

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

‘TIME TO REMEMBER’

Interviewee: Mr Laurence Corrin

Date of birth: 10th January 1910

Place of birth:

Interviewer: David Callister

Recorded by: David Callister

Date recorded: 1st August 2000

Topic(s): Early school days
Working as a sawyer in father’s building business
Building houses for Ramsey Commissioners
Working in Maughold for Northern Lighthouses
Seeing first cars in Ramsey
Local entertainment
Learning to play the piano
Member of Ted Collins’ *Harmony Band*
Building Lifeboat House and Post Office in Ramsey
Manx Salt & Alkali Company
Acquaintances with international artists

Laurence Corrin - Mr C
David Callister - DC

- DC** Laurence Corrin, born on the 10th January 1910.
- Mr C** Which you say makes me ninety or something like that.
- DC** That'll be right.
- Mr C** Or some blooming thing.
- DC** Where did you go to school then Laurence?
- Mr C** Well in the early days I went to the old Grammar School in Waterloo Road, and then of course it was all taken over by the Education Authority after that.
- DC** What do you remember of your school days if anything?
- Mr C** Well, they weren't too bad, I could hold my own, I could and evidently I was no, not quite any toot.
- DC** Who would the teachers be then?
- Mr C** Who would the teachers be?
- DC** What were they like, were they hard to get on with.
- Mr C** No, no, one or two of the very earliest ones when I was only about ten ... weren't so ... you got into trouble in those days if you killed a mouse, from the teachers, yea ... but eh ...
- DC** How far was school from your home then?
- Mr C** From Brookhill ...
- DC** Brookhill, yes.
- Mr C** ... yes ... latterly to what was known as the Wesleyan School and it was pulled down and became a car park.
- DC** Oh yes. Now, your father, was it your father, that had started the building

business?

Mr C Oh yes, yes, father and his father and of course when Dumbell's Bank broke that ruined them because houses which cost a thousand pounds each in those days, which the Brookhill houses did, and the Crescent houses up here, they were sold for an average of £230 apiece.

DC Were they?

Mr C Yes.

DC Now how did the firm start, it was R E Corrin was it? R E was your father?

Mr C Arthur Gorry Corrin was my father, yes, and his father was Richard Corrin and lived at *The Arderry*, in Glen Auldyn.

DC Yes. So did you go straight from school into the firm?

Mr C Yes, when I was sixteen.

DC What trade did you take?

Mr C Well mostly in the line of, well I was actually I was the sawyer for the firm, converting mill sawyer ... ummm ...

DC Tell me about the work you were doing?

Mr C That I was doing? Well, it was as you say, chiefly joinery.

DC But the sawyer ... were you cutting trees in the Isle of Man, were the trees coming locally.

Mr C Well, father would buy 200 trees, aye ...

DC What, on the Island?

Mr C Yes.

- DC** Where would they be growing, then?
- Mr C** Lezayre, chiefly. Lezayre Parish, yes.
- DC** What sort of trees, Laurence?
- Mr C** Well the trees – none of them was less than four or five tons in them and one of them with forty-two tons in it.
- DC** Really? Forty-two tons?
- Mr C** Forty-two tons.
- DC** Was that an oak?
- Mr C** No, it was a beech, a beech tree, and the way we know ... of course we had no conveyance of our own for timber, and each had to be put over the weigh bridge on the quay.
- DC** Really?
- Mr C** Yes.
- DC** How was a tree like that trucked along then, how was it got around?
- Mr C** Oh, just cut up, of course, oh yes.
- DC** Who would fell that, Laurence?
- Mr C** Well we had the saw mill, you see, and there was a five foot saw and I was the sawyer.
- DC** You were felling the trees yourself as well were you?
- Mr C** We were cutting them up into merchantable timber, yes.
- DC** Right. Cross cut saws?

Mr C Cross cut saws for the felling.

DC How many men to a saw?

Mr C Two.

DC Two men.

Mr C Yes and we had them from various sizes from 4ft. 6 in. up to 7 ft.

DC Right. How long would they have to be left to season?

Mr C Well, depending on what use it was to be put to, yes. Yes some of it, as you say, had to be left to season for a long time.

DC Stacked outside was it?

Mr C Oh, I'm speaking of course of when it was cut up, because it takes a heck of a long time to season in the log, yes.

DC What was the saw mill like, then, what was the equipment like in the saw mill itself, how was it run, what kind of mechanism?

Mr C Gas engine.

DC Gas engine.

Mr C Yes a forty horse power, two tons of fly wheel.

DC Right, and how many sawyers would there be in then?

Mr C Just me and my father.

DC Ah right, yes, ever have an accident?

Mr C Never, no.

DC Good thing, yes.

Mr C Yes you don't fool around with 5ft. saws, by jove you don't.

DC No. You'd be lifting some pretty heavy wood then?

Mr C Oh yes, yes. No mechanical aid, no, just planks of various lengths according to the weight of the piece you were dealing with. And if it was too great a diameter for the 5 ft. saw to cut through you turned it over, lined it up and put straps across it to hold it together so that when the saw did meet the previous cut on the other side it wouldn't fall over.

DC That would be quite a tricky job wasn't it?

Mr C Yes, it was indeed, yes. And a fine big bench it was, it was forty feet long.

DC Forty feet?

Mr C Aye, and stand, steel plates of course.

DC Yes, how long would a saw blade last then?

Mr C A saw blade, well, I had to sharpen them, I did all the sharpening of them over the years.

DC With a stone?

Mr C Beg pardon?

DC What did you use to sharpen them, a stone?

Mr C No, American files because the British files were not, in my opinion they were no use, no.

DC So they were sharpened with a file?

Mr C Yes they were sharpened with a file – they were quarter inch teeth, yes.

DC And would a blade last for years then would it?

- Mr C** A blade lasted all the years I was down there.
- DC** Did it?
- Mr C** Yes, I don't know where they went afterwards – I don't think Arthur stuck on to them, I think he parted with them, yes.
- DC** And where is the saw mill now, is it all gone?
- Mr C** Oh, all gone, I don't know what it is now.
- DC** What work would your father be on then, was he building houses?
- Mr C** Oh yes, yes.
- DC** Where did they build?
- Mr C** There weren't so many, well of course he built for the Ramsey Commissioners – he built those houses at the back of the Brookhill.
- DC** Did you employ many tradesmen there?
- Mr C** I beg your pardon?
- DC** Did you employ many tradesmen?
- Mr C** Well the most tradesmen we employed were when we built the houses on the cricket field, you know where that is, do you? ...
- DC** Hmmm.
- Mr C** ... at the back of Brookfield ...
- DC** Yes.
- Mr C** ... and there was one of those completed every fortnight.
- DC** Was there?

Mr C Yes.

DC You did? The firm had a very good reputation here, didn't it, I think?

Mr C I believe so, I believe so, yes. Father always used to reckon ourselves and the Cain boys were the best builders in the Isle of Man in those days.

DC Aye, you would be in a small way compared to some of them, I suppose, would you?

Mr C I suppose so, I never thought about it, no.

DC Who'd look after the books then, your father?

Mr C Yours truly, yes.

DC Did you? Did you have trouble getting paid? Did you have any trouble getting paid?

Mr C Me?

DC No, paid for the work.

Mr C Well, I never had more than ten shillings a week.

DC No. You never had?

Mr C No, no, I didn't want it, I don't know, I've never thought of money in that line, no. No greediness, you don't want that in life. I used to do lots of things for nothing, if there was somebody I knew, that they weren't well heeled and they had some little job to do I would go and do it. Get on my bike and go and do it and they'd say how much was it and I'd say nothing, no, it's all right.

DC Well what vehicles did you have in the company then in the early days, how did you get from place to place? How did you get to the jobs, what kind of vehicles did you have.

Mr C Well latterly we did have a two-ton lorry, yes.

DC But in the early days what did you have?

Mr C Ah now ...

DC Handcarts?

Mr C Oh yes, I'm forgetting that, thank you for reminding me.

DC Handcarts?

Mr C Yes, handcarts, yes, we'd go to Maughold, we had all the work for the ... who were the people called who had the lighthouses in those days?

DC Oh, the Northern Lighthouses.

Mr C That's right, yes, we had all their work and we would set off at half past eight in the morning with the handcart, buckets slipped on over the handle.

DC And you'd go up ...

Mr C And we'd go up to Maughold lighthouse with a handcart.

DC You were telling me that you saw the first cars come to Ramsey?

Mr C Yes, when there was only two cars, when I was five, there were only two, one was the late Wilfred Corkill, manager of the Isle of Man Bank, and another ... oh I've remembered the name of the gentleman at the top of Glen Auldyn, Mr Rattenbury, he had the other one.

DC They'd be Fords would they, Ford *Model Ts*?

Mr C No, one was a make of car that I've never heard of since, yes, because my brother bought it from this gentleman afterwards.

DC Oh, did he?

Mr C Yes, my brother, Arthur, Arthur's father.

- DC** This is Arthur's ... this is old Arthur and young Arthur, we're talking about.
- Mr C** That's right, we are talking about old Arthur at the moment, who bought this car. I can't remember the make of it.
- DC** Did you go for a ride in it?
- Mr C** Oh, yes, because in those days Arthur and an elder brother, Richard Corrin, his photograph is in the forces ...
- DC** Oh yes, in the First War, there.
- Mr C** There he is in the First War. They used to go up to dances in *The Palace Ballroom* on a Saturday night, before they were married.
- DC** Yes, yes. Did you go with them?
- Mr C** They used to take me with them and I used to sit up in the gallery in *The Palace* and see 5,000 couples dancing on the 25,000 square feet floor there.
- DC** What did you do for entertainment here in Ramsey then?
- Mr C** In Ramsey? Well ...
- DC** Go to the pictures?
- Mr C** Oh yes, two picture houses, in fact there were three at one time.
- DC** What were they called?
- Mr C** Well one was *The Palace*, one was *The Cinema House*, that was the one over by Raymotors, that was a cinema, and then there was one, it was called *Dyson's*.
- DC** *Dyson's*?
- Mr C** *Dyson's Picture House*, it was, yes.
- DC** Did you go to all of them?

- Mr C** Yes, I'd pay my penny on Saturday.
- DC** A penny?
- Mr C** A penny, yes, yes.
- DC** For the matinées?
- Mr C** Aye, that's right.
- DC** Were they cowboy films?
- Mr C** Oh aye, yes, Tom Mix ...
- DC** Tom Mix, yes.
- Mr C** ... and his horse.
- DC** That's right. There'll not be many people about that'll remember Tom Mix, will there?
- Mr C** I don't suppose so, no.
- DC** Was there any dancing in Ramsey?
- Mr C** Oh yes,
- DC** Where was that?
- Mr C** And then when I was, as soon as I was sixteen I started playing for dances and I played for over 7,000.
- DC** You had an orchestra?
- Mr C** Well I ... it was known as Ted Collins, *The Harmony Band*, and Teddy Collins was the leader ...
- DC** What did you play?

Mr C ... the late Ted Collins, who was a plumber.

DC Oh, right. What instrument did you play?

Mr C Piano.

DC Oh yes, right.

Mr C I've always played the piano.

DC Can you still play?

Mr C Oh, I should hope so, it would be a bad lookout if I couldn't.

DC Yes, you've got the grand piano here.

Mr C I bought that one for £2,000 and it was £47,000 new. And this one is £13,000 – this is a *Blüthner*, the upright, yes.

DC So you still have a tinkle every day on the piano, do you?

Mr C Oh yes, yes, never miss, never miss.

DC Great.

Mr C I could play 1450 ditties for you for which I've never seen any music.

DC Really, so it's all by ...

Mr C No, I've never seen any music for any of the things I play.

DC So it's all by ear?

Mr C I was able to play these things when I was five. I had a very wealthy Aunt who came over here for eight or nine weeks and stayed with her father at Glen Auldyn and when she came, 'Would you play this for me Laurence?' and this and that and the other and she would give me a crown, a five shilling piece, for every tune I played.

DC So you'd picked up these tunes in your head and you just sat down at the piano and played them?

Mr C Yes, that's all, yes, if you had a tune that you wanted playing and you were to whistle it, hum it, sing it, well, I'd play it.

DC But somebody must have taught you the scales and things like that?

Mr C No, nobody taught me any scales, no, the only scales I had were scales coming off my ...

DC Off my hands? (*laughter*) So this band started up, what year would that be then?

Mr C Beg pardon?

DC What year would it be when you started the dance band?

Mr C Well I started with Teddy Collins when I was sixteen.

DC Really, yes. That was 1926.

Mr C That's right ...

DC 1926.

Mr C ... because I was born on the 10th January 1910.

DC So 1926 before the ...

Mr C I was sixteen then, yes, that's right.

DC It was between the wars, and where did you start playing? Where did you go with the band then?

Mr C Private dances, *The Bay Hotel*, *The Snaefell Hotel*, I played once in *The Villa [Marina]*.

DC How many were in the band, how many men?

Mr C Well four others with me and then if there were any special do, we would augment it.

DC Tell me about the time you came home in a rowing boat, what was that all about?

Mr C Oh, well, it had rained cats and dogs, not ordinary rain, but coming down, pelting down, for about twenty-four hours, and of course when the tide was full it backed up the sewer and came up through the grids in the town.

DC This is in old Ramsey I suppose they'd call it.

Mr C They would have called it old Ramsey.

DC And where were you playing at the time?

Mr C At the time I was playing in St. Paul's Church Hall in Church Street, which was dismantled since of course. There were, well let's see now, there was a parapet, which would have a ledge of about that and then you went up, one, two, three, four steps, up to the dance floor.

DC So it was quite high off the ground?

Mr C Yes, quite high off the ground, yes.

DC And what happened?

Mr C Well the whole, the town flooded, the whole town.

DC So was it up over the steps?

Mr C Well you know Market Hill, don't you? Well, a rowing boat can go over there, yes.

DC So it came up over the steps, did it?

Mr C Oh, yes.

- DC** What on to the dance floor?
- Mr C** Yes on to the dance floor, we had to give up – I was playing for a dance that night there you see, and of course ...
- DC** And how did people get out, it must have been two or three feet deep then?
- Mr C** Oh, no, no, no, no, no, no, not, it only arrived at the level of the dance floor, yes, oh no.
- DC** So people got pretty wet then.
- Mr C** Because the dance floor was, let's see how much would it be above the Church Street, the road, it would be about, I should think about 22 inches.
- DC** That's enough to get your feet wet. How did you get home?
- Mr C** Plenty of rowing boats in those days, 200 rowing boats in Ramsey in those days. There was Kinrades and Corletts.
- DC** So somebody got the boats out did they?
- Mr C** Oh they had the boats out. Aye, too bloomin' true they did.
- DC** Yes. And how did you get home?
- Mr C** How did I get home? I went home in a rowing boat. I went to the foot of Brookhill, I lived in Brookhill in those days, which you know is elevated there, and the rowing boat was able to take me up, certainly to above the tramlines.
- DC** That would give you fellows more work to do I suppose, would it?
- Mr C** Yes, oh there was a lot of work to do after that because all those shops, all low lying, like Church Street, were all flooded.
- DC** Well you were here of course in Ramsey when the pier was being used, weren't you?

- Mr C** The Queen's Pier, too bloomin' true I was, yes.
- DC** How popular was it?
- Mr C** Oh very, very popular, yes. I've seen 200 on it, 200 people at the one time, yes.
- DC** What was on the pier then down there?
- Mr C** Well, there was a café at the far end and of course there was a small gauge train going down the pier in those days.
- DC** Did you go on that?
- Mr C** Once. Aye, I went on it once, it was very popular the Queen's Pier was and for fishing as well and in those days there were fish in the bay, yes.
- DC** And the Steam Packet boats came in, didn't they?
- Mr C** The Steam Packet boats came into the pier, yes, that's right.
- DC** You've seen an awful lot of buildings pulled down then in your time, haven't you?
- Mr C** Oh quite a lot of buildings, they pulled the Town Hall down, damn fool thing to do. It was a fine Town Hall ...
- DC** It was nice, a good building.
- Mr C** ... any town could be proud of it.
- DC** Yes. Why did they pull it down then, Laurence?
- Mr C** Well I don't know, I can't understand it, I honestly can't, and dozens of other people can't understand it, it was a fine Town Hall. Any town could have been proud of it.
- DC** But they're building a new one now.

- Mr C** They're going to. My father built the lifeboat house, it cost £750.
- DC** Did you work on that?
- Mr C** No, no.
- DC** No, that was well before your time?
- Mr C** Actually this was at the turn of the century.
- DC** Oh yes, it goes back that far does it?
- Mr C** Oh yes the lifeboat house does, and he built the post office too.
- DC** Yes, oh right. Did you get out on buildings as well?
- Mr C** Very little out on buildings, no, very little out on buildings. I had to be in control of the business in Derby Road as well as the sawyer for it.
- DC** How were the customers for paying their bills?
- Mr C** Most of them were very good, very honest and decent.
- DC** You didn't have to spend a lot of time chasing money then?
- Mr C** Oh, no, no, no, no, no. No, then of course in those days father didn't worry if somebody was a year paying or two years paying, there was one gentleman hadn't paid at the end of six years.
- DC** Really.
- Mr C** Mmmm ... I won't name any names.
- DC** But you got paid in the end.
- Mr C** Oh he had plenty of money, he had plenty of money, he could have afforded to pay anytime, yes, and this gentleman, father would say, 'Oh send Mr so and so an account and put on the bottom of it...' and 'write on the bottom of it ...'

Latterly we had little things that we stuck on the bottom of it, and a day or two later he would turn up at the office and it would always be me who came in for it because I was in the office and he'd say, 'Now I've told you before, Mr Corrin, I don't want you to send these accounts, they upset my wife.' Well then, that went on, I used to dread when he'd come to the office door and I would be sitting on the stool at the desk and this day father had had an armchair by the fireplace in the office, a nice fire, but it had gone down, we'd let it go down because it was coming to evening, and he didn't see my father sitting in the corner by this fireplace and he came to the door, 'Now I've told you before I won't have this,' late evening and it must have been autumn because it was starting to get, the light was starting to go then and he came to the door of the office like he always did and stood at the door and he evidently didn't see father there ...

DC What did your father say?

Mr C ... and, 'I've told you before Mr Corrin,' he said to me, 'I don't want you to send any of these accounts, they upset my wife.' And out of the corner came a voice, 'I don't care if she has a canary fit.'

DC That was your father?

Mr C That's right, by gum he jumped.

DC Did he pay up?

Mr C Pardon?

DC Did he pay up?

Mr C After six years, yes. Always me that came in for his ire because I was there on the stool in the office, aye, I used to dread his visits. But that was one time I didn't care.

DC When you were working there, when you were with your father's business, would you go, would you have annual holidays when you would have some time off?

- Mr C** Didn't want it – I didn't want it, no, no.
- DC** So you wouldn't go away for a holiday?
- Mr C** Every day in the Isle of Man is a holiday.
- DC** That's a good way of looking at it, isn't it?
- Mr C** Every day in the Isle of Man is a holiday, a wonderful place the Isle of Man, there's not another place in the world to touch it.
- DC** And you never bothered with holidays then?
- Mr C** No, no, I haven't spent £20 on holidays in eighty odd years, no, no.
- DC** Did you go, you've been off the Island though?
- Mr C** I've been to Liverpool.
- DC** On business?
- Mr C** No, not on business, I went to see an uncle of mine, yes. No, I didn't want a holiday – every day here is a holiday, yes.
- DC** Did the firm do work in other parts of the Island or were you mostly in the north?
- Mr C** Mostly in the north, yes, yes, except that we had the maintenance of the lighthouses, yes. And the maintenance of the telephone exchanges, the maintenance of the telephone exchanges.
- DC** Did you?
- Mr C** Yes, yes. That's just occurred to me that, telephone.
- DC** What will be the biggest property you've built do you think?
- Mr C** Oh the twenty six, probably the twenty-six houses for the Ramsey

Commissioners.

DC Where did you buy your timber in later years then?

Mr C It was nearly all from Bootle.

DC Was it, and it would come in to Ramsey here would it?

Mr C Yes, on a cargo vessel every Friday, into Ramsey, Steam Packet.

DC What about bricks and that sort of stuff, were they local?

Mr C Scotch.

DC Oh, yes.

Mr C Now, my brother Richard, the one who was in uniform there in the First World War, he was manager of the Manx Salt & Alkali Company.

DC Was he, oh?

Mr C Yes, yes and they had their own vessel, *The Manxonia* ...

DC So would he bring cargo back for you?

Mr C He would bring bricks back, from Manindale [sp ???], in Scotland.

DC How big was that business that he was running, the Salt & Alkali, then?

Mr C Oh pretty big because they had men at the salt pans and the salt went chiefly to Ireland in full cargoes, yes, various grades of salt from the butter salt to the coarse.

DC Did it?

Mr C Yes.

DC And these salt deposits were at the Point of Ayre then, were they?

- Mr C** They came in from the Point of Ayre, that's right, yes – on a six inch pipe.
- DC** And how far out, where were they being, how did they get to that I mean?
- Mr C** Well a lot of it inland, on land, but in other places on the shore and there was one terrific storm when they were bared and broken on the shore ...
- DC** On the pipes?
- Mr C** Yes, on the pipes.
- DC** Did you see that operation working down there did you, at the Point?
- Mr C** What the Salt works? Uh, yes.
- DC** Spent a lot of time there did you?
- Mr C** Yes, I used to go and watch the men dragging the salt out of the brine, as it formed. I think there were three big salt pans, I think, yes, I think there were three.
- DC** Had he started that business or taken it over, or what?
- Mr C** Who's that?
- DC** Richard, was he first ...
- Mr C** He was managing for them, for the Manx Salt & Alkali Company.
- DC** Why did that fold up, was it, did they run out?
- Mr C** They started manufacturing bacon at one time, yes.
- DC** Did they?
- Mr C** Yes.
- DC** They had pigs as well then?

Mr C Oh no, they didn't, they bought them from producers of pork.

DC Where were they doing that then Laurence?

Mr C At the Salt Works.

DC Were they?

Mr C Yes, they brought a man over who knew the job, yes.

DC So there'd be sides of bacon going out as well, would there?

Mr C They had bacon going out as well, but I don't think, to my mind, I don't think it lasted very long, no, no.

DC Right, when you are ready.

[Mr Corrin plays 'Ellan Vannin' on the piano]

Mr C ... I've dined with them.

DC You've dined with Layton and Johnstone?

Mr C Aye.

DC Where was this, in Douglas?

Mr C No, no, no, in Liverpool.

DC Aye, well they were great men at the piano, weren't they?

Mr C Oh yes, they were grand – I always loved listening to them.

DC Tell me about Haydn Wood, then?

Mr C Haydn Wood? That he collaborated with my brother Richard?

DC Did he?

Mr C And they were, there were two or three songs that my brother Richard and I wrote together.

DC Yes, oh really.

Mr C Yes.

DC And Haydn Wood was a Manxman was he?

Mr C Oh yes, yes.

DC Did you get to know him?

Mr C Oh aye, I knew him fairly well, yes fairly well.

DC What sort of man was he?

Mr C Oh a real decent, you wouldn't wish to meet a more decent fellow, no, oh no, no, considerate, you know, and that goes a long way, I like people who are considerate, and think of others.

DC Yes. What other entertainers can you remember then?

Mr C What other ...

DC Gracie Fields?

Mr C ... beg pardon? Oh yes, I've interviewed Gracie Fields, oh yes, oh dash it all, you see my memory is going, I should have really put them on tape.

DC Yes, yes, and where would you be then when you met Gracie?

Mr C Where was I then? Blackpool, *(laughter)* it's just occurred to me, aye, in Blackpool, yes.

DC *(laughter)* Oh right.

Mr C Oh, if only I could think of some of the others, oh dear, dear, dear, dear, dear.

DC Did you get to know Harry Korris?

Mr C I knew him, yes, yes, he was a Manxman, old Harry, yes. Harry Korris, featured numbers on ... on the television.

DC That's right.

Mr C Yes ... oh Harry was all right.

DC Because I think he lived in Ramsey for a while, did he?

Mr C Well I never remember him living in Ramsey, no – that would perhaps be before my time. You see he'd be older than me.

DC Probably, oh yes, I should think so, yes, yes, yes, he would be, if he was around today he would be about 105 or 8, he'd be well over a hundred now.

Mr C Aye, well you see, you reckon I'm ninety or something.

DC Yes, you're ninety.

Mr C Aye, Aye ... Lord save us.

END OF INTERVIEW