

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

‘TIME TO REMEMBER’

Interviewee: Mr Alfie Gilmour

Date of birth: 15th April 1915 [Died 27th November 2000]

Place of birth:

Interviewer: David Callister

Recorded by: David Callister

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Topic(s): Spring Valley and Pulrose estates
Open air services at Kirk Braddan Church
Early school days
Cattle boats from Northern Ireland
Belle Vue racecourse
Builder Mr McCarten
1928 flood and saving baby
Douglas & Pulrose Laundry
Wilfie Purvis’ bus service
Apprentice at Todhunters
Parrot stories and antics
The Minay family
Tricks and pranks at work
Nicknames and local tramps
Working for the Gas Company
Drunken holiday-makers

Alfie Gilmour - Mr G

David Callister - DC

DC You tell me you're 85, Alfie, what's your date of birth then?

Mr G 15th April 1915.

DC Wow!

Mr G 15th April 1915.

DC Right, now we are standing in a lane here that hasn't got a name I suppose, has it?

Mr G It is, The Groves, they used to call it, some people called it years ago, some people called it The Double Groves, because there were two sets of threes down here, two little lanes at one time, down here, but where I'm standing now is outside where my cottage used to be, but it's now, it's been pulled down, there's a modern bungalow built here, I've forgotten the gentleman's name in it, it belongs to the Spring Valley Estate, used to be the Kyles Nursing Home at one time.

DC Oh that's right and the house is called now, it's called *Mandalay*, with a sign 'Beware of the Dog,' so we'll beware of the dogs. But I mean we're in proper Spring Valley, are we?

Mr G Yes this is Spring Valley, this is old Spring Valley David, yes, this lane is a continuation from, through the Nunnery Grounds which eventually went on towards Leigh Terrace. Now donkeys years ago when the open air service was at Spring Valley, [Kirk Braddan] thousands of people used to walk up past here, some come over the stone bridge, past Leigh Terrace, through the Nunnery Grounds, through the camp field, the camp field is now where Pulrose is built, through here and to the top of the lane over the Saddle Road to Kirk Braddan open air services. Now then, at the top of this little lane here there used to be two gates, both wrought iron gates, and people used to, I don't know who opened and closed them, I've no idea, they used to open the gate at the beginning of the week and it was eventually lost, the gate taken off its hinges in my time, but there was also a little kissing gate attached to it, like a circular effort, I've forgotten the correct name for that, and people used to swing on that for fun. Outside in the lane here where I'm standing used to be a little area where my brother and sisters used to have a little garden, just for fun, of course,

but that got trampled down with lots of people walking over it on the service days, on a Sunday, to Kirk Braddan. Now then, my eldest memories of being in this lane was when my mother one day said go and see if your father's coming home and I come out into the lane and I looked down to where Pulrose is now built, you could look right through, the trees weren't as extensively foliated as they are now. Now then, my father was coming home on leave.

DC From the First World War?

Mr G From the First World War and the mud of French trenches was still on his tunic when he come home, like other fellas of course, and of course when they came home the first thing they had to do was shed his old clobber, my mother would wash it, he'd have a bath in the yard, like people did those days.

DC Bath in the yard?

Mr G In the yard, yes, in one of those big ...

DC Tin baths?

Mr G Tin baths, yes, thank you David, tin baths in the yard, and perhaps I would give him a scrub on the back, or me mother would, it was commonplace those days, oh yes. And of course he would be home for about a week, before then called back to the trenches in France. He was fortunate enough, he was one of the lads who did come home, some poor fellas didn't and then of course time goes by, they grew up in this area. I had another three brothers after me in the family when the old man come back home and from here ...

DC And where did you go to school then Alfie?

Mr G Yes, from here we went to Kewaique School, we walked to the top of the lane here, turned up left towards Pulrose Farm and through the farmyard to Kewaique School. Percy Kermode was the name of the farmer in those days, in *Pulrose* Farm, and also in fine weather sometimes we could cut through the field opposite Springfield House, Springfield House where a gentleman by the name of Mr Hoyle used to live, that's below the farm. And in that field, I could more or less go and put me foot on the spot where there was a beautiful white stone monument, was buried by Percy Kermode the farmer. He said it was in

the road of his ploughing activities and that, for harvesting and he dug a great big hole, he got a team of horses and they pulled it down into the hole in the ground and covered it over, yes.

DC So it's still there under the ground.

Mr G Yes, it's still there under the ground – they could find it these days with modern equipment of course.

DC Did it have an inscription on it?

Mr G No, it was like the one that's in First Avenue, Glencrutchery Road, they did a Sheading marker or a Parish marker in those days.

DC So that's what they were really?

Mr G Yes, that's right, David, they were markers for Sheadings in the Isle of Man. And why the Museum didn't take any notice of me or not, I don't know, this is donkeys years ago but they didn't and it's still lying there under ...

DC Underneath the ground.

Mr G ... underneath the ground. Also when people used to come up through here of course, at the top of the lane just over the wall here there's a little cottage as we're looking at, there's a new roof on it now, it's called the *Robin's Nest* and that one belonged to people by the name of Kelly. The original owner was Coopers from Circular Road and Mr Kelly married the daughter of Coopers in Circular Road who had other business, tobacco business as a matter of fact, Coopers Twist, do you remember *Coopers Twist*?

DC Oh yes, that's right.

Mr G So they ran that business in Circular Road and they had this little place called the *Robin's Nest* and on the Sunday when the people were coming up past they used to sell pop, pop those days was in a mineral water bottle with a marble in, you know, and you pushed the stopper down ...

DC The old codd bottle, yes.

Mr G Yes, that's right, you used to collect those bottles, get the marble out to play marbles with. However further up, twenty yards further up on the left hand side, on the right hand side, sorry, there was people by the name of Wademan [sp ???] – they had a café there, it's pulled down now, and it's a showroom now.

DC Westminster Motors, now.

Mr G Yes, thank you David, yes, Westminster Motors. But those days they did tons of business, only on a Sunday of course, but before the First World War, which I don't remember, they must have done more business, because of people walking out and then of course charas used to come out, the horse-drawn charabancs, those days of course the coaches were just coming in. Now then Saddle Road corner, we'll eventually get to it, was widened, because there were several fatal accidents at Saddle Road corner due to people coming in under the influence of drink, from the outtelling [outlying?] pubs, you know, getting smashed.

DC Did you ever see any of them yourself?

Mr G Well I seen the results of it David, I didn't see them happen. But there was one night in particular, in the very early twenties, when there was an awful crash, we heard it when we were lying in bed here, and other people too, they all got up to go to the corner to see what had happened and someone was killed in a taxi. The two taxis collided and I believe the taxi driver, or whoever was driving the vehicles, were drunk and they were coming in from three or four pubs out here, one was called *The Richmond Hotel*, which was now a house on Richmond Hill, the next one was *The Lancashire Hotel* and then the one after that on the left hand side near the post office at Santon was called *The Brown Cow*.

DC *The Brown Cow* was a pub was it?

Mr G The pub was called *The Brown Cow*. Well that was more or less closed by police order because I think they were having great fun out there, the girls were dancing on the tables and I think it was closed by police order.

DC But the taxis in those days, the taxis wouldn't be anything like the taxis today would they?

Mr G Oh no, they were like gangster's vehicles those days, David, with the whitewall tyres, you know, you've seen the gangster pictures, Al Capone and that. They were vehicles like that, I think the vehicles were Moon's, I don't know the old fashioned name, *Chevrolet*, of course. And they had hoods that come down, they weren't solid tops those days, not in the taxis. But they must have had great fun, they were having great fun David, they were gangsters, all right. And of course in this lane, of course, we had our fun – we learned to ride bicycles in this lane.

DC Of course.

Mr G I drove down the lane here where the National Sports Swimming Pool is built, there used to be a big swamp, a big swamp down there, and as children we knew of a way out. There was a little island on that swamp – oh we used to have great fun.

DC Oh really.

Mr G Oh yes, beautiful flowers growing on it as well. And of course sometimes when the heavy floods was on, and the tide, the high tide and an inshore wind, the place would be flooded, flooded, oh yes, flooded. But of course you must remember too, that when people went to Braddan open air service, I hope people will remember that the old churchyard there, has got a Negro slave's grave in it. Did you know that David?

DC Yes, that's right.

Mr G Samuel Ally, and as children when we used to go out there we used to, if there was snowdrops about we used to pick snowdrops and put it on the grave, and have a prayer and have a cry over the poor little fella and on the grave is inscribed, if I remember correctly, how good obedient servant he was, the poor fella had to be good and obedient servant, David, poor, poor fella, from Africa.

DC Well the lane here then, I mean, you'd see all these hundreds, thousands of probably going to the church, but was it ever used for trucks or anything like that, vehicles, horse and carts get down or any other things?

Mr G No, not really David, the only other event that used to come through here of

course was, every now and again in the old days, in the twenties I'm talking about now, there used to be a boat called *The Asssaro*, [sp ???] that come from Northern Ireland with a load of cattle, dozens and dozens of cattle aboard and they'd be moored at the breakwater and they always come in at night, funny enough, and all these cattle, poor animals must have been sick many a time you know, and frenzied, and there'd be dozens, well a dozen fellas and dogs with these cattle and they'd be brought up around this area, Spring Valley and *Kirby Farm* and perhaps Farmhill and Stanley Moore's up in Anagh Coar, they were going to provide for these cattle until they got well and fed. But they used to drive them up through this lane, this was one of the areas they'd come up through and now and again the cattle would go astray and it was at night, they didn't know where the poor things were going to go and the dogs would be running after them, and there was one night – there was a big greenhouse behind our cottage, with about six or eight steps down into it and one night, for some reason or other a poor cow fell, got into the field behind us, our little cottage, and it fell down these six or eight steps into the greenhouse. Well you can imagine it, you've heard of the *cliché* many a time, 'A bull in a china shop' – well this time it was a cow in a greenhouse. We were all woke up with a dreadful fright – 'What the hell was that?' pardon the expression, 'What the hell's going on?' And of course there was a chap by the name of Dick Connall and he had a very high deep voice like Paul Rosa [sp ???] – when he shouted, he was swearing, the dogs were barking, and this poor cow was in agony with a broken leg, by the way and of course, they were cruel and of course they'd got to get the cow out of the greenhouse. They couldn't turn that cow around in the greenhouse so they tied a rope round it and pulled the poor cow backwards up these steps ...

DC Really.

Mr G ... yes, and by this time of course it was getting dawn and of course we were out in our night attire, mother and father playing hell, you know, come in out of the rain, so to speak, and it was raining and we seen this poor cow, I think it had a broken horn as well, bleeding, poor cow, and a broken leg, broken front leg. But they were cruel, those cow drovers and of course the cow was driven I suppose into either *Kirby Farm* over at Christian's, Kirby, or perhaps into Drinkwater's fields here at this corner, until the vet came along and had it slaughtered. Now those days the farmers, I'm sorry, the butchers, had their own slaughterhouses, in those days.

DC Was there a slaughterhouse near here then?

Mr G No the nearest slaughterhouse, David, was up near ... oh what's the name of the place where people play tennis up here?

DC Oh ... Harcroft?

Mr G Harcroft, thank you David, that's the name of the place. There used to be an old house up there, a slaughterhouse, there was a butcher's slaughterhouse and the flenching stone, you know what a flenching stone is, don't you?

DC Yes.

Mr G That's a stone cross-wired between two walls and they used to hang the beast over that, of course it was slaughtered, it was humanely slaughtered then it was hung over this flenching stone.

DC Did you ever see that happen?

Mr G No, no, I didn't see that happen, no, I was too nich [sp ???] for that David, my brothers used to go and other people used to go round to see that sort of thing, but I never seen [it]. I eventually went up the slaughterhouse when I was in Todhunter's in the thirties to see animals slaughtered but I only went up once, it was cruel David, it was cruel those days. But that's the story of the poor cow in the greenhouse.

Pause in recording

DC We're actually in what is now the National Sports Centre, it hasn't always been that and I suppose your earliest memories Alfie, of this, would be something very, very different.

Mr G Oh, indeed.

DC They had a racecourse here once?

Mr G Oh it was a horse race course, that was the main sport, and we called it Belle Vue in my time and the ground was four feet lower than it is now, four feet

lower, than it is now and we're standing near one river, we're standing near The Dhoo, aye, that's right, the other side is The Glass. Now then in my time, as I say, the horse racing was done here and we're standing near a corner called the brewery corner, also near where the grandstand used to be and it was well attended to on a Tuesday and a Thursday, if I remember. People coming off the boat, bookies and all sorts of ill repute if you like to call them, we call them other things of course, and lots of bets were played on different horses, *Ben Hur*, *The Giant*, *The Knight* and other things, I wish I could remember lots of horses' names.

DC You'd be too young to have a bet wouldn't you?

Mr G Oh, much too young but many a time, David, before and after the race, we've seen jockeys, as children, there were no barriers for kids, I've seen many a fight between the jockeys, as to who'd win and who wouldn't win ...

DC Oh!

Mr G ... and some were very vicious fights.

DC Really?

Mr G Yes, really and honestly, yes I mustn't tell you the names of them but I do remember them of course, I'll tell you the name of different things after, of different people. Now then at brewery corner here, sometimes there'd be six or eight horses in a race, sometimes less. Now many a time as children we'd be on brewery corner wall which is near Cain's, *St. Helena House* here and six or eight children, there'd be Charlie – can I mention the name of the children?

DC Oh yes.

Mr G Thank you, well there was myself and my two brothers, Maurice and Frank, sometimes Alan, the third brother, Charlie Evans and his sister Mona, Guy Dickinson and his sister Pauline, Percy Cowley who lived in Saddle Road, Tommy Duncan, Ciggy Bell [sp ???] and others, great fun, great gang of kids round here. And had wonderful fun, we did and we'd be watching these fellas coming round on the horses, on the race horses, and on more than one occasion you'd hear one jockey or other he'd shout, 'You'd better get on ahead of me,

I'm falling off, I can't hold this horse, I can't hold him, I'm falling off,' and that jockey David, would fall off because he was paid somehow or other to lose the race and he'd fall off the horse at the ruddy corner and that wasn't the only time they fell off, they'd fall off at the bottom at Belle Vue corner.

DG Oh, really.

Mr G And you may not believe this but this is perfectly true, there was a big stampede one day in the grandstand here, a lot of excitement about a very special horse that come off the boat, this horse had come off the boat, he's bound to win the race, the bookies are running and taking the bets on and as children we were listening, and as children we were amazed to see this special horse, as he was supposed to be, coming off the boat, that special horse, David, was taken out of a milk cart, honestly.

DG Really?

Mr G The milkman himself would be in the flats here as we called them, delivering milk, having a cup of tea, whatever, and when he come downstairs his horse was missing out of his float and the horse, poor animal, it wasn't fit for racing, it would do half a lap, and that jockey would fall off at the far end, and then he'd beat it, he'd beat it because ...

DC And the jockeys would go home laughing wouldn't they?

Mr G Yes, and the bookies were running down the road too, to get taxis to the town.

DC So were they well attended, these meetings?

Mr G Oh yes, they were well attended, oh yes, dozens, hundreds of people. Oh yes, lots of people would be walking up of course, they ran on a Tuesday and a Thursday.

DC It would be summer time only would it?

Mr G Summer time only David, yes, and of course, Tuesday and Thursday, lots of people come off the boat, and the bookies of course, it was the only way of getting into the Isle of Man those days, there was no flights, just the boat. The

bookies would be here on a Tuesday, I think they'd have to hide themselves on the Thursday if they did any 'jiggery pokery.'

DC What about the animals, the horses themselves. They must have brought horses over as well?

Mr G Oh yes, oh yes.

DC Where would they be stabled?

Mr G Yes, they were stabled right opposite us here now David, behind, down to the ...

DC Across the river here.

Mr G Yes, down the river and people by the name of McArdle, they were quite good people, they lived in a cottage in Kirby Farm lane, over Saddle Road, they had several horses, others were kept down here of course, yes.

DC So there was a bridge across the river here somewhere?

Mr G Yes, there was a bridge across here David, as well. And then of course, on a wet day of course it was only poorly attended, on a wet day. People went somewhere else.

DC Now how big would the race course be, then, would it occupy this whole Belle Vue field or what?

Mr G I suppose, I couldn't tell you the distance but it was from, it went on the anti-clock direction, it didn't go clockwise, it went down here, around where we just came in the car ...

DC So that would actually be more or less the whole of what used to be old Belle Vue then?

Mr G Yes, that's correct, it was old Belle Vue, David and as I say when, they also had cricket matches on here as well, rugby matches at one time, Collegiate School had a cricket pitch down here and they played their football matches here as

well. There were a couple of football teams called Old Douglas and Mona. My brother played rugby for, I think it was Mona, in his young days.

DC When we came here you said we were on brewery corner.

Mr G That's correct, that's right, well the brewery in those days, sorry it was already turned into flats by Mr McCarten. Mr McCarten – he was a furniture remover and he stowed furniture, he bought the old brewery you see, now he turned [it] into flats. Now it couldn't have been a very nice place for people to live because they'd have a room downstairs of some sort or other and the bedrooms could have been two or three flights away and long, long corridors to walk in and the corridors were about six feet wide, wooden floors, and of course you can imagine the children at night when they were galloping along making as much noise as possible much to the neighbours' disgrace. And also in the late thirties, or the mid-thirties probably, when Douglas Corporation done away with the cable cars Mr McCarten, he bought these cable cars with the intention of turning them into accommodation for people to live in and he bought about a dozen of them and he put them alongside the wall in the brewery lane there and of course when it come to the punch, that he wanted to turn them into accommodation he wasn't allowed to do so, so he had to sell them for scrap then. The man must have lost money on it but it was great fun because when the cars were first put there the foot bell that the drivers used to – as children, boy, boy, at night when we got on those tram cars did we give those foot bells hammer, we were chased many a time, people trying to get to sleep, oh aye.

DC But you'll have gone up and down the town on the cable cars anyway of course won't you?

Mr G Yes I have done, yes, so it must have been in the thirties, David, when old McCarten bought them.

DC Well the brewery itself, when did that disappear from here?

Mr G The brewery, I don't remember it as a brewery myself, David, so the brewery must have disappeared before the First World War.

DC Oh right.

Mr G And then of course it was lying idle for a while until Mr McCarten bought it and turned it into flats as I say. It's surprising how many people come into these flats and of course they were living in poor conditions, poor people, and of course some of the people used their loaf, so to speak, they got living in these poor conditions so they would qualify for a Pulrose house, you see, that was the idea. Also of course in 1928 when there was a dreadful flood here, it washed Pulrose bridge away down here.

DC You remember that, do you?

Mr G Oh yes, I remember that, I remember that. I think it was about 1928 or '29, about that time, and it was washed away.

DC Well how did people get across to Pulrose then?

Mr G Yes, well the only way people could get to then was to come to the Quarterbridge during that bad time, for a couple of days, come to the Quarterbridge, walk up to Spring Valley corner, down into the lane where we lived, to Pulrose that way. But in the day, the particular day of the dreadful flood, we were standing about in the position where the river was flooded, and people were trying to get across from the Quarterbridge there, to get a short cut to Pulrose. Well I remember I seen a lady in difficulty, a Mrs Cottier, and some of the family are still alive, and she had a little baby in a pram and two children by her hand and she was in difficulties trying to get across the river where the river is here. So I went in after her, and genuinely the pram slipped out of the poor girl's, poor woman's grasp and I managed to save it from floating down the river.

DC Really?

Mr G Yes, I genuinely did, and of course I got her across to the lane where I lived, I managed to get across the river. We were in a bad way, we were all wet through, and she thanked me, of course, and that was it.

DC But people were just wading through were they?

Mr G Oh yes they were, they were panic stricken, they wanted to get home, oh aye, there was – also you can imagine the gas company, when the gas main went

across that bridge as the water main as well, well years after I got to know from Freddie Garrett – I was working in the gas company eventually, and Mr Garrett, the foreman down there, he was watching and looking at one of the gas holders and wondering where the hell was the gas going because the holder was going down and down, he didn't know for an hour, I suppose ...

DC It was just escaping.

Mr G ... that it was just escaping at the six inch main or whatever it was, or a four inch main going over the bridge had broken and all the gas was escaping and it was panic stations then, you see, all the fellas came out to bag the main off till they put a temporary main across the area.

DC Did the flood cover the fields here as well?

Mr G Yes, right across, onto Peel Road as well, Peel Road as well. The Quarterbridge itself, the Quarterbridge itself was high enough, the bottom of Braddan was flooded, the bottom of the road to Braddan from Port-e-chee, from Port-e-chee Meadow, because there was a high tide at the time, a dreadful storm, the same time as Laxey was flooded out.

DC Well what was here in this area before the power station then, Alfie?

Mr G Yes, well before the power station there used to be an old mansion, but this old mansion where the power station is built, it was a private residence until after the First World War and then shortly after the First World War, I remember it turned into a laundry, it was called Douglas & Pulrose Laundry and then of course that fell by the wayside, because of opposition from Clucas's and others you see, and poorly paid, the poor girls were poorly paid, so they went somewhere else. Now then, when that went Douglas Corporation bought the area in 1929 to build a new generating station there and when you stand at the front of the building you see Douglas Corporation Electricity Department 1929.

DC Yes, that's right.

Mr G I remember that getting built. Also of course when the Corporation built, before the Corporation built the new bridge, now then people were demanding some sort of public service, transport to get to Pulrose, and of course there was a

temporary bridge and the Corporation buses they had were too heavy for a wooden bridge, so there was a gentleman by the name of Wilfie Purvis, Wilfie Purvis, yes, he had a twenty-seater bus. Now he applied for, and he eventually got after a lot of hassle, he eventually got permission to run a bus service from somewhere in Douglas up to Pulrose and he went round, Pulrose, old Pulrose, with red roof places, he went around old Pulrose and he picked up a lot of people into town, that's how he made ...

DC That's how it started?

Mr G That's how the bus ... until eventually when they built the new bridge and there was quite an argument then over Mr Purvis, whether he was going to be allowed to continue his bus service to Pulrose or not, but they wouldn't let him. No, no, when they built the new bridge the Corporation had the rights then to run the bus service to Pulrose and only the bus – they hadn't had a bus service before even, I don't think so, until Wilfie Purvis originated it.

DC So even when you were growing up then, Pulrose hadn't been built had it?

Mr G Not completely no, Pulrose was getting built about 1926, '27, I think David, my memory could play tricks at times of course. But funny thing I'll tell you, there was one day, when we were living at home of course, all children in the area of course, not just our family, we had to gather firewood. We didn't have a gas or electric cooker those days you see so if you seen any timber or that, you brought it home. Well this particular day myself and other children, as I've just mentioned, the gang, we were up at old camp field where Pulrose is now built. Now when we went up there this particular day, there was lots of little bits of timber stuck in the ground, all about a foot long, you see, and I thought, by jove, we all thought, by jove this is wonderful firewood, you see, so we gathered all, as many of these bits of timber as we could, we didn't know what they were for, so we took them home and smashing. Now this is quite, quite true, donkeys years after, forty years after, I'm in the Gas Company working, went into the joiner's shop one day and there was an old boy there by the name of Willie Curphey, he was a very nice chap Mr Curphey, he was a joiner. And I picked up his wooden mallet, and one side of the wooden mallet was really well and truly battered, very well worn out, and I said, 'What happened to this, Willie?' 'Well,' he said, 'I'll tell you a story Alfie.' So he told me the story and he said, 'Now one day,' he said, long before the war, Freddie Garrett come to him and

he says, 'cut off a few marker timbers will you, like little strips of wood, about twenty or thirty or more about a foot long with a point on them.' So he said, 'I want you to go up to the old camp field and mark out where we are going to put the gas main because they are going to build houses up there.' So Wilfie said, 'I went up there,' he said, 'and I had more than twenty or thirty pieces of timber,' he said, 'and I knocked all these bits of wood into the ground with this mallet.' And I said, 'Is that so, Willie?' I said, 'Do you know what happened to those bits of timber?' And he said, 'No.' And I said, 'I used them for firewood.' And he said, 'Never!' But we both had a good laugh and I recited him this story you see that myself and the rest of the gang as children had pinched all the pieces of firewood they put in for markers for the new gas main.

DC Isn't that wonderful – forty years on!

Mr G Forty years on David, yes. And we burnt them, and he said, 'You can have that mallet.' He give me the mallet – I've got it at home yet. Yes, Willie Curphey, happy days.

DC Let me ask you about work, I mean was it all work and no play, or did you have any fun in those days?

Mr G Oh yes, I must tell you the story when I was in Todhunter's as an apprentice, and those days of course as an apprentice you just said 'Yes Sir, no Sir, three bags full' – you had to be obedient and pay attention to what was going on. And as a matter of fact, you may not think so now, but I was rather a timid type because I was thrown in the deep end, I hadn't had any experience like other fellas, other lads, reared in town, I was reared in the country, shy type, and of course you go to work many a time and if you had your hat on you took your hat off before you got to the house, to be respectful, wipe your feet with it many a time before you went in, it was discipline you see. And big Jimmy Taggart and I, one day, we went to a house, *Tremissary Lodge*, at the bottom of Blackberry Lane, to do something or other in the kitchen, probably a burst water pipe. And a lady answered the door of course, a very nice person, and she said, 'Oh come in,' she said, 'I'm glad to see you,' this, that and the other, and she said, 'this is a parrot, now we'd like to sit this parrot on this table because of the nice sunshine coming through the window and by the way, gentlemen,' she said, 'this parrot doesn't have anything to do with swear words, he is quite a good – this is a house where there is no swearing – we're good living types here,' or

words to that effect. ‘Oh well then that’s all right,’ said big Jimmy, ‘as far as we’re concerned there’ll be no swearing from us,’ and she looked at me and I just nodded my head in agreement you see. So after a while Jimmy Taggart had been down to the parrot at the cage ...

End of side 1

Mr G ... saying something to him, I didn’t know what on earth he was saying to it. Well, after an hour or so, I suppose, the lady come in to see did we want a cup of tea or that, which was a good thing those days if you got a cup of tea on the job, and when she come in, she says to Jimmy Taggart, ‘How are you going on?’ and the parrot immediately said, ‘you’re a stupid bugger!’ And the lady in the house whipped round and looked at the parrot straight away and she said, ‘What did you say?’ and the parrot said, ‘you’re a stupid bugger!’ Well of course I was nearly fainting meself because I’d never even looked at the parrot. I know now that it was Jimmy Taggart ...

DC That’s what he’d been saying.

Mr G ... he’d been saying to the parrot on the quiet, ‘You’re a stupid bugger,’ this, that and the other.

DC Well you’d both be in trouble then?

Mr G ‘Oh, yes,’ she said, ‘I’ve a good mind,’ she said, ‘to order you out of the house.’ ‘Oh no,’ he said, ‘you can’t do that,’ he said, big Jimmy Taggart says, ‘I’m awfully sorry, it must have been the young fella. I’ll chastise him when we go off the job.’ Well I was shivering, me labouring, him blaming me, ‘It must have been the young fella,’ he says. And I wouldn’t say boo to a goose never mind the blooming parrot.

DC Did she complain to the Company?

Mr G Yes, she said she’d complain to Mr Harvey and Mr Kennaugh and Mr Quilliam, who were the three directors. Whether she did or not I’ve forgotten, but of course on the way out, you know, Jimmy Taggart had one or two other words to say to the parrot before we left, but whether they were stronger language or not I don’t know, but we never worked on that house a second time. On the way up,

when we got to the bottom of Summerhill, you know, we got the horse car back along the Promenade, that was summer transport, that was your transport those days. When we got to the bottom of Summerhill big Jimmy Taggart says, 'Well did you enjoy the joke, Alfie?' And I said, 'What joke, Mr Taggart?' It'd be Mr Taggart because he was my senior, 'Well,' he said, 'did you enjoy the parrot swearing?' and I said, 'I didn't really because I got the blame.' 'Well,' he said, 'somebody had to get the blame,' he said, 'you'll learn,' he said, 'you'll learn, boy,' 'you'll learn.' Aye, well I took the blame. Talking of parrots, too, there was a parrot on the quayside somewhere, whether it was near *The Coffee Palace* end of the quayside or near *The Saddle Hotel* or not I don't know but there was a parrot on the quayside, and those days, of course, up to the beginning of the, the middle of the thirties, 1930s, coal boats were emptied by horse and cart you see, carted away coal boats and other transport and there was a parrot on the quayside there, he'd learned the command from the horseman 'back' and he was shouting 'back' ...

DC The parrot was shouting this?

Mr G Yes the parrot was shouting 'back' and of course the horse cropped his ears up and he decided he's got to back, you see the horse was backing, 'back,' 'back,' you so and so, and of course the horse backed and he backed him into the harbour. Whether the horse got hurt or not, I don't know, but that's what happened. There was another parrot on the Promenade, it was near *The Crescent Hotel*, I've forgotten the name of the house now, and the people in the summer time they always put this parrot out on the steps, on a prop on the steps, and he could whistle, exactly like the tram car conductor and the horse would stop. And then he'd whistle a second time and the horse would start. And the horse car – they were playing hell about this and they decided after all if the horse could, it may as well make a stop there because it is a stop there about ten or fifteen yards further on so they let the parrot do the commanding of stopping and starting the horse car. What was the name on it, *Waverley*.

DC *Waverley*?

Mr G *Milne's Waverley* was the name of the house, yes, stop and start the horse cars just like that, happy days. Of course I eventually got married, about 1936 or '37, I think it was, David, fancy forgetting when I got married, and we eventually lived in this house here in Mountfield Road and the way to work of course was

on a push bike those days, I used to go out of this back lane here, down past Hayman's [sp ???] field, and I would meet Eric Faragher, who was a joiner serving, no he was a joiner by then, he was out of his time, Eric Faragher, a good lad was Eric, poor fella's dead and gone now but he was a real good mate and we'd go along Governor's Road, Glencrutchery Road, flat out on the push bikes and we'd go down Somerset Road, we'd go down Somerset Road and along, turn left at the bottom of Somerset Road and then right down the back lane of Alexander Terrace. Well you'd meet people, with the same habits, same time, coming and going of a morning, people had habits, same as we had, prompt, or perhaps sometimes we were late, and one particular morning we were going along and now and again we would see a chap pushing his push bike out backwards from the back door, you see, or sometimes we would hear him after he'd gone past. This particular morning then we coincided, now this poor fella was pushing his push bike out through the back door and I put my left pedal onto his mudguard and I ripped the mudguard right off, well we didn't stop, Eric said, 'Don't stop, don't look round,' so we didn't. We didn't go down that way for a day or two. So a few days after that we were going along and there's a cross, there's little crossed lanes down there ...

DC That's right.

Mr G I've forgotten the name of them, there's a little tiny shop.

DC That's right, yes.

Mr G I've forgotten the name of the people that used to have that shop.

DC Four-way junction.

Mr G Yes, a little four-way, a lane there, and this particular morning Eric and I are going there flat out and we hear the poor old fella, he must have been a pensioner of about 60 or 70 years of age, we knocked this poor fella off the bike and we were very, very sorry. We picked him up, we sympathised with them, we doctored his bike, whatever was wrong with it, and very careful. 'Now be careful now, we'll see you sometime.' 'Yes, thank you boys, it was very kind of you,' he said. The following morning, flat out, we hit the poor fella again, same spot, and we left him lying there, calling him for all the silly so-and-so's we could lay our tongue on and Eric Faragher and I, we never went that way again.

We never went that way to work again. Of course in the Gas Company lots of times you know, when you went into the Gas Company first thing in the morning, half past seven start or whatever it was, the lads from the retort house were in having breakfast or having a cup of tea or a good meal, you see. Now they had, what do you call it, a communal frying pan, a big frying pan, some fellas who was there would have an egg or bacon on it, others a sausage, other fellas liver and onions or whatever it was. If you'd have seen that frying pan, David, you'd have laughed. And it never got washed. And this frying pan – there was about four or five blokes all sitting at the one table and what they put in the frying pan to get cooked, they'd just take it out while the frying pan was in the middle of the table, you see. No hygiene whatever, no hygiene whatever. There was an old boy there by the name of Freddie Sweetman and his son was Freddie as well, and they used to share one another's breakfast and this particular morning young Freddie Sweetman says to his Dad, 'By jove Dad,' he said, 'the liver is tough this morning.' 'What, there's nothing wrong with the liver, boy,' he says, and he's doing his best to cut through the liver as well but we had to stop him because somebody'd put a Phillips 'stick-a-sole' on the frying pan, he thought it was his liver, we had to stop him from eating it. Another morning, old Freddie, the same thing, he said have a cup of tea, so somebody refused a cup of tea because we knew what was on and young Freddie said there's something wrong with the tea Dad, this morning. He sez, the old man sez, 'There's always something wrong with something with you,' he said, 'what the hell's wrong with the tea this morning?' He said, 'Well it's funny.' We had to stop him from drinking it, because somebody had put lemonade crystals in it. Ah, happy days. Also in the coke yard there were tons and tons, dozens of tons of coke going out every day, and the lads, sometimes they would bring bits and pieces of sweets and that back from the restaurants or sweet shops and cafés they had been and this particular day, I don't know who all it was that said to one of the drivers, 'Now bring something back with you, you haven't brought anything back with you for weeks.' 'Right oh,' says this driver – I won't mention his name, but he was a character, so just before dinner he'd been to different restaurants in town and you'll never guess what this fella brought back – a tray, a wooden tray, with twenty-four meat pies on it and we were eating meat pies all day, we wouldn't dare say, we wouldn't dare say where you got them from.

DC So he'd whipped them, had he?

Mr G Aye, he'd whipped them on the way out, he covered the tray with a sack, an empty sack, and brought it out. Another day a chap said, 'Now it's your turn to bring something back today,' and you'll never guess what this fella brought back, he brought a sack with hot pot in. Now this sack was a paper bag actually, you know ...

DC I know the type, yes.

Mr G ...you know, multi-layers, paper bag, and you can cut it in two across through the middle, and he must have put about a bucket full of hot pot in this bag and he brought it back and everybody in the coke yard was eating hot pot out of a bag. When I went to the trade first of all of course in Todhunter's shops, they're all pulled down now, the workshops, and that, but they were quite happy days, it was hard work lots of times of course, but we had lots of fun. There were eighteen ironmongers in the front shop to start with and in the heyday when the hot and cold water systems started on the promenade, with the boarding-houses, I can remember twenty-seven plumbers working in, six or eight blacksmiths and one electrician, it was a big firm those days. John Henry Cubbon's in Finch Road had more plumbers and more electricians but they didn't have blacksmiths. However they was wonderful days, happy days to remember too because one of our directors in the front shop, Mr Harvey, he was a bit of a hard taskmaster, really. His habit of course was to send the junior ironmonger every morning to get him a dry meat pie. Now the dry meat pie was bought at either *Collinson's* or *Cabin Café* in Duke Street. Now Dickie Craine was the junior this particular time, for quite a little time, and Dickie Craine from Peel, he's still living, he's got a motor agency in Peel, Dickie, quite a good lad, and if he's listening to this he'll smile, believe me, all those years ago. Well Dickie was sent for a meat pie as usual, 'A dry one, lad,' he was saying, old Harvey, 'a dry meat pie, lad.' So Dickie had the money, went over to *Collinson's*, or *Cabin Café*, *Cannell's* or wherever it was, but when he come round the Shakespeare corner, he always took the meat pie out of the paper bag and stuck his pencil up at the bottom of it, and drained the gravy out, so old Harvey, in the shop, he never knew he had a drained meat pie at all. So that was one of the comical things of course. Well another story of Todhunter's when we used to go to the Steam Packet Company many a time, to bring stuff up from the warehouse to Todhunter's you see, from the Steam Packet warehouse and this particular day a chap by the name of Johnny Corlett, a ginger haired lad, and Jimmy Smith and one or two others, and myself, we went down to the Steam Packet Company.

Todhunter's those days had eight handcarts, eight handcarts, well they were like stiff carts, some of them, and of course this particular day we were dragging stuff up from the Steam Packet Company and a load of stuff was in and in particular a lot of sash weights, lead sash weights ...

DC For the windows.

Mr G ... for the windows. And Johnny Corlett, unfortunately had an accident with the handcart and he was running along and he couldn't stop the handcart from speeding along out of the warehouse, he'd let the handcart go, it hit the stanchion or whatever it was, the woodwork alongside the harbour, and all the sash weights went into the harbour, you see. And of course we had to fish them out eventually, we always called Johnny Corlett out to fill in the sash weight quota, fill the sash weights. We didn't get them all out but we got most of them out. And another time, another thing I remember about the Steam Packet Company, donkeys years after, they were emptying for an alteration in the Steam Packet warehouse, emptied it all out, and they found a ladder there which had been posted, addressed to Todhunter's, twenty years previously from *Slingsbys* and this ladder had been lying at the back of everything in the Steam Packet warehouse over twenty years, David. I don't know did they ever claim for another one or not, I don't know. But that ladder was lying there for twenty years. Now then, also when we were working out in the town as an apprentice, I always remember working in Sartfell Road houses, Mr Waid, Sanford Waid, his son was Mr Waid, his son eventually became a dental surgeon, in Woodbourne Road there, almost opposite top of Derby Road, however he was getting some nice houses built in Sartfell Road and other places and ... by Creer Brothers ... and they were happy days with Creer Brothers, they were good joiners and that, a happy gang, and the plasterers in particular were the Minay family, there was Fred, Allan and, oh ...

DC Dan?

Mr G Dan, yes, that's right, Dan, and of course a labourer, and the Minay family were always interested in the Douglas Choral Union and donkeys years previously they used to ... old Fred Minay, he had a sister called Maggie. Now Maggie Minay was in the Choral Union as well and she was always a leading lady. Now all day long the Minay brothers and the old man, they would be singing their songs which they would be practising for the Choral Union and of course we'd

join in you see, there was many a time somebody was singing a wrong note, we were told off then, you know, or a handful of plaster thrown at us to shut up, but it was wonderful days. I don't think there was a tenor among them, I think they were baritones but they were real good voices, the Minays.

DC And they put the plaster on while they were singing?

Mr G While they were singing, they were working there, yes, and I'll tell you how tough – I hope there's some young men or even older men listening to this – try sometime putting a hod full of mortar on the mortar board and the mortar board was about eighteen inches square, and hold it with one hand. Now old Fred Minay could, the others couldn't, but old Fred Minay he was really strong. Even a bucket of mortar, lift a bucket of mortar up with one hand, try it and by jove he was tough boy, he was really strong. But the singing their songs all the day long it was wonderful, and when the kids came out of school, all the kids you know from Westminster Terrace and Alexander Drive and Eleanora Drive and all those, all the kids were all outside listening to these fellas singing, it was a concert for the kids, you know, it was, it was wonderful, it really was wonderful. They were good characters around the towns and the villages those days. I was still living at Spring Valley of course, I wasn't married, I was still in Todhunter's then as an apprentice. But I always remember a builder's labourer by the name of Bob Bell, he was a mason's labourer and he was called 'Buster Drum,' 'Buster Drum' he was called, now I said, 'Why 'Buster Drum'?' you see and of course the lads told me, and this is quite, quite true, that Bob Bell had at one time he had been in the Salvation Army and he was fond of going on the booze every now and again and of course when he went on the booze he was drummed out of the Salvation Army and then of course he made a promise then he'd sign the pledge; he'd sign the pledge and he'd re-join the Salvation Army. Well this particular night he was on the promenade or some place and he was spouting the odds how good the Salvation Army were, mind you the Salvation Army are good, there's no doubt about that, a good organisation they are, and how sorry he was that he had made a fool of himself by going on the ale, and they brought him back into their fold and he was quite happy. 'Happy,' he says, 'I'm so happy,' he said, 'I could bust this ruddy drum,' and he did. He jumped on the drum with joy, and he was drummed out again for doing it; he was drummed out for good. 'Buster Drum' he was called ever after. And also of course there were other characters around the town too, there was Ben Kewley, I may have told you, there was Kewley, there was Rocker Mouldy, there was

Fat Jack, he was a nice old boy, he was Fat Jack of course, and Scare Loughlin, and of course we knew all these characters and Bella Dole, and they all slept out, they were tramps, but they were quite, quite harmless, quite, quite harmless; used to sleep or live up at the three hedges at Pulrose, you know where the three hedges are at Pulrose?

DC Ah yes.

Mr G Up there they slept. They had galvanised, they used to take galvanised sheets off the tip, the tip was going in those days, and before Pulrose houses were built and just getting built and they slept up there but they were quite harmless. And now of course 'Peg Leg' Caley, we used to be afraid of 'Peg Leg' Caley because some of the kids used to be calling him 'Peg Leg' and of course we were afraid of him in case he thought we were the cheeky ones, you see. Mind you I suppose we did shout 'Peg Leg' after him now and again but he couldn't chase us, poor fella, you know, he'd lost his foot – he had lost a leg in the First World War.

DC You weren't always with Todhunter & Elliot though, you worked at the Gas Company as well didn't you?

Mr G Yes, eventually of course work went very slack in Tod's and when you had winter works schemes you see before the war, when you got paid off from one job and there was nothing in the building trade, well you went and looked for something else and for a little while I was down the Braddan quarry, with Mr Kniveton, he was – ran the quarry down there, And then of course I was on Douglas Head Marine Drive which you have a recording of and then I was lucky enough to get into the Gas Company. I was a lamplighter when I was in the Gas Company because sometimes the Gas Company was slack as well and they were very good to their employees, the Gas Company, they said, 'Now if there's nothing in the plumbing trade will you go labouring?' and I said, 'yes.' This appertained to other fellas as well, and I said, 'Yes, certainly, I don't want to get paid off,' because I was a married man by this time, just before the war, and they give me a chance, they said, 'now will you go lamp lighting?' And I said, 'yes,' so there were lots of gas lamps around the town those days, and they were on a pilot light, you pulled a lever for on and off, you see, at whatever the lamp lighting time was, like lighting up time was perhaps 4 o'clock or half past according to the light of the winter and summer. You lit them up at lighting up

time and you put them out at midnight.

DC How did you do that because they were tall lamps, weren't they?

Mr G Yes, well you went around on the push bike and you had a piece of copper tube or a walking stick with a hook on the end of it and you reached up and the wire coming down from the bottom of the lamp was only about a foot long, but it was long enough to pull the lamp on or off, whichever it was, it lit by a pilot light you see. And of course there was one place in particular where it was funny, Shaw's Brow and all the old houses were still intact in those days, pre-war, there was nothing pulled down and I used to go over Athol Street and there was a couple in Athol Street, then into Shaw's Brow, there was two or three in Shaw's Brow, and then you went down the steps to Hanover Street. Now then on the way down the steps you got to a lamp on a bracket on the wall outside an old boy's window and this old boy, Mr Jones, Natty Jones, he were, poor man, I eventually discovered he was crippled and lying in bed most of the time. Well of course I didn't know that and of course I put the lamp out at midnight and when I got into Hanover Street and I looked back and the lamp was re-lit. So I thought I wonder what's gone wrong, so I went back up, it might be a slack lever, or the balance has gone wrong, so I went back up and I put the light out again, and believe me when I put that light out I was met by a tirade of foul language, leave that so-and-so, so-and-so lamp lit, you see. And I thought, what's this at all, you see, and he said leave the lamp lit. So I went and the following morning I sez to Tommy Creer, the foreman plumber, about this bracket, and he said, 'Oh I forgot to tell you, Natty Jones, he lies in bed and he reads by the lamplight and when he's finished with the light he'll put it out.'

DC So he used to reach out of the window.

Mr G Yes, Natty Jones used to reach out through the broken window with a walking stick and put the light out and then that was all right. So I had no need to light or put out that lamp in future. He put it on when it was convenient for himself, yes. Also of course those days, the porters' handcarts – there were porters those days, people don't know what porters are these days – they had their handcarts stacked behind *The British Hotel*, near *The Market*. Now the porters those days, when the boat was due in, coming in, they'd all run down with their handcart to get the luggage and deliver it to the boarding houses, you see. But, I'm repeating myself, the handcarts were behind *The British Hotel* and there's many

a night, Saturday nights in particular, when the trippers were in, lots of them got drunk, and of course they were getting drunk among those old pubs, there were old pubs, lots of old pubs around the town those days. When they cleared the pubs, the bus stop area, they pulled twenty-two pubs, they pulled down twenty-two public houses down in the clearance for where we know the bus station is in particular. Now then, the policemen those days, they were good blokes, they're good blokes these days of course. I've held a handcart and the policeman would put two or three drunks who were incapable on a handcart, ask somebody else who is on the trip, as well, 'Wheel these fellas, these blokes, down the pier will you,' and I'd go down the pier with the policeman, to make sure, to bring the handcart back you see, bring the handcart back with the policeman for the next batch of fellas who were drunk. There would be about six or eight handcarts shovelling up and down the pier, putting drunks on, but we'd always give the drunks to some of their mates, whether they were mates or not on the trip or not we don't know.

DC They'd be day trippers would they?

Mr G Oh, they'd be day trippers and they didn't put them in gaol, didn't put them in gaol, get shut of them, bring them down the pier in a handcart, you wouldn't do that now, would you? Wouldn't do that now.

END OF INTERVIEW