, it got impossible and it got so you couldn’t park in Bournemouth, we used to leave the car with – Chris’s sister lived just on the outskirts – we used to leave it there and then we got on the bus into Bournemouth. It got so busy, so ...

DC So you wanted to get away from there?

Mrs B ... get away, we wanted to get away.

DC How did you happen to pick the Isle of Man then?

Mrs B Well my brother came to see us when we were in the bungalow there and we said, ‘We’re fed up with all this; it’s too busy altogether for us,’ you see, ‘so we shall have to go and find somewhere to go and live.’ So Alaister says, ‘Well what about the Isle of Man?’ He said, ‘It’s lovely, you’ll have a bit of peace there you know, it’s lovely in the Isle of Man.’ So I had been as a kid, my father used to come to the racing when there were cars racing.

DC Car racing?

Mrs B Car racing, yes, not bicycles, and I've been coming to the Isle of Man since I was very young you see.

DC Yes.

Mrs B So we said, 'Well that's not a bad idea' so we wrote to the – Chris got all the newspapers, wrote to all the house agents, but there were no houses for sale, there was nothing for sale, well two, one was *Spooyt Vane*, you know *Spooyt Vane*?

DC Yes I do.

Mrs B That house there, one was *Spooyt Vane* and the other was opposite Greeba Castle, so we came over and we set off to go and look and we decided the one at Greeba Castle, it was across the road, down the lane to the railway crossing. You had to get out and open your gate and the house was up on the field there and there was sixteen acres with it you see.

DC Right.

Mrs B So I said to Chris, and it was raining, I said, 'No, no, that's no good, we're not going to look at that,' I said. He said, 'Sixteen acres, we should have something in that and start me getting busy again,' so he said, he said, 'we can always let it.' Well I said, 'I don't fancy it,' so we backed away from that and went to look at *Spooyt Vane*. Well, when we went to *Spooyt Vane* we sat outside and we were looking at it and decided it faced the wrong way, you see, we like everything to face the sun, so we thought, well this is no good, so anyway Chris said – he rang the man up and he said he sounded very nice and we went in to see these people and they were – and we saw them and we said, 'We'll be quite honest; it is not what we want really,' because we couldn't alter it round back to front like we had done with some places because it was sloped up you see, so that was that one, so we said, 'we are very sorry,' because they were very nice and anyway they turned out to be our best friends really, now he's died, and she's in a nursing home in Laxey now. But, so anyway what did we find first? Oh, we used to go in to see the house agent and they said, 'No, no, we haven't got anything,' he said, 'I think I'm going to have a house for sale,' he said,

‘very soon, but,’ he said, ‘I can’t tell you where it is, because it’s not been put in my hands yet so I can’t tell you where it is.’ So we said, ‘Well, give us an idea, is it in the country?’ He said, ‘Yes, it’s in the country but I can’t tell you where it is,’ you see. So, ‘No, no,’ he said, ‘it’s Kirk Michael way,’ but he couldn’t tell us where it was. So then when we got in the car we said what are we going to do now, so Chris said, ‘We’re going to the pub, they’ll know.’ So we went to the village pub, and we said, ‘We hear there’s a house going to be for sale somewhere in here, but they can’t tell us yet.’ ‘Oh,’ they said, ‘it’ll be *Gorse Lea*,’ the publican said. So off we went to look for *Gorse Lea*, you see. Well we found it and we knocked on the door and an old man answered it and it was – do you know the house, *Gorse Lea*?

DC No.

Mrs B There was an old man inside answered the door you see and he said, ‘Oh, well,’ he said, ‘I’m leaving, my wife’s been ...’ he said, ‘we haven’t been upstairs for years,’ he said, ‘my wife’s an invalid and,’ he said, ‘we want a little place, we’re moving.’ So he said, ‘I’ll go and leave the key with Mrs Kelly, she lives in a farmhouse at the bottom corner, and he said, ‘if you leave it there it’ll be all right leave it with her.’ And so next day of course we come over and Mrs Kelly – and she said, ‘Oh, I do hope you’re going to buy it, I hope somebody’s going to buy it and do it up,’ she said, ‘I was born in that house,’ she said.

DC Oh, yes.

Mrs B So off we go to look at this house, you see, all doing – no right to have done it at all, you see, so just we kept going in to see Gordon Bell to see what he thought about it, ‘Oh,’ he said ‘it’ll be all right, go on, carry on, carry on,’ and told us what builders to get, and so we looked at it, we went in and there was a – we went upstairs, and it absolutely stank, it was terrible, it stank, it was terrible the whole place, the old man hadn’t had a window open for years I don’t think, and when we got into the bedroom and I said, ‘Look how many papers the walls have got on,’ and I got hold of a little bit of paper to see how many lots of papers they had put on you see. I got hold of it and when I got hold of it the whole damn lot came down, the plaster, the whole damn lot and Chris said, ‘We shall be shot,’ he said, ‘for God’s sake stop doing that sort of thing.’ But eventually we told them what we had done you see, but anyway we lived in that house, we had – he said, he said, Parkinsons – the builders were –

he said, 'They'll do it up for you nicely.' Well, all the walls had to be stripped and then re-plastered you see, there was no damp course or anything in it you see, but we'd had all that done; we still didn't know how much we were going to pay for it.

DC Oh!

Mrs B No, and we spent £5,000 on having it done up and we lived in it for a year nearly before we paid for it.

DC Really.

Mrs B And it was oh, very little, very little, surprising.

DC Yes, mmm. But that's not what you'd have wanted to face up to when you retired really was it? All that, a lot of work, yes.

Mrs B No, oh, well we thought – well the Island was like that when we first came in, wasn't it?

DC This would be about, what, thirty years ago, would it?

Mrs B Yes.

DC Have you any idea what year you came?

Mrs B Yes, 1963, 1963.

DC Nearly forty years ago, isn't it?

Mrs B Yes.

DC And in 1963 you would be about sixty-four yourself, wouldn't you then?

Mrs B Yes, I suppose so, yes, must have been.

DC What's it feel like to have lived partly in three centuries, well you've lived through the whole of the twentieth century, of course, but here you are now,

August 2000, three centuries, not many people have done that have they?

Mrs B It's my birthday again next September, I shall be 101, doesn't make sense, does it?

DC It's amazing, it's wonderful, isn't it?

Mrs B I'm a bit ashamed of myself really, the only thing that's wrong with me, I've got terrible rheumatism in this knee and it's difficult walking.

DC Is that all that's wrong with you?

Mrs B Yes, when I walk.

DC Well that's not bad then is it, if you've got through ...

Mrs B That's why I've got that walker thing you see.

DC Yes, yes.

Mrs B I can't walk about without that; I can walk with a stick but I'm not safe with it you see.

DC Ah, right, so you have a frame now do you?

Mrs B No, it's outside, it's one of these, it's not an awkward one, it's one you can shut, open and shut.

DC Yes. And you've been here, you came to Cummal Moar the day it opened, did you?

Mrs B '81. 'No,' Chris said, before he died, he said, 'now look,' he said, 'for God's sake don't try to live by yourself, go and live in a hotel or live somewhere but,' he said, 'for goodness sake don't try to live by yourself.' So I knew this place was being built so I rang them up actually, quite early on, before it was only half-way built and I asked if – I was told where it was, who it was and they said, 'Well, yes, we'll put your name down and we'll let you know when there is anything there, when you can go,' you see.

DC You were the first resident weren't you?

Mrs B Well there was one man with me, one blind man, and then – for two or three days yes – and then a woman came and she had the next room to me, oh, I was – the whole place, I had a choice of bedrooms, everything you see.

DC Well you've got the sun all day, haven't you?

Mrs B Oh, it's lovely and so then there was Mrs Hine came, oh, and then two more men came ...

DC Yes.

Mrs B ... so we said, 'Well, we'll leave you lads and we'll get another table at the other end of the dining room,' actually and then the first lot of people who came in came from Cronk Ruagh because that closed, they all came down, that was the first lot of people who came in, you see.

DC So you've been here ever since?

Mrs B Been here ever since.

DC And you're going to be 101, celebrate here as well, aren't you? Did you have a party for your hundredth birthday?

Mrs B Oh yes, yes, lovely, it was a wonderful party.

DC Big party?

Mrs B A tea party we had.

DC Oh yes, photographs here, happy days.

Mrs B I have one daughter, that's my daughter, that's her husband, that's my grandson.

DC Your grandson, yes, yes.

Mrs B And that's his girlfriend.

DC Oh yes, yes. And does your daughter live here or across?

Mrs B Oh, she lives – live here! – she lives in Truro.

DC Oh Truro, does she?

Mrs B I can't think of anywhere further away, can you?

DC No, no.

Mrs B He was a Flying Corps man you see. She married him during the war.

DC Ah, right.

Mrs B She was six years in the Air Force.

DC Was she?

Mrs B Code and Cypher Officer, six years she had.

DC Well I think we've done enough there I think, really – look at that!

END OF INTERVIEW