

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

**‘TIME TO REMEMBER’**

**Interviewee:** Mrs Irene Curphey

**Date of birth:** 17<sup>th</sup> February 1913

**Place of birth:**

**Interviewer:** David Callister

**Recorded by:** David Callister

**Date recorded:** 18<sup>th</sup> August 2003

**Topic(s):** Head Cook at Castle Rushen School  
Training as a Master Confectioner  
Douglas High School and Arbory School  
Archibald Knox  
St Ninian’s School and Park Road School  
The ‘big snow’ in the 1920s  
Leaving school and living in Colby  
Working for bakery and cafes in Castletown  
Running Ballabeg Post Office with husband  
*The Meadowside Choir*  
WW1 memories  
Early school days  
Entertainment

**Irene Curphey - Mrs C**  
**David Callister - DC**

**DC** Right, so this is Irene Curphey at the Old Post Office in Ballabeg. It is, today, the 18<sup>th</sup> August 2003. Irene, born on 17<sup>th</sup> February 1913, so ... you're in your 91<sup>st</sup> year, then! (*laughter*)

**Mrs C** I'm always getting told that by a man in Port Erin, and he lived next door here. And he always used to say, Stan Hill, his name is, and I was never an age, I was always in your, sort of – you know ...

**DC** In your nineties – in your sixtieth, or sixty-first, or whatever ...

**Mrs C** Yes, yes, or ninety-first year now, yes.

**DC** What does it feel like, then, does it feel – do you feel any different than when you were sixty, say?

**Mrs C** No, (*laughter*) not really, no, I feel alright, really. If I could, you know, I shouldn't grow – I'm not moaning about anything, really, but I can't see like I'd like to see.

**DC** No – do you watch the television, though?

**Mrs C** Oh I watch the television – I can see that a bit, but I can't read, can't read. But I can write with a – you know, I guess me writing, and I seem to, you know, manage the writing not too bad – they say they can understand me writing.

**DC** Do you get out and about much, or not?

**Mrs C** Oh yes, I do, and I think it's a good thing to do if you can.

**DC** Keep on the go, aye.

**Mrs C** Keep on the go. And I've always been with, amongst younger people, you know, young people as well as old people.

**DC** Keeps you young, doesn't it?

**Mrs C** Yes. I was at Castle Rushen School – Head Cook down there for about 30 years.

**DC** Really.

**Mrs C** Yes.

**DC** That's when you were known as Auntie Renee, was it?

**Mrs C** That's right and I'm Auntie Renee all over the south of the Isle of Man, I think, now, (*laughter*) but it's lovely – I like it! (*laughter*)

**DC** How did you become a Master Confectioner?

**Mrs C** Well, I went to Miss Paul's, first, to serve me time. I was three years with Miss Paul. She had a shop in Castletown, in Castle – *Castle Café* it was called – it was right by the castle. And then I was three years there, and then I went up to Mr Kermodé's, up Arbory Street. I was three years there, improving, (*laughter*) supposed to be. And then I was three years with Miss Duggan. I always wanted, really, to be a nurse – that's what I wanted to do.

**DC** Did you?!

**Mrs C** Yes, I always wanted to be a nurse, and then it used to worry me that somebody would come in, belonging to me, into Noble's that I knew. And I thought, oh I don't ... but I had all the papers all to go to Walton Hospital in Liverpool, everything was all signed up to go and then me father came home from sea, and he hadn't been home for a long time, and he sort of talked me out of going he was saying, 'I'll never see you.' And all this, you know.

**DC** Well you weren't seeing him, very much, either, were you?

**Mrs C** No! So that finished that. So it was then that I went for a confectioner – I'm going backwards, now. It was then I went for a confectioner, you see so. But it was – and then it came in that the school, with Barbara Bean. It was handy with, you know, little girl that there'd be somebody home in the holiday for her holidays, and I was getting holidays from school at the same time.

**DC** At the same time, of course. What did you like best about confection, really, then? What did you like most making, would you say?

**Mrs C** I liked decorating wedding cakes and things like that because my art was my favourite subject in school. I went to the Douglas High School – Arbory School first, of course. And then I went to Douglas, and ...

**DC** You felt you were an artistic person, really, were you?

**Mrs C** Well, I think I must have been a bit, 'cos I liked it and I could do no wrong with Mr Knox.

**DC** Oh right – Archie Knox!

**Mrs C** Yes! – could do no wrong. I was ten out of ten, nine out of ten. It was me best subject.

**DC** So were you the best in the class, do you think?

**Mrs C** No! Oh maybe at drawing and things like that, but I wasn't what you call a brilliant scholar at all! (*laughter*)

**DC** What was Archibald Knox like as a teacher, generally, would you say?

**Mrs C** Well he was a good teacher, but he was a bit ec ... well I shouldn't say ...

**DC** Eccentric?! (*laughter*)

**Mrs C** Eccentric – he was.

**DC** Well, he was allowed to be, I suppose, really.

**Mrs C** Just a bit, but when he'd come into assembly in the mornings there were – oh, the boys used to clap and all this, you know. This is before we separated – there was boys and girls when I went first. And then, of course, the boys went up to St Ninian's, and we were in Park Road, you see. But I left – I didn't go in for any big exams, I left when, oh, you wouldn't remember the big snow we had.

**DC** I wouldn't, but you can tell me about it.

**Mrs C** Well, we were warned in the school that we'd better all get home.

- DC** What year was that, then?
- Mrs C** Now then ...
- DC** Well if you were, if you were there, it would be 1920 ...
- Mrs C** 15, I'd be about 15 – I was ...
- DC** '27 or '28, we'd be talking about – late '20s, anyway.
- Mrs C** Yes, yes, late '20s.
- DC** Aye, and you said you had to go home.
- Mrs C** Well, we didn't get home – we were stuck in the train and spent the night in Ballasalla, and ...
- DC** What, on the train?
- Mrs C** In lodgings, in lodgings we had to be. And then we started off the next morning and we were stuck in Castletown – we were in that ... *The Viking*, as it is now. And we didn't get home until three o'clock in the afternoon. We were all that time with err ... they were digging out the engines and carriages and everything that time – it was dreadful!
- DC** So that would keep you off school for a week or so ...
- Mrs C** I never went back.
- DC** Oh, never went back?!
- Mrs C** No, because I was 16 come, you see? That finished me, I'd had enough. I wasn't one of these, you know, academics, or whatever you call them, (*laughter*) no, I wasn't really, then ... umm ...
- DC** And then it was going to be nursing, and that didn't happen. And then ...
- Mrs C** Yes, it was going to be nursing, and then ...

**DC** Then it was confectionary, was it?

**Mrs C** It was confectionary, then.

**DC** Well, there was a big demand for confectionary in those days, wasn't there?

**Mrs C** Oh, yes. You had to work – well I used to cycle from Colby – that's where we lived then. I used to cycle from Colby to Castletown, to start work at the weekends for quarter to six, so we were leaving home at half past five, on the bike. And then, in the summer time, of course we were working 'till seven and eight and sometimes later than that at night. So it was an awful long day, as well, you know, it was a – it was really heavy work, really.

**DC** Yes. What were the sort of things that were selling best then, the big sellers of those days?

**Mrs C** Well, there was all the different – you see these three shops were in Castletown, they were all together, I don't know how they used to ...

**DC** All three in the same town! (*laughter*)

**Mrs C** Yes, and they were all making a living. It was wonderful, really.

**DC** So what are we talking about – fruit pies and err ...?

**Mrs C** Yes, we started off – had to do the bread first, you see. Mixing the bread, and when that was rising, the apprentices had to go out to swill the windows, in those days, you know, the outside windows, sometimes still dark when you were doing this! And this was at Miss Paul's. And then we go back and give the bread another, you know, pull – turnover and what have. And then we'd be getting ready – the pasty stuff had to be cut by hand – everything, potatoes. Mind you, in those days, everything was fresh, it's not like nowadays – things are different, now.

**DC** No, you didn't have anything sitting in a fridge or anything like that, really, no.

**Mrs C** Oh no, there would be no fridges, then. So everything had to be fresh, and the meat was fresh when it came in – the mince for the pies and the pasties and

everything. And then we went on then to the scones and everything like that. Then the cakes would be in the afternoon. In Kermodé's they had a *Scotch* oven. You see the ovens were different.

**DC** Oh right.

**Mrs C** You see, there was a *Scotch* oven in Mr Kermodé's place up Arbory Street, and that had – the things had to go in at different times there, to Miss Paul's.

**DC** Oh right. Yes the ovens were operated differently, yes. What form of heat heated the ovens then, was it a coal or?

**Mrs C** Coke – Miss Paul's was coke, and it was in the backyard at the back of the oven. It's down at the – it's the electric shop now, in Castletown – that's where it was. And the coke was out – the fire was out at the back, and there was coke there, but in Kermodé's it had to have the – I think it was coal they were using there. It had to get the 'flash' – what they used to call it the 'flash' and it was the bakers that'd seen to that, you see. We couldn't use ...

**DC** Was there no gas oven, then?

**Mrs C** No, it was just this oven, and then the things that had to – it was bread – bread used to go in and the bread would be first and then we'd go onto the meat pies and the pasties and things like that, and then we'd come on – there'd be another 'flash' going on to put the heat up a bit.

**DC** So it was a busy time getting all this ready.

**Mrs C** Oh it was a busy time, and it was a full day's work, sort of thing, and puff pastry. Oh, that had to be done pretty early in the morning, too – the puff [pastry] – everything done with puff. Mind you, they were very good confectioners really. You know, the Miss Duggan's and the Miss Paul and they all knew what they were about, they were very good.

**DC** Was it all sold by the end of the day, all this material?

**Mrs C** Well, most of it was. Most of it was, really.

- DC** So you knew what the demand was going to be?
- Mrs C** Yes, yes, and you get the list and then we'd start on it, you see.
- DC** But you'd be in your element when you'd got a birthday cake to do, I suppose, really.
- Mrs C** Well, that was in the afternoon, when you would be – have time to do the birthday cakes and the wedding cake would take a day, you see, pretty well, if it was the three tier, because and then you had to beat the icing sugar and all by hand – there was no machines! So we had to then – but I used to go down after I was married – they used to send for me if they were busy and Mr Quayle had taken over – *Duggan's Café* – and I – he'd got more modern things, say, you know, in those days. His pie block, that you ... that you'd pull down, you know, and block the pies and whatnot ... different things like that – and a machine for the – mixing the cakes and things. And he used to, you know, he was more modern than the others, yes. But then the job came up for the school, and I took that job and I was there for 30 years, in umm ... Park ... in Castle Rushen, and the most happy days of my life, nearly – were lovely!
- DC** How did you come to get that job then, was just advertised and you applied for it?
- Mrs C** It was just advertised and I applied for the job and got it, because (*laughter*) – I don't know. I went in the room, and I always remember getting pushed in ...
- DC** Pushed?!
- Mrs C** ... by Mr Wilkinson ...
- DC** Yes. (*laughter*)
- Mrs C** Do you remember him?
- DC** Yes, the Director of Education.
- Mrs C** The Director of Education, and it was my turn to go in, and when I see all these people sitting round the table to be interviewed, you know, there was about



seven or eight people sitting round the table, and one woman. And I said, 'Oh, I'm not going in there!' And he pushed me in! (*laughter*)

**DC** And they asked you all sorts of questions, didn't they?

**Mrs C** Yes. And then, of course, Mr Cubbon from – he was the Headmaster in Rushen School – he said, 'Oh, she's been working in Miss Duggan's.' And all this, you see, so that carried the day for me.

**DC** Oh yes.

**Mrs C** But it was lovely. And then when I got to the school, it was Mr Cretney, and of course, he was at school at the same time as me in Douglas. But of course the boys and girls didn't – we only mixed at Christmas for the party. (*laughter*)

**DC** Yes, you were kept separate, weren't you, yes?

**Mrs C** Yes, we were kept separate, but we mixed at – for the party at Christmas time, you see.

**DC** So was Mr Cretney – was Head at Castle Rushen High School?

**Mrs C** He was Head, yes, when I first went ...

**DC** What do you – what boys do you remember being there now, 'cos they would be all grown up – and beyond grown up, wouldn't they, yes?

**Mrs C** They're ... well, they are over 70! (*laughter*)

**DC** Yes. (*laughter*)

**Mrs C** John, me son-in-law, just missed coming in because he was just that much – well, only a few months too old, you see. So he's 70 now, so ...

**DC** Have any of them gone on to be well known, then, have they?

**Mrs C** Well, Noel, and Miles and ...

- DC** Hang on – Noel Cringle, Miles Walker, yes.
- Mrs C** Yes. They were – I don't – they weren't quite the first – they were the second year, I think, that came in, you see. And Eddy Lowey – they were the second year.
- DC** What were you dishing up for them at mealtime, then?
- Mrs C** Well, at first, you see, the cost was only five pence – that was five pence for a dinner. But we all – they had fresh vegetables, they had potatoes, which we started off at the very first peeling, and there was about – there was about 120 started the school the first time, you see. So we were peeling potatoes at first, but then we got the machine came in. And we used to do – some liked stew, some liked hotpot, some liked – they all liked different things, but their favourite seemed to be – you get – I get a call to me even now – cheese and onion pie, they loved that! A lot of them, if they liked cheese or onion, you see. Of course if they didn't like – they didn't like it so much, but everyone seemed to like that.
- DC** Cheese and onion pie ... it's pastry, of course, yes.
- Mrs C** Pastry and then the potatoes had to be put on and mashed with butter and pepper, and then you put the – do you want to know how to make it? (*laughter*)
- DC** Oh yes.
- Mrs C** Well you line the tin with pastry – the big long tins, they were, you line the tin with pastry. And then you chop the onion fine, put it in the bottom, and just put a bit of milk over the top to soften the onion. And then you grate the cheese and put that on top of the onion, and then you beat the cream, the potatoes, and put that over the top, and sprinkle some more cheese on the top of that – that's all it is, really.
- DC** And then you put a pasty lid on that again?
- Mrs C** No, no, we leave it and then the cheese makes it nice and coloured on the top.
- DC** What sort of pastry would you use for that, just ordinary?

- Mrs C** Just the ordinary short pastry, yea, and then cut it in squares, you see.
- DC** Did you have to work out menus for the week for them, or ...?
- Mrs C** Yes, we done the menus.
- DC** There wouldn't be a choice of meals – they'd have to get what was going, would they
- Mrs C** They got what was going, (*laughter*) and we got to know all the different – what they wanted. It's funny, isn't it, we seemed to know – and if they wanted big ones or little ones, you see.
- DC** What did they leave on their plates that they didn't like, anything?
- Mrs C** Well, well, sometimes there was some things they wouldn't want, or something or ...
- DC** Cabbage?
- Mrs C** Yes, but (*laughter*) Mr Boucher, one of the teachers, used to grow a lot of spinach ...
- DC** Oh yea.
- Mrs C** ... and of course they didn't know they were getting that, because they'd be coming in with big bath full of spinach and they were going, 'Ugh,' you know, like this. But they didn't know we were having cabbage that day, and the spinach was going in the cabbage, (*laughter*) so they were getting it just the same – it was good for you! But, and then we used to buy ... umm ... what do you call them? ... cowheels, and things like that. And we'd great big, big pans at that time, and we used to stew them to get the good out of the cowheels, to go in the gravy. They all – there weren't all these different things to get the goodness out of things, you see ... umm ...
- DC** Was there any direction from the Board as to what you should use, and so on, in those days? Or was it – did you have total discretion on what you should buy and use.

**Mrs C** No, we – they let us really buy what we wanted. Miss Stubbs, who was the Head Supervisor, like, she was, on all the schools, Miss Stubbs, her name was.

**DC** But you had freedom to buy your own materials.

**Mrs C** Yes, well we had to buy – we had our own grocers – we used to get them from Collister's, the grocers, and Alf Coates was good to us for different things, and Cubbons the butchers, at the time, at that time, we used to get ...

**DC** How many staff would you have working with you then?

**Mrs C** Well, it was – to start off when we were only – it started off from about 120, I think it was, there was four of us at that time, just four. There was me, and there was the assistant – oh Mrs Harrison, the assistant confectioner, sort of thing. And then two that used to come in to ... err – oh, there was Mrs Collister. Well, we were all so friendly, nobody ever left! And they just – when the number went up, we got more staff in, and we finished – I think it was eight or ten staff when I left. But the number had gone up then – we used to start off in the September – I think we started about 500 in the September ...

**DC** Yes, in the school.

**Mrs C** Yes, and then some of them would be leaving during the year, you know. But it started off in the September.

**DC** What did you do for puddings for the boys, then?

**Mrs C** Oh, (*laughter*) oh, all different things. Well, of course, there was always once a fortnight we'd have rice, sort of thing, rice pudding. But we used to get the milk from Walkers, of course, and we'd be going ten gallons of milk, in those days – I don't know what they do now. But we – eight and nine and ten gallons, and if there wasn't rice pudding there'd be custard, custard or things like that. And we'd do boiled – steamed puddings, well then we'd be using suet sometimes.

**DC** Of course you would, yes, yes.

**Mrs C** Yes. With the apple, apples, yes, we used to do that. We had a steamer by that time, with all, you see, that used to help. And then – oh, chocolate pudding,

ginger pudding and err ...

**DC** So you had ...

**Mrs C** ... syrup sauce on the ginger pudding and – we used to try to get – Miss Stubbs used to say to get the colours, you see, you know. Sometimes we'd be doing choc ...

**DC** Yes, oh that's right, yes – make it look attractive.

**Mrs C** Make it look attractive.

**DC** So you'd have to have all this done and served and finished within an hour, virtually, wouldn't you?

**Mrs C** Well, we started work you see – well, I used to go down on the eight o'clock bus in the morning, and the dinner was at twelve, so ...

**DC** Just one sitting?

**Mrs C** No, it got to be there was two sittings before ... you see, with it being so long ... it's so long, and the time, sort of thing, from the time I started to the time I finished, there was a big ...

**DC** Big change.

**Mrs C** ... big change, you see, in all the things we used, and everything. There was – the school – we changed schools – we started off in the huts, you know, where the sailors – sailors used to be in Castletown – we started off there.

**DC** So was there a dining room – a hut for a dining room?

**Mrs C** Oh yes, there was a dining room, and all the passages to the different classrooms – joining up all the different rooms. And then there was a room – another big building built at the – for the sports, you know, and concerts and things like that. That was built on while I was there. And then of course, Miss Wells became Headmistress after Mr Cretney went. He went away – he was – he'd done so well here, in opening that school, that he was – he got this job in

Wolverhampton, that was Mr Cretney, yea. He done very well in Castletown, he was a nice Headmaster. And then Miss Wells came as Headmistress for a while until Mr Smith came. And he was a good man, too. He was a real friend of mine. And his photo's up there in the corner. *(laughter)* No, he was a good friend. And then I left just before Mr Taverner started – I left then.

**DC** Well, you do remember going into the new school, though, do you?

**Mrs C** Oh, yes.

**DC** That must have been a big change!

**Mrs C** *(laughter)* Oh yes, it was! And the – they'd taken out – I don't know what they thought we were going to work on – the men – trust men! They took all the ... table, and everything, what they thought we were going to work on, I don't know. There was all things going round the wall, you know, but err, small tables, but there was a big table we used to use in the middle of the floor and they'd taken that out. And we went out to get it, and we were carrying it in, and one of the – Kate and I, carrying it in, and the Clerk of Works was shouting, 'Leave that alone, you're not bringing it in!' But we'd brought it in, though. But they'd no idea of what we really wanted.

**DC** No, and there'd been no ... there'd been no discussion about it, or anything?

**Mrs C** No, no, never, so it – it was a bit of a changeover to go into the new school – but it was lovely.

**DC** But you had better facilities, would you, [unclear]?

**Mrs C** Oh yes. But they had to be altered a few times, they weren't perfect to start off with. And then they never realised that there would be a big intake of children, and the school would grow, which it did. Because the school should have been bigger in the first place, you know, than what they did. And then we had to have these caravans, you know things ...

**DC** The additional classrooms, and so on, yes.

**Mrs C** ... classrooms.

**DC** And Jack Curphey was your husband when we were in this – you, actually, in this very house, now, which was the post office at the time.

**Mrs C** Yes, yes.

**DC** Tell me about that – what do you remember about that?

**Mrs C** You mean when I came here to live?

**DC** Yes.

**Mrs C** Well, I knew everybody, ‘cos you knew everybody in the village, then. I’m afraid I don’t, now. *(laughter)* And then, being in the post office, people coming in for pensions, and children’s allowances, of course, they came on. You knew everybody, but now I miss that, now. I don’t know the people so well, now – I used to know everybody.

**DC** It must have been pretty small for a post office though, was it?

**Mrs C** It was only small, but it was – that was the division, there, you see?

**DC** So that’s like one small room really, isn’t it?

**Mrs C** Yes, yes, a small room with that, you see. Well then Jack ... umm ... divided it up a bit small and make this room bigger, you see, that’s what it was. But – oh, well, I can remember at Christmas – I’ve been on this floor, on me knees, sorting letters you know! I had to divide English and Manx letters, and cards ...

**DC** These would have been the ones going outwards, were they?

**Mrs C** Going outwards, yes, because you had to catch ... I was never here when Jack used to go on the umm – I remember him doing it, but I wasn’t living here when he used to go down on his bicycle. It was when we used to have to put the mail on the bus ...

**DC** Oh right.

**Mrs C** ... and you had to stand out here to stop the bus to put the mail on, you see.

Well, once or twice he has missed the bus and he's had to cycle into Ballasalla to catch the bus going round!

**DC** Right. (*laughter*)

**Mrs C** He's done that! (*laughter*) He'd tell me off for telling that.

**DC** But talking about Christmas, I mean, and all that, would there be parcels as well, at Christmas?

**Mrs C** Oh – there was an awful lot of parcels then. Well, they used to send geese away, and turkeys and big cakes and things like that you wouldn't, well, you wouldn't – it would be terrible, the weight of them now, you see, the weight has gone so expensive, now, of course, yes.

**DC** Of course, yes.

**Mrs C** And no, it was a very busy time at Christmas. And then he used to do the mail, as well. He used to go out with the mail, up to Ronague and all round on his bike.

**DC** Did he – what, to deliver it?

**Mrs C** Yes, deliver it, yes. He used to do that and before him it was Uncle Dick, of course, his uncle, that had the post office then. And he used to cycle up and round, yes.

**DC** Did you deal with telegrams in those days, here?

**Mrs C** Yes, he would be – not when, I don't think it was when I was here, it had stopped, then, but ... umm ... he – they used to do it before, yes. But Uncle Dick, and Jack, they were very keen as regards everything had to be done correctly, and if – even a magazine had to be delivered to a farm that was way off the road, it would be delivered, no matter what the weather was – if it was only a magazine – it had to be delivered that particular day – never kept, you know, for another day. No, no.

**DC** And it's a bit widespread, I mean, the farms all around here.



**Mrs C** Oh yes, yes. It was all round, around – it was up Ronague, Grenaby and all round there, they used to go, yes.

**DC** So they'd be coming down from Ronague and various places to draw pensions, or send a parcel or a letter down to here, would they?

**Mrs C** Yes, yes, yes, oh yes, yea.

**DC** Was there also a post office in Colby as well?

**Mrs C** Yes – Miss Clague, I remember, was the first one I remember over there, 'cos I lived in Colby, then. And I remember when she had the – it was only her that had a telephone, I think, in the village, then, at one time. And she used to – she'd answer the phone, I can always remember her answering the phone, and she'd say, 'Colby' – she'd put the tone on a little bit – 'Colby – 'C' for Charley, 'O' for Oswald, 'L' for Leslie, 'B' for Boy and 'Y' for Yes.' She used to say, always used to spell – I always remember her doing that. *(laughter)* 'Oh,' she'd go – real, you know, like – and say the different things. No, that was Bella Clague and then she'd a shop, you see. We never had a shop, here.

**DC** Just a post office?

**Mrs C** Was just the post office. So that was why I kept on with me job, you see.

**DC** Yea, because there wouldn't be a big living made with just a post office, would there, no.

**Mrs C** No, no there wasn't. It's not ... it wasn't a highly paid job, really, so I went and kept on with my job.

**DC** Yes. Did you get any – were you doing anything in the post office yourself?

**Mrs C** Oh yes, I used to – and then, when Jack wasn't so well, I used to – he used to tell me what to do. And not to talk too much! *(laughter)*

**DC** Oh! *(laughter)*

**Mrs C** He'd be hearing me in there.

- DC** Did you take any notice of that?
- Mrs C** No! (*laughter*)
- DC** What were the – I mean, people would come in here – would be a social gathering, would it?
- Mrs C** Yes, it, well, especially when he was here, because he could do as much talking as me! (*laughter*) And there'd be different ones coming in and they'd be putting the world to rights, you know.
- DC** Yes of course. (*laughter*)
- Mrs C** Oh, I remember Mr Oates that used to live up at the corner here, Frank Oates, and he was great for his pipe, and he'd be sitting at the window there, at the table, and the smoke would be going up in the wreath of smoke – oh, I could always remember that, and Jack – and they'd be having a real good yarn over something, and Frank would be telling him his views, you know, dear me!
- DC** So there would be a few scandals in the villages, would there?
- Mrs C** I suppose there would be, yes. (*laughter*) And the music, the funny part of it, I brought some music down to Noel ...
- DC** I think you're talking about Noel Cringle, here aren't you, yea.
- Mrs C** Yes, these quartets, you know, he's in these quartets. Well, there was music up on the attic that I found, and there was different pieces, 'In Absence' – oh I forget all the names now of the different pieces – there was about four, I think. And I brought them down to Noel and I said were they any use, you see, because of the quartet party. So he said, 'Oh yes, these all be al... we'll practise some of these,' you see. And ... umm ... (*laughter*) he said, 'Where did you get them?' And I said, 'Well,' I said, 'it's when Jack was in the choir.' 'What?!' he said, 'I've never known Jack to be in the choir!' He wouldn't believe it! I said, 'Well he was – it was only for a short time, but,' I said, 'he was in the choir, Frank Oates' choir, he was conducting.' But Noel was tickled – the idea of Jack – he couldn't believe that Jack had ever been in the choir. So, because he's full of choirs, you see.

- DC** Oh, yes, yes, yes. Yes, that's right.
- Mrs C** Well I was in them, I was in the choir from the time I was fifteen.
- DC** Which choir was ...
- Mrs C** The Colby choir.
- DC** The Colby choir?
- Mrs C** The Colby choir – I was fifteen when I joined that. With Mr McFee, you know, Cecil?
- DC** Oh, Cecil, yes. Oh aye – was he the Choir Master, was he?
- Mrs C** Yes, Cecil started that, he was the Choir Master. And yes, I was just fifteen, and then, of course, it was Effy Fayle, and Mr Faragher from – Fargher he was calling himself, from Ballasalla, and Doug Buckston, and Mr Quirk and all – they were all conductors of the Colby choir. And then it came a time when they thought they'd change the name because there were so many from different places coming and joining – there was Castletown, and Port Erin, and Port St Mary, I think, there was ones coming in. So they decided to change the name, and we were wondering what to call the choir, and it was going on, and the pianist at the time had built a little bungalow in Croit-e-Caley – Marjory Costain. And she'd built – she'd had this bungalow built, and her – it was called *Meadowside*, so that's how it got the name *Meadowside*.
- DC** Really!
- Mrs C** We were wondering in the Level Hall what to call the choir and it was because she called her ... and she was the pianist.
- DC** Yes, and everybody thought that was a good name?
- Mrs C** So it was decided on *Meadowside*.
- DC** And they stuck with it, of course, yes, yes.

**Mrs C** They stuck with it, you see, and then Enid then took it over and she's still conductress there, but ...

**DC** So at fifteen, then, what would ...

**Mrs C** Fifteen, and I was in it until about I was 60.

**DC** Right. What would there be to do down here for a fifteen year old girl, apart from singing in the choir? (*laughter*) How did you pass your evenings, for instance?

**Mrs C** At fifteen? Oh well, oh, we'd all sorts of things to do in those days. You made your own amusement, you know, different things. We used to have socials in the hall, and we used to go to a knitting class with some old lady (*laughter*) we knew, knitting there, in Colby. And then we used to – what was it – oh, I was in the Girl's Friendly [Society], in the church. Although I was a Methodist, I – we were always in with church things as well. We were always friendly and it came – used to come over to the choir and the church to help out at special occasions and whatnot, and ...

**DC** Well with your father having been working across for so long, you must have had to help your mother a lot, as well, did you?

**Mrs C** Oh yes, he was – you mean, to help her?

**DC** Yes.

**Mrs C** Well, I don't know, because we lived in *May Cottage* in Colby. It wasn't a big house then, it wasn't a big house, but, me mother was a singer too, you see.

**DC** Was she?

**Mrs C** Oh yes. Well, I'm boasting now, but I don't think I've ever heard a singer as good as her. She was, she had wonderful expression and good voice and everything, and I was never – used to think that I'd be the same as her, and I wasn't, you know, I hadn't the voice of me mother, really. She had a good voice.

**DC** Was your mother born on the Island here?

**Mrs C** Yes, yes, she was Manx, of course, through and through. But it's me father that's been the mix-up, because his grandfather – the Turnbull's came from Northumberland, in the first place. There were three generations back of Turnbull's on my family tree. Barbara's got all the family tree done, you see. So – and then his – me grandfather's mother was Irish, yes, she – they'd come from County Mayo, so I'm a 'Heinz Variety!' (*laughter*) – that's all you could call me – a 'Heinz Variety.'

**DC** I think a lot of us could say that, probably. But, to get you back to your earliest memories, if you were born in 1913, then you might have some vague recollection of the First World War, would you?

**Mrs C** Yes, just vague, but I can remember me grandmother always sort of worried about the weather, because granddad was at sea, and he used to always blow the – when they were coming into Port St Mary, when he was on the way, and she'd be happier, you know. And she would know he was home, because they used to go round the British Isles, you know, with the boat. But me father was deep-sea, you see, and but he was, but it was the two, he was in the second war, too, you know, with cargo and passenger boats for the Booth Company.

**DC** Didn't you tell me that you'd seen a *Zeppelin*?

**Mrs C** Oh yes. Well there's just a – seeing this big thing in the sky, but, you know, I didn't know if it was a dream or not, but it had been over ...

**DC** Oh yes, that's true, yes.

**Mrs C** ... yes, but I did see it, yes, it was going over Balladoole at the time – we were in Balladoole and it was going over – a massive thing, like a big long balloon.

**DC** Yes, of course it was, exactly, yes.

**Mrs C** But it stuck in my memory that, yes. And, no, it's just them talking here, the older ones, talking about the weather and talking about the war, you know, that sort of thing.

**DC** So the feeling of what the atmosphere was?

**Mrs C** Yes, it was. And then Uncle Harry was in the Army of course, and he was me father's brother, and he was coming home on leave. I was seeing him, you know, whenever he was home on leave, and umm. Things like that, you know – but I was only a child, and I was looking to see what they'd brought me!  
*(laughter)*

**DC** Of course you would, yes.

**Mrs C** And Grandy used to bring me things home, you know, from – they used to call in France, me Grandfather, because it was France, he brought me a lovely doll – Oh, she was a beauty! And then, when he was up in Scotland I remember him bringing me plaid to make frocks and things, you know. It was often – and then sweets, of course, and there was often things – wondering, you know, what he was going to bring home to me.

**DC** You didn't see a lot of your father if he was out deep-sea, then?

**Mrs C** No, it was about once a year, or, as I say, once, there was once one year and eight months – a year and a half he was away, yes.

**DC** Really, yes.

**Mrs C** Yes, but I always seemed to know him, but George made strange of him, because he was younger than me, of course.

**DC** That's your brother, George Turnbull, yes, yes.

**Mrs C** Yes, yea. And he used to make strange of daddy, and he used to want to push the pram, you see, and I'd be sitting in the front and George would be in the back – the baby. But George was better to talk than me, and he clearer to talk than I was, and he'd put his head round the hood and he used to say, 'Don't let that man touch my pram!' *(laughter)* And daddy would be awful upset.

**DC** He would, wouldn't he?

**Mrs C** Yes, he was upset over that.

**DC** Do you remember your first day at school?

**Mrs C** At Arbory School?

**DC** Aye.

**Mrs C** I didn't start school until I was seven, so I remember.

**DC** Seven, yes?

**Mrs C** Yes, 'cos we lived at Balladoole at that time, and it was a bit too far to walk to Arbory, for a young child to walk – it was a long way, you see. So you were allowed not to go until you were seven. So I was seven when I started Arbory School; but I came on alright, I got to Douglas after, anyway! (*laughter*)

**DC** Yes. So in fact – I mean there would have been other children who'd got a year or two ahead of you, would there?

**Mrs C** Yes, I suppose there was, I didn't realise a thing. I got friendly with next door neighbour – she was Katy Costain, and she took me under her wing. She was, I think, three years older than me, but she took me under her wing and brought me to school – she was my best friend, but I lost her two or three years ago, and she was a Mrs Kneale from Castletown. But no, Katy was good to me, and then on the other side was Sylvia, Sylvia Leece, and friendly with her. And no, we were a – lots of friends in Colby and we used to go up the glen, picnics in Colby Glen and ...

**DC** Oh yes, yes. You'd know almost everybody in Colby, wouldn't you?

**Mrs C** Well you knew everybody, you know. And you could go anywhere and anybody's house if you wanted to and you seemed to know everybody and do messages for different ones, and then your mother would say, 'Now you're not to take anything for doing that message.' We weren't allowed to take anything for doing messages. (*laughter*)

**DC** How important was the train in your life?

**Mrs C** The train – oh well, when I, what age would I be – somewhere around eleven, it

was somewhere around the time I started at Douglas, I think. We could have a night out for 8p.

**DC** What?!

**Mrs C** 8p! It was 3p on the train return – Saturday night we used to go to the pictures at Castletown, 3p on the train, 3p down in the front of the picture house, and 2p for chips! (*laughter*) And that was 8p – and we used to come home on the nine o'clock train from Douglas – half past nine in Castletown, it was. And the crowds of people there would be seeing that train off – oh, different ones all going to the train to see people getting it, going, I think. And we'd be waving through the window to different ones.

**DC** And your 8p, of course, we're talking about eight old pennies, as well, aren't we?! Yes.

**Mrs C** Yes – well, we had a night out for 8p.

**DC** Oh aye. Who'd give you the 8p? It was your mother, I suppose.

**Mrs C** Well, it was 3p, (*laughter*) – well I had to work for that!

**DC** Oh did you, oh yes.

**Mrs C** Yes – I had to go for sticks (*laughter*) go for sticks and dust the front room. (*laughter*)

**DC** Oh right. Where'd you go for the sticks, then?

**Mrs C** Up the – well, up the glen or round the fields.

**DC** Up the glen, yes. These were to light the fire, were they – firewood?

**Mrs C** Yes. To light the fire – it was fires, you see, then.

**DC** Aye, of course, yes.

**Mrs C** And we used to – that was two of my jobs on a Saturday morning. (*laughter*)



And then there was 3p – what did I get – oh, I used to get the pension for another old aunt in Croit-e-Caley, and she used to give me three half pence [1½p] of all things! (*laughter*) And then there was ... umm ... I don't know where I was getting – must have been me mother that was making it up to ... but we used to all have the same – it was Ida and Dawny and Amy – the three Teare girls at this time – and we all had the same to spend. Ida must have had a bit more, I think, she would have had a bit more than us.

**DC** Bigger bag of chips, I think! (*laughter*)

**Mrs C** Yes. So it was 8p – but it's just surprising what you could do, you know. Go for 3p on the train return – half return, as would be. And 3p in *The Cosy Cinema*, it was, in Castletown.

**DC** In Castletown. Now this would be when you were fifteen – we're talking about 1927 or 1928 or something like that, probably, yes.

**Mrs C** Oh it was younger than that.

**DC** Oh, younger than that, was it, oh right.

**Mrs C** I was only about twelve when we used to do that, yes.

**DC** Oh right, yes. So you can't remember – they were not silent pictures, they had talkies by then, did they? (*laughter*)

**Mrs C** Talkies, yes. Well, I remember Mr Punch before *The Cosy* [Cinema].

**DC** Mr Punch – now tell me about that. *Punch's*...?

**Mrs C** *Punch's* (*laughter*) – it used to be in Malew Street.

**DC** *Punch's Pictures* or something like that, was it?

**Mrs C** Yes. *Punch's* – Tom Punch his name was.

**DC** Yes – oh, that was his real name, was it?

**Mrs C** Yes, Tom Punch and he used to have a picture house just opposite Miss Duggan's and Miss ... umm ... Holmes, Holmes and Duggan's were side-by-side confectionary shops – right side by side.

**DC** Was it called *Punch's Perfect Pictures*?

**Mrs C** No, I think it was just *Punch's* – yea.

**DC** Was it, oh yea.

**Mrs C** We never saw – and they had a shop where the chemist shop is now, on the corner.

**DC** What size cinema would that be, then? Would you seat a few hundred in it?

**Mrs C** Oh, it wouldn't seat that many, I don't think, no.

**DC** No, it would be quite small.

**Mrs C** It was only small – it used to break down (*laughter*) – it would break down in the middle of a real exciting part, it would break down and then you got your money back.

**DC** Oh did you?

**Mrs C** Yes – I can remember that!

**DC** So you got your 2p back?

**Mrs C** 3p! (*laughter*)

**DC** Oh, 3p!

**Mrs C** 3p back.

**DC** What would you do with that, then, when you ...

**Mrs C** Well, you'd – oh I don't know. (*laughter*)

**DC** A fortune back!

**Mrs C** Yes, a fortune that night!

**END OF INTERVIEW**