

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

‘TIME TO REMEMBER’

Interviewee: Mr Frank Crompton

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Place of birth:

Interviewer: David Callister

Recorded by: David Callister

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Topic(s): Moving to the Isle of Man
Starting up car business
Manx Democratic Party and 1986 General Election
Abrogation and birching
Accident and major surgery
Scheme for building airport at Jurby
Presenting shows on Manx Radio
Performing in Forces shows
Performing with international artists in famous clubs
Representative for Manx Equity
Writing children’s story book
Website businesses
Working as a film extra

Frank Crompton - Mr C
David Callister - DC

DC Right, guest on this disc is Frank Crompton, and, well, experience of travelling the world, being a man in the Royal Navy, being involved with music, with the motor industry, political parties and so on – there's a good deal to talk about. Came to the Isle of Man in 1961, and I suppose we might start from that point, Frank.

Mr C Yes, okay.

DC What was it that brought you here to the Isle of Man – don't say, 'The boat' of course! (*laughter*)

Mr C No, no. Well, actually, it was by plane – it wasn't 'The boat!' My wife brought me here, to meet with – before we were married, to meet her family, and then we got married, and we went across to live in Australia for two and a half years. And then afterwards, when I came back to England, having some business and other contracts to fulfil, I then came to the Isle of Man permanently in 1974.

DC Did you set up in business on your own, or did you work – were employed by somebody here, then?

Mr C No, no – I was in business on my own. I set up F Crompton Limited, which was a factors [factory ?] in Finch Road in Douglas, supplying the motor trade, and also I was selling cars, as well, at that particular time – which I've done most of my life. Basically, I had at that time so many companies and so many interests on and off the Island, doing so many things – I had ten companies at one time. And I found it very difficult to control the ten, so I sold a few off, and concentrated on the main thing, which was the guarantee business.

DC Yes.

Mr C Maybe this is something you're not aware of, but the guarantee system that you have at the moment on all cars – which obviously you know about – you get an extra guarantee – you've twelve months guarantee – I invented that system in 1965 ...

DC Oh, really?

Mr C ... and I first started it off with the Wynn's Organisation which I was associated

with and I was the Sales Director. And it was an idea to sell products, rather than anything else, that if they put Wynn's in the car, they would get an extra guarantee. And it gradually developed into what it is today. But I couldn't patent it because you can't patent the written word, so otherwise I would have been a billionaire now, because everywhere in the world uses this system.

DC Yea. What you're saying, nobody got in before you on that idea, then?

Mr C No. I was first one to do it. The first person was Knutsford Motors in Cheshire – the first garage ever to use it.

DC Well, you're here, then, in the Isle of Man, you're living presumably – where – in Douglas or Onchan, somewhere?

Mr C I was living in Onchan.

DC Yea, yea. And at some point, then, you became interested in local politics, because one of the things we'll talk about is the Manx Democratic Party. Now, what got you into the political scene, can you remember that?

Mr C Umm ... first of all, I think I was at my garage, one day, in Onchan, and I was so disappointed with the way things were going with the Government and the way things were being handled, I put an advert in the paper asking all businesses on the Isle of Man to go on strike, in support of what I was saying that the Government wasn't treating us right. So I thought this idea up of making the boss go on strike, rather than the worker. In actual fact, it worked to a point, because the next two or three days I had hundreds and hundreds of phone calls of people saying they would support me. And the television came across to interview me and everything else, and it's on tape with television with me being interviewed and everything else – this is how I got involved in politics. And then, of course, a friend of mine, Nod, and I can't remember – somebody else – they had a public meeting at *The Howstrake* in Onchan – this must have been the early-mid 80s I would say, and saying that if people were dissatisfied with the Government and the way it was going and the things that were happening – we had this public meeting, which was very well attended, and from that was formed 'The Future of Mann.' And Leventhorpe, Mr Leventhorpe ...

DC Richard Leventhorpe, yes.

Mr C ... Richard Leventhorpe was chosen as Chairman and I was on the committee with other people. So that's how it developed. And that then developed into the Manx Democratic Party ...

DC Yes.

Mr C ... and of course, so many meetings – we had public meetings all over the Island. We organised a very big petition over the homosexual law being changed – we didn't agree with it being changed to what it is today.

DC How many signatures did you get?

Mr C About six and a half thousand ...

DC Yea.

Mr C ... which was quite substantial, which was then presented to Miles Walker, who was the Chief Minister at the time, and we weren't well received at all. We were treated very badly and since then, I've had a lot of problems with business – with threats and different things were happening, things were made difficult for me in one way or another. But I still kept going with the political side of it, and that's when I was chosen to stand for the election in Onchan, for the Manx Democratic Party.

DC This was for the election in 1986 – it was the General Election, at that time I think, wasn't it?

Mr C Yes.

DC And, as far as I can remember, there would be five or six members of the Party in various constituencies.

Mr C Yes, that's right.

DC Alistair Robertson was one of them, wasn't he?

Mr C Yes.

DC Derek Hays.

Mr C Derek Hays, yes.

DC John Christian ...

Mr C Yea.

DC ... and Percy Quirk ...

Mr C Yes.

DC ... and yourself ...

Mr C Yes.

DC ... none of whom did very well.

Mr C No, I'd – really it was before it's time – I don't think party politics – I believe in the party system, because I'd rather have – it doesn't matter what you call it – left and right, up and down, but I believe there should be something where they're accountable and they can be got rid of if they're not right. But it was probably before it's time, I think, that was probably the main problem – we had a lot of support, but not enough.

DC John Christian would have been familiar with elections, pretty well, but I suppose the other four of you, really, was kind of new to you, was it, really?

Mr C Yes it was, very new.

DC What do you remember of that election, now – can you remember any details of that?

Mr C Of going round to see the people, you mean, or ...? Yes, I mean, it's very difficult to say what the public really feel. I think there's a lot of people call you in just to delay you going round so they know they're not going to vote for you – they want to stop you going round to see other people, I think. There's quite a bit of that going on! (*laughter*) At the election itself, that was the first time that

the STV system was used which really confused a lot of people – as you know, there were three candidates in Onchan, and people were under the impression they could vote 1, 2, 3 and, of course, they can't, they can only vote for one. And the votes that I got were actually used to get Leventhorpe elected.

DC Of course, he wasn't a member of the Manx Democratic Party, he was – he stood as an Independent.

Mr C That's correct – he resigned from the party so that he could stand as an Independent. So it was my votes that actually got him elected.

DC Well, that's perhaps one way of looking at it – whether that could be proved on paper, I'm not sure, because ... they were transferable votes, yes, that's right.
(laughter)

Mr C Well, yes – 'cos they went to – my votes – they were transferable votes to him, and he came to me afterwards and said, 'Thank you, it was your votes that got me in,' you know.

DC *(laughter)* On the doorstep, then, how were you received, apart from sitting you in and making you avoid – stop the other people getting round.

Mr C Very well, I didn't have any sort of bad reaction from anybody. It's not that we really wanted to alter that much, anyway, apart from the fact that, like the manifesto, you see, I didn't write that – that wasn't my manifesto – that was written by the Party, it wasn't my idea, it was the Party's ideas.

DC But abrogation, you must have been supporting it, then?

Mr C Oh I supported those things in there, but I'm saying it's not – I didn't write that as an Independent – I didn't put that forward as an Independent candidate.

DC The abrogation issue, was, I suppose, as big then as it ever has been, probably, but nothing's ever happened about it to make anything of that become a reality.

Mr C No. I believe in abrogation, I think it's the way forward, and if we'd have done it in 1976 when the – at the time, we had another survey done and spent another three-quarters of a million, or whatever it was on a survey to say that we should

abrogate – the timing was right and of course, in those proposals, was put forward that we'd have to build a new harbour extension for the increase in traffic that we'd get from the sea-way, and also we would have to build a new reservoir for the influx of people. So the Government in its wisdom decided not to abrogate and take no notice of them, but we'll still build a harbour extension and we'll still build the reservoir. And how many boats have we got now?

DC Hmm, all right, well that point's made, but you also, in this manifesto, it says, 'We believe that ways and means *must* be found to reintroduce the birch for crimes of violence.' There's another thing gone by the board, you see.

Mr C Yes, again, I would say that the majority of people in the Isle of Man would agree with that – sentiment – if you like, but we must have some kind of deterrent for the people that are causing mayhem with the population – not just here, but all over the world, it's a very sick world we live.

DC When you got together, then, as the Manx Democratic Party at meetings and so on, presumably all five of you and others, did you – was it easy to get agreement on issues?

Mr C Yes, fairly easy.

DC 'Cos it isn't always for a group to ...

Mr C No, no, we had disagreements, obviously, and we compromised and came to a conclusion that was satisfactory to all parties.

DC Alistair Robertson, Derek Hayes, Percy Quirk, Jim Hall – the late Percy Quirk, now, as it is now ...

Mr C Yes.

DC ... yes, but the whole thing, presumably, then – you'd have thought it would have disintegrated after the election, but it became – it then evolved ...

Mr C It evolved into something else – it evolved into the Conservative Party of Mann; and I got a letter from Margaret Thatcher, wishing us all the best 'cos I wrote to the Prime Minister. In other words, I wrote, wrongly, to ask permission if we

could be called 'The Conservative Party of Mann,' and she wrote back and said, 'it's of no concern to her's what we call ourselves,' but wished us all the best, and ...

DC Oh, right. (*laughter*)

Mr C ... which was nice to get a letter from 10 Downing Street! (*laughter*)

DC And what happened to the Conservative Party of Mann – other people came in, did they?

Mr C Other people came in and ... err ... Bob Noakes came in, and eventually it just – again, it just withered away through – I suppose, not lack of support from the public – people used to stop us and talk to us and say they agreed with some of the things – not everything we did, but some of the things – most of the things we did. But I think it was the people themselves, just got despondent, with what was happening all the time, and anywhere you tried to make a move you were blocked, or ... like for example, as I explained to you about the Homosexual Bill, you know, the way we were treated with that was just disgusting, really, it was just not, not right.

DC Well, it wasn't – or at least, the Government policy was to change the law because the UK had said, 'You change this law,' virtually.

Mr C Oh yes – I'm not on about that. It was the way we were treated by the Chief Minister, and his staff, when we presented – we were treated as though we were alien, or not fit to be there, and we were accused of falsifying the figures and falsifying the documents, and – which, you know, I thought was disgusting, quite honestly, and it's things like that that really, I think, destroyed the Conservative Party of Mann. That the reactions we got from officialdom was not very good.

DC And then, as a result of that, no candidates were ever put up by the Conservative Party of Mann, were they?

Mr C No, never put up again. I, I resigned because I – it was at that time, when I stood for the election, I had an accident, just before the election, and after the election I was taken very ill and I had major surgery. And that really put pay to a lot of

things, because I was in a bad way for quite some time with my spine, I had a major problem with my spine.

DC Right. Well, would it be round about this time, then, that you came forward with an extraordinary scheme which you still have the drawings of this – to build a big airport at Jurby – not just a secondary airport, and then along with that, some kind of huge hotel complex and entertainment areas and so on out at Ballaugh.

Mr C Yes, that's right.

DC Why – how did all that happen?

Mr C It all started with – sat in my office one day, and I had in my office a very large map of the world which was nine foot by twelve foot, and I used to study the map and look at different – and see the places that I'd been to all over the world, and reminisce, and it suddenly struck me, and after reading 'Mein Kampf' with Hitler, Hitler was going to run the world from the Isle of Man because it was the centre of the place to be. So I got a piece of string out, and I put a pin in the Isle of Man, and up to the Antarctic, and the Arctic and the Isle of Man is almost, not quite, but it's almost the centre of the world, so I thought, what a fabulous place to have a stopping off point. Now we've got an airport up there at Jurby which is doing nothing, is owned by Government, I thought what a fantastic idea to make that into an international airport, as a refuelling spot and a jump to go all over the world, which is quite logical. Of course, I had quite a bit of flak from different people, particularly a man named Flynn who accused me of flying Americans over for holidays from ... which was not the intention at all. The complex to the hotel and the indoor sort of summer venture place was just an added-on to the airport. Obviously, if you build an airport you'd need more hotels and a complex for people coming in, or stopover.

DC Right, the concept, this concept really, then, would have cost millions of pounds, wouldn't it, really.

Mr C Yes.

DC You didn't have the money to do it! (*laughter*)

Mr C Oh, no way, no, not quite that much. (*laughter*) I'm not that wealthy. But, what happened, was, it was about a month after all this had been in the paper – month, six weeks ...

DC Yes. It was well publicised, I remember.

Mr C Yes it was, it was all in the press. A lot of cartoons and some of them quite funny, eh ... I enjoyed it, really, it was quite good. And then after about, as I said, four to six weeks, I had a knock on my office door, and these two gentlemen and a lady came in to see me, and they were American. And they told me they had this, the drawings and all the clippings from the paper, and they said they'd actually flown in from Philadelphia to see me. Well I thought this is a big wind-up, somebody's having a real laugh at my expense, you know. (*laughter*)

DC It wasn't the first of April, was it?

Mr C No, no, it wasn't. Anyway, they finally convinced me who they were, and they were a business consortium of – quite a wealthy business consortium – American concern, and what they did, they went all over the world developing projects. That was their 'bag', if you like. And they'd studied this – had been up to the airport and studied the logistics of this idea of an airport, and they thought the idea was sound, and they wanted to take it further. And they asked if I could arrange for them to meet the Government and discuss it. I said, 'Well, you know,' I said, 'the Government's not going to be able to afford to ...' They said, 'We don't need any money whatsoever. We're prepared ...' They were prepared at that time, and this is 1980 ... mid 80s, to invest £200,000,000 of their own money in the project. All they wanted was a 99 year lease on the airport. And for five days I tried to get Government to see them, and they wouldn't see them. Finally, on the fifth day, I finally saw a Minister, at the time, who didn't treat me very kindly at all, but he sat me down in his office with a minion alongside him, put an egg timer in front of me and turned it over and said, 'You've got two minutes.' He listened to what I'd got to say, and he said, 'Not interested,' and asked me to leave. And the people who came to see me – the Americans – were absolutely disgusted and had never been treated like it anywhere before, and went away.

DC So nobody ever saw the Americans, then?

Mr C No.

DC Apart from yourself.

Mr C Yea.

DC Would there be a suspicion, perhaps, that there might have been ‘dirty’ money behind it?

Mr C I don’t honestly know – I can’t say, I mean, I didn’t think there was, and it didn’t appear – I mean, the people seemed genuine, as one thing I did see, they’d each got a gold American Express card – you don’t have to have one of them with nothing.

DC Right. It was in the wake of the SIB [Saving & Investment Bank] and the panic over taking finance into the Island, and that sort of thing, so there would be a wariness around, wouldn’t there, I suppose?

Mr C Maybe, yes, but maybe there was a wariness but then, it would have been courtesy for somebody in Government to see them and talk to them.

DC So you had no contact with those Americans after that?

Mr C No, none at all.

DC If that had gone ahead, with private money, it would have meant a huge battle over planning in the Isle of Man, presumably, as well, wouldn’t it, because, if you were going to have an international airport, it would expand over a pretty big area?

Mr C Yes. I didn’t go into the logistics of it, but, obviously, they’d looked at and thought it was feasible, and everything else, so I don’t know, I could take it any further, but that’s the truth of what happened.

DC At this time, then, you were still in business. You were basically selling cars, I suppose, were you?

Mr C Yes, yea.

DC What's the best kind of car to sell to make a profit?

Mr C There isn't one, *(laughter)* nobody knows. As far as the car trade is concerned, it's always been slated, and everybody's an 'Arthur Daley,' that's the image that the world gives to the motor trade. The motor trade is probably, throughout Britain, is probably one of the biggest employers of people, and is a very, very large industry. It is – it does have crooks, like any other business, and there are bad people, there are bad people that sell fish and chips, you know. It doesn't matter what business you're in. But the motor trade is a very difficult trade because people are always under the impression, the motor trade makes thousands and thousands of pounds out of a car, and they don't. It's actually a very, very small percent. And it's a very precarious business to be in, because you've always got to take part-exchange. And now, today, I think it's even more difficult, with the choice that people have – how you choose a car when there's so much, so much available.

DC Yea, well, we're spoilt for choice in every area of life. But when, yes, there are – I don't know how many car sales garages there are here in the Isle of Man, but it's a phenomenal number.

Mr C It's approximately eighty.

DC Eighty?!

Mr C Yes. We have enough garages in the Isle of Man for a 1.9 million population.

DC *(laughter)* Really?!

Mr C I don't know how they make a living.

DC Is that because, is that the reason you're now not selling cars, is it?

Mr C No, no, that's not the reason. The reason is 'cos I'm retired – I'm getting too old! *(laughter)* And also health reasons.

DC Yea, well, the car business, then, wasn't hugely profitable, you would say, would you?

Mr C Oh, I'm not saying it's not profitable, but it's not like people think it is. You know, you don't sort of buy a car for £5,000 and I've got £4,000 profit in it. You'd be lucky if you got £500 or £600. So, and then, of course, I've never understood the system that we have in the British Isles whereby we are the only business in the world that pays VAT on profit. So in effect, we pay 37½% tax.

DC Right.

Mr C Do you see what I'm getting at? ...

DC Yea, yea.

Mr C ... and I've never understood that, because it's not something you can claim back, the VAT can't be claimed back, you know, the car is a price – £5,000 – it's not £5,000 plus VAT. So if the garage makes £500 on it, he pays VAT on the £500.

DC Right, hmm. So, car industry, I mean, somebody going into this business today, not advisable here, in the Isle of Man, at least, anyway?

Mr C Well, no, we've got far too many in the Isle of Man – there's far too many people in it.

DC What was the first car you ever drove?

Mr C The first car I ever drove was a ... oh, (*laughter*) an *Opal*.

DC *Opal*, yea, was that – who made those, Ford, was it?

Mr C No, *Opal*, *Opal*.

DC *Opal* was a company in its own right, was it?

Mr C Yea – German, it's a German Vauxhall, I suppose, really. I think that was the first one I ever drove.

DC What was the best car you ever drove?

Mr C Oh, there isn't one.

DC No?

Mr C No. They're all ...

DC They're just cars, are they?

Mr C They're just cars.

DC *(laughter)* Right. Something you did drive, which you tell me no one else has done on the Isle of Man – I don't know whether that's right or not – Hovercraft.

Mr C Oh, yes, a Hovercraft – I was probably the first person, anyway, it maybe that someone has flown one since, but I was the first person ever to fly a Hovercraft in the Isle of Man. I flew it off Ramsey beach.

DC How did that happen, then?

Mr C It was a publicity thing I had for the Wynn's Organisation, and I brought it across to do demonstrations at Onchan Park and different places, and I took it down to Ramsey and flew off the beach at Ramsey and went out to sea and come back again and ...

DC And what was it like flying one of those, then?

Mr C Very, very ... very, very ... well, thrilling, I suppose, really. It was so good.

DC Like a boat going into the air, is it?

Mr C Well, yes. This was the trouble at that particular time, this was in, this was in the 60s – you're going back a long time, now. And, of course, then, they couldn't decide whether to give you a driver's license, a pilot's license, or an aircraft license, or a boat license *(laughter)* – they couldn't figure out, because you're actually nine inches off the floor, so actually flying, and so it was very, very difficult. And, of course, they are not really, then, they weren't very controllable, you had to anticipate a turn about 300 yards before you went into it. *(laughter)*

- DC** Oh, really?! And the size of the engine, was it, weren't very big, I suppose?
- Mr C** They were two *Vi* ... on that particular *Wren* craft, there was two *Villiers* aeroplane engines.
- DC** So difficult to control.
- Mr C** But a lot of fun.
- DC** Was this a sort of demonstration to try and sell them at that time.
- Mr C** No, no, no, it was just a demonstration, it was to let people see a Hovercraft and ...
- DC** Oh I see, right.
- Mr C** ... take passengers – I used to take the odd passenger in it, and take them round.
- DC** Now when you were working, round about this time, in the 60s, and we're talking here – what – '65, '66, '67 – something like that, you did some radio shows here, didn't you?
- Mr C** Yes, I did, yes.
- DC** Tell me about those.
- Mr C** Ah, yes. There were two programmes – two shows, and one was called *The Motor World*, which was all about motoring in general, and of course, pushing the Wynn's products at that particular time. And the other one was *Anglers Island*, which was a fishing programme. That was fun.
- DC** I take it from that that you are an angler then? (*laughter*)
- Mr C** Yes, yes, I'm a very keen angler – have been all my life. And it, that was quite good, I really enjoyed that.
- DC** Fishing in the Isle of Man – what's the difference between a fisherman and an angler – an angler is a sea, sea fisherman, is it?

Mr C No, no.

DC It's the other way round, is it?

Mr C No, there's no difference.

DC Oh, there's no difference?

Mr C No.

DC So you can be a land or sea?

Mr C Well, yes – you're an angler, well, a fisherman can be a professional fisherman, can't he?

DC Where do you do your fishing – or angling?

Mr C In the sea, rivers, lakes – I do the lot – sea and lake fly fishing – salmon, sea trout.

DC So there are stocked reservoirs now, but were there then?

Mr C Yes, yes, they've always been well stocked.

DC Yes, well, the rivers haven't got much in them, have they?

Mr C They used to have. The rivers here, many, many years ago used to be the finest in Europe – the sea trout rivers here were phenomenal, but of course, they've been polluted and poached to death. Poachers decimated the rivers in the seventies. And a known poacher, which I caught red-handed on the Douglas river, I took him to Court – I was then a river-watcher and a bailiff, and I took him to Court, and he was found guilty, and, at that particular time, he's probably the most – I won't mention his name, but he was the most famous poacher in the Isle of Man, and he had 56 prosecutions at the time that I caught him, and, anyway, the Deemster, again, no names, no pack-drill, he stood up in front of the Deemster and the Deemster found him guilty and fined him £50 and his words back to the Deemster was, 'If you keep increasing my fines like this, your Honour, I'll have to put the price of your fish up!' (*laughter*)

- DC** Now that sounds like a fiction, but you're telling me it happened?
- Mr C** No, I swear on my son's life that that's the truth!
- DC** Well, a river-watcher or bailiff, then, what duties did that involve?
- Mr C** It meant watching the rivers and looking out for poachers and keeping your eye open, you know, and things like that, just, just voluntary.
- DC** You weren't sent out at particular times and things like that, then?
- Mr C** No, it was just a matter for the club and for associations that I belonged to and keep a watch on the river.
- DC** *Anglers Island* then, was that title something to do with attracting people on holiday, as well, for angling, or not?
- Mr C** No, not necessarily. It was just for the local anglers talking generally about fishing, and that's all it was. Different methods, different flies, different types of bait and ...
- DC** Right. That's your radio – now who was here at Manx Radio at that time, then?
- Mr C** Oh, there was George Ferguson, of course, when he was a little boy. Louise Quirk, Don Allan, Bill Crisp, err ... I'm trying to think who else – I can't think who else.
- DC** Peter Kneale would be running I suppose, at that time, yes.
- Mr C** Peter Kneale, yes, yes.
- DC** And how did you get on with all these presenters and ...
- Mr C** Oh great. Manx Radio, then, was a fantastic place – it was magic to go through that era.
- DC** Why was that, then?

Mr C It was like a club. I mean, this might sound a bit strange, or far-fetched, but like, for example, I'd be driving down the road – and there was no such things then as mobile phones, or anything like that, they weren't invented – and suddenly I'd have Manx Radio on and I'd get a call, over the air, from Don Allan saying, 'Oh Frank, go and get the phone,' – not Frank Crompton – 'Frank, pick up the phone, somebody wants you,' you know, and I'd go and pick up the phone, you know, and stop! (*laughter*) It was used as a ... well ...

DC A bit like a community unit, or something.

Mr C Yes, yea – there was a lot of *umming* and *rrring* – I mean, not as professional as it is now, obviously, and everything else, but it was very, very fun, at the time – a great time.

DC *Motor World* was really a sponsored programme, I think, wasn't it?

Mr C Yes it was, it was a sponsored programme, by Wynn's, and it was motoring tips, and telling people how to do this and how to do that and how to use this product for that – a general sort of ...

DC 'Wynn's for Oil' is the phrase I remember, and there used to be commercials for Wynn's – this was an additive to your engine, was it?

Mr C Yea, well, there was, there was, oh, maybe a 150 different products altogether, but basically, without getting into the technicalities of the product, yes, you added it to your engine oil. It's still going strong now, and you can go and buy it now, you know, just the same its, one for the radiator, and all different products for different parts of the car.

DC In *Angler's Island* and *Motor World*, did you also play music to break up the conversation pieces?

Mr C Yes, yea. I'd go into the library and pick some records and ...

DC Now what was the library like, can you remember what that was, because it ...

Mr C Well, it was like a closet with a few records in it all piled up in the corner – it was a real tip really, (*laughter*) and it took me ages to find anything, 'cos there

was no ...

DC They weren't in alphabetical order?

Mr C No, there was no system, it was just a pile of LPs, you know, plastic LPs, or 45s or whatever.

DC So you'd just go and pick any old thing that you thought you'd like to play?

Mr C That's right, that was it, yea.

DC Right, and err, that, those little programmes would be about, what, 15 minutes each, or something, would they?

Mr C Yea, 15 – 20 minutes, something like that, yes.

DC Were these done live, or recorded?

Mr C No, they were recorded.

DC Yea, put onto reel to reel tape.

Mr C Yea.

DC Yea. And you'd have a presenter with you, then, presumably, then, at the time, a co-presenter?

Mr C No, no. I did them on my own.

DC You did them on your own – oh, yea, right. And that probably lasted what, a few years, I suppose, would it be?

Mr C Oh, 12 months, anyway.

DC Yes, because the music element of your programmes belongs to another facet of yourself, doesn't it, really?

Mr C Right, yep – you have been digging, haven't you! (*laughter*)

DC Where's the music, because, you were involved, not only in the Isle of Man, with music, but particularly across, as well?

Mr C Well, yes, now you're going back, now, to the 50s.

DC Yes.

Mr C I ... how it started. I first, when I was in the Navy – I was in the Royal Navy – and I joined when I was 15 – I was in Korea when I was 16. And when I came out, when I was 21, I didn't really know which way to go, what to do with my life. So I was at a crossroads of my life – didn't really figure what I needed to do, but while I was in the Navy, I'd done a couple of Forces shows, and I'd got this 'bug' to sing, and I'd got a reasonable voice, and I could sing. So, when I came out of the Navy, I was living with my parents in Ermstone, in Manchester, and there was an advert in the local paper in *The Manchester Evening News*, a singer was wanted for a big band of the day, which was Ivor Kirchin and his Band in the Locarno in Cheshire. So I thought, oh well, I'll give it a go, and I went and, I think I only knew one song at that particular time, and I sang this song, and, much to my surprise, I got the job. So suddenly now, I'm a singer now, with a big band, so I had to learn some music, which I did, and then I started singing with other bands, and I sang with Phil Moss, Peter Lee, Ray Ellington, Ted Heath. I had me own TV show on BBC, it was called, 'Songs for You' on a Friday afternoon, and I was resident compare and singer at the famous *Cabin Club*, just outside Manchester, which was possibly *the* club in the British Isles at the time, in the early 60s – late 50s, early 60s. My audience was other stars – it was exclusive to, really to show business and very wealthy people – millionaires and things like that – nobody else was allowed in – it was a very exclusive club. And I, basically, got a lot of training and I worked with some of the now great names, which were not so great, then, people like Frankie Vaughan, Bruce Forsyth, Norman Wisdom, who was a big star at the time. Err ... I'm trying to think of some of the others – I said Frankie – the King Brothers, Janie Martin – and these were the type that I learnt my trade with, and I was doing all kinds of different shows – I had a band of my own called, *The Comets*.

DC What name were you using, then, or was ...

Mr C My name was Frank Cane – that was my professional name.

DC C-A-N-E or...

Mr C Yes, C-A-N-E.

DC Frank Cane, yea. And you had your own, you had your own band, was it?

Mr C Yea, I had my own band, we were making records, then.

DC A six or seven piece band, was it?

Mr C Yes, rock and roll band, you know, we toured the – all the nightclubs and then toured the theatres throughout Britain and this kind of thing, and ... it was a lot of fun.

DC How long did that go on for, do you think?

Mr C Oh, I was pro for about eight years or something like that. And then semi-pro, and then I was doing a lot of club work in Manchester and around there, and I lived in Paris for a while, and I was singing at the *Moulin Rouge* in Paris and ...

DC Did you get, sort of, disillusioned with all that, or something, did you?

Mr C No, no – I loved the business, and I'm still sort of half involved, because I'm actually Manx Equity, I'm the figurehead for Manx Equity here, in the Isle of Man. And I've made quite a few films since I've been here and little bit parts, and things, and ...

DC And you are still composing music all the time, then?

Mr C Yes. I still write music, and I've got a couple of albums released and, I now devote a lot of my time to the computer. And I use the computer to make computer music, and build orchestras, if you like – start with a blank sheet, and I put a drum loop in, and then I play the strings, and I'll play the piano, and I play every instrument on the computer or with a keyboard. And again, I have different programmes which can mix and everything else, and produce different sounds, and ...

DC Yes, well, I've heard some of those, indeed. The other aspect which you've

surprised me with today, is, you've brought along a folio of your paintings, again, you use the computer for those.

Mr C Yes, it's computerised.

DC Yes ... and children's stories, as well.

Mr C Yes, well, the computer art.

DC Just forgive me for a minute, you don't look like a person who writes children's stories, to me! (*laughter*)

Mr C I'm the ogre! (*laughter*)

DC (*laughter*) I can imagine all sorts of stories, but not children's stories!

Mr C Oh, I write them as well, you know, but they're not for print ... (*laughter*) ... err ... yes, the children's stories. How these came about was through my niece, Clementine Kermode-Clague, who's – she's now coming up to 14, and when she was little I used to tell her these stories, and think up these stories and tell her. And the family used to say, 'Why don't you write?' Ah, you put it off, don't you? And you don't and anyway, I finally did. And it's called, 'The Adventures of Orky Duck.'

DC Orky Duck?!

Mr C Orky Duck, which is a little duck which lives in the Isle of Man and anyway, that's the basis of the story, it's the adventures of Orky Duck. And I got the book printed, published, which has sold, not thousands of copies, but hundreds, you know, and has done, I suppose, reasonably well for a little book. Now since then, I've written two more, and I've put them on the web, 'cos I'm very involved in the web business, and they're now on the web at kidsstoriesforyou.com.

DC Right, so kids can go on to hear – listen to them, can they, or what?

Mr C Well, no, they read them off the computer.

DC Oh, read them.

Mr C So there's all the characters, and then they can read the stories. It's a website that I've set up for children, free, to just read the stories, but it's only for young children up to eight years old.

DC Umm. And you put some CDs out of these, then, have you?

Mr C Yes. This was launched, actually, last week – Ottaker's in town have just decided to take them, and it's a new idea I had of putting the stories on a CD. And so it's called, 'The New CD Book,' and they're for sale, now, in Douglas.

DC Then tell me about the web and how much you're involved with that?

Mr C Well, since I retired from the motor trade, with all the things that I, for therapy with my health, the doctors asked me to get involved in something – not to sort of vegetate, to get over some of the problems I had, so I got more involved with the computer and I learned a lot more about it than maybe the average. And then I came up with an idea, with a partner I've got, David Kinrade, with manxautos.com which is an idea that advertises cars for the garages on the web, Manx Autos doesn't sell anything, it's just purely advertising the garages cars, and the cars are updated every week, and new photographs put on, and some are movies, and some are ActiView, and it's become the top site in the Isle of Man. I suppose, much to my surprise, but we're getting up to sort of 10,000 hits a week ...

DC Really?!

Mr C ... which is quite fantastic when you think it's just a car site – it's nothing else. And just since Christmas, or just before Christmas, we redeveloped it, and it's now become the first web magazine on the Isle of Man, so it's actually a motoring magazine, and I do test drives of different cars, and motoring information – just like you'd go and buy a motoring magazine, but it's on the web, and it's become quite successful. Plus, of course, there's lot of branches from that – there's manxhouses.com, manxfindit.com, which is a web directory, manxartists.com, which is an art gallery for any Manx artist to go onto to show his works all over the world.

DC So this must take up a lot of time?

Mr C Yes, it does take up quite a bit of time.

DC You're full time working almost, again, are you? (*laughter*)

Mr C No, I'm not full time, by no means, but it does take me a coup ... two or three days a week, it takes up of my time. But it's given me something to do, and I'm enjoying it. And, of course, the music side, I really love building.

DC Well, that gives you the freedom to do whatever you like, the music side, doesn't it, you know?

Mr C Yes.

DC Except you – I suppose – yes you can, you can have an orchestra as well, if you want to create a 16-man orchestra, you could do that, of course, couldn't you?

Mr C That's right, you can. You build it, sort of like, in layers. It's quite interesting – some of the programmes are quite expensive to do it, and the mixers, but it's good fun – I get a kick out of it, anyway.

DC We didn't cover your show business career in any detail. You, apart from being in some films, which we'll talk about – when you were doing these shows, you were involved with quite a lot with some big name stars, I think, weren't you?

Mr C Yes. In the late 50s, early 60s, the people that I sort of worked with, or did shows with, or entertained particularly at *The Cabin Club*, was people like Bruce Forsyth, Harry Secombe, Tommy Cooper, Frankie Vaughan, Janie Martin, King Brothers.

DC You mentioned Ray Ellington, as well, I think, as well, didn't you?

Mr C Yes, yea.

DC And he was on the Isle of Man, quite a bit, towards the end of his career, really.

Mr C Yes. The last time I saw him here, I think, when was that – when was he last

here – was it in the 70s?

DC Probably, yes, I should think so, and was at the Holiday Centre, Isle of Man Holiday Centre.

Mr C Ah well, when it burnt down, and he lost all his music and everything.

DC Yes.

Mr C Oh, he was quite a character – real character – made you – he used to – he had this habit of – I'd be in front of him, and he'd be playing the bongos, or whatever, and they'd be singing a number, and he'd be telling me *Goon* stories at the back, and making me laugh, you know, and trying to sing and laugh was just impossible, and sometimes I'd just break down, I couldn't stand it, I was just in fits, laughing, it was terrible!

DC Right. Karl Denver was another singer that you were pretty matey with, I think?

Mr C Yes, yes, Karl and I used to knock about together, at one time, again, this is going back in the – gosh, it's got to be the 50s, 60s – when he made that record, 'Whim Away,' I think it was called.

DC 'Whim Away,' hmm, hmm.

Mr C And Mike Sarn, was – do you remember the name Mike Sarn?

DC Oh yes, 'Come Outside,' yes.

Mr C Yea, that was another lad that – we used to knock about together, and ...

DC Where did you go? In bars, mostly, I suppose, was it?

Mr C Oh, yes, but then, of course, Manchester, at that time, was a better place than London, it was the top place in the British Isles for club life and some fantastic clubs. I opened *The Stork Club* in Manchester, with *The Dallas Boys*, I topped the bill then, to *The Dallas Boys*. And I believe one of *The Dallas Boys* lives here now, doesn't he, on the Isle of Man?

DC Yes, yes.

Mr C There was *The Stork Club*, *The Athenaeum Club*, *The Candlelight Room* – there were some fabulous clubs, and of course, the coffee clubs – it just bred these coffee clubs. And spaghetti houses – Italian restaurants.

DC Yea, yea. You must have seen Tommy Cooper close up, then?

Mr C Oh, you could say close up, yes we were doing a show with Tommy – Tommy was the main star, actually, at *The Manchester Palace*, and at that particular time, I was a double act with my partner, Jerry De'Roser, who was my school chum, and we grew up together in Salford, where I was born, and Brian Storey, his real name is. And we were doing this Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis act. Now, alright, I don't look anything like Dean Martin, I know that, but being tall, and then I had hair, and Jerry is the exact double of Jerry Lewis even today. He looks exactly the same as Jerry Lewis, he talks like him, he walks like him, he sings like – he's just like a carbon copy. And of course this made me look more – I was the straight singer and – so we were doing this double act with the show in *Manchester Palace*, and Tommy Cooper was on after us, so we – because it was a matinee, we rushed to the – sat in the front row of the seats at the theatre, and Tommy had a habit – maybe a bad habit of belittling smaller people, and making people look a bit of a fool, and everything. So he used to come on, and he was doing his act, and one of his little tricks was, he'd get a piece of rope, and then he'd say to the people, 'This is a piece of rope.' And he'd throw it to somebody in the audience, and they'd tie a knot in it, and then he'd get the thing back and say, 'Look at this wonderful knot that's been tied in a piece.' And of course, he's very, very funny, and you'll laugh – you can't do anything else. He'd then throw the rope back to the person, ask them to tie another knot in it, and then make a big thing about how clever this man was, tying two knots in a piece of rope – that's all the gag was. So, but he would pick *me*. So he threw me the piece of rope, and I tied a knot in it and threw it back, and then he'd made a big thing about this tall gent down here tying a knot in the rope, then he threw the piece of rope back to me, and I just put it in my pocket – I wouldn't give it him back. Well, of course, I ruined his gag, and of course he wasn't very pleased. So that night, I'm at *The Cabin Club*, in Manchester, and he came in, like he normally did, for a meal, and a drink, and he had a few drinks, and I'd had a few drinks, and we stood at the bar and we started arguing and then it came to fisticuffs. And I'm having a go at him, and he's having a go at me,

(*laughter*) Harry Secombe's only five foot, and there's this big Tommy Cooper – half as big as me again, and me going at one another, and Harry's between us say, 'Now come on boys, stop now, boys, that's it boys.' Quite funny, really, well, I think we squared up afterwards, and shook hands and there was no hard feelings.

DC He was a great comedian, Tommy Cooper, wasn't he?

Mr C Oh, phenomenal – to see him live, was just nothing like on television – I can guarantee you – totally different.

DC You also met Frank Sinatra, didn't you?

Mr C Yes, I did, that was in 1957, I think. '57, '58, when he came across – I think he'd just made the film 'From Here to Eternity,' and he'd just made a big comeback. And he came into *The Cabin Club* where I was appearing, and he was having a meal, and I did a couple of numbers and he called me over to the table and I couldn't talk, I was so nervous, I was so scared and gob-smacked that the man was there – my idol and everything. And he just said, 'Well done, boy.' And that was it and I went away, and (*laughter*), but I've never forgotten it.

DC 'Well done, boy.' (*laughter*). What about your career in films, then, because you've spent a lot of time as an extra, as well, haven't you?

Mr C Yes, I've done a few bits and pieces. The first one was 1954, 'The Baby and the Battleship,' with John Mills.

DC Gosh, that's going back a bit, isn't it?

Mr C Yes, it is. And then I did 'Single Handed' with Tab Hunter.

DC That – where would we see you in that, if it comes up on television. Or would we, because a lot of ...

Mr C I don't know, I mean, I'm playing a German sailor rowing a boat – that's basically what I'm doing, so, I'm supposed to be going to capture Tab Hunter who's shooting people on the ship, because the ship that was used was *HMS Bermuda* – I think it was *Bermuda* was used as the ship that he was firing at.

DC Yes.

Mr C Some of the others, here in the Isle of Man, such as, ‘All Little Animals’ with John Hurt – I played a lepidopterist in that.

DC A what?

Mr C A lepidopterist, which is a man that is a fanatic about butterflies and moths and ...

DC These will all be non-speaking parts, presumably?

Mr C No, that was a speaking part.

DC Oh yea.

Mr C I didn’t say much, like, except – oh, what was the words – ‘It’s that bloody idiot again!’ (*laughter*)

DC What about other films, here in the Isle of Man?

Mr C Yea, ‘The Harpist,’ ‘The Brylcreem Boys,’ ‘Tichborne Claimant’ ...

DC So they are like walk-on parts, more than anything, are they?

Mr C Yes, yea – was in a riot scene with the ‘Tichborne Claimant,’ and err ... I was actually on television last week, with this new series that’s on, I played a bit part in ‘Serious and Organised’ with Martin Kemp and the other actor – can’t remember his name.

DC This involves a lot of hanging around, doesn’t it, this film business.

Mr C Oh, you wouldn’t believe the amount of hanging about, but I’m fascinated with the industry – it’s the way they do things, and it’s so interesting to me to see – you don’t – when you see the film, it is nothing like what actually happens, ‘cos all you see is that little box squared that you see on the screen. But if you could get the screen and go the other side, there’s a guy holding a piece of cardboard! I remember them doing a scene with ‘The Harpist,’ so what they had to do, was

to make it look like a dream scene, and we're at the bar, and I'm – it's – it was a bar in Ramsey, in the square, there, that we'd used as the set, and it was supposed to be a German brothel, a nightclub type of brothel. So these two main actors are having a fight, and they wanted to make it look like a dream scene, so he – one of the runners, or the boys comes on, and they hold a big piece of ... err ... like a tin foil plasticy thing, and they wobble it about, and the camera's looking in at it and it makes it all go (*laughter*) ... and makes it look like a dream scene, something like that.

DC Oh, right, yea.

Mr C It's like the riot scene, if you see the 'Tichborne Claimant,' you see the riot scene where all the people are chanting up and down with banners and that – it's a bit – there was only about 15 or 20 of us, but you think there's hundreds on screen (*laughter*) – I just don't know how they get that together and they make it like hundreds.

DC Yes. It's worth sitting around to watch it, is it, then?

Mr C It is, yea, well, for me it is, but it is a lot of sitting around, and the times you have to do things over and over, the director's not got the – the light's not right, this angle's not right, and then you spend 16 hours doing all this, and then they don't use it!

DC But they pay you for each hours?

Mr C Oh, no, no, you're not paid for each hour – you get a set fee.

DC Per day?

Mr C Per day.

DC Per day, yea.

Mr C Or you get a contract if you've got a speaking part – you get a fee, the Equity rates, which I am ...

DC You can look after. (*laughter*)

Mr C Yea, 'cos I am – I am Manx Equity, (*laughter*) or represent Equity in the Isle of Man. That's my professional name, Frank Cane, who represents that.

DC Right and err ... there won't be all that many Equity members in the Isle of Man, anyway, will there?

Mr C Yes there are, there's quite a few; there's quite a few stars here and people that live here, and – there's about – I don't know – maybe 40-50.

DC Really, as many as that?

Mr C Yea, yea.

END OF INTERVIEW