

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

**‘TIME TO REMEMBER’**

**Interviewee:** Mr Hilary Guard

**Date of birth:** 21<sup>st</sup> March 1913

**Place of birth:** Wallasey, Cheshire

**Interviewer:** David Callister

**Recorded by:** David Callister

**Date recorded:** January 2001

**Topic(s):** Childhood holidays to the Isle of Man  
Owning an *Austin 16 Six* car  
Meeting future wife at *The Grasmere Hotel*  
Tourism after WWII  
Renovating *The Hydro Hotel*  
Employing Irish staff  
Rules and regulations on accommodation  
Advertising in *The Guide*  
Rationing and the ‘black market’  
The Hotelier’s Association  
Decline in tourism  
Staff shortages and the introduction of service charge  
Staff incentives and bonuses  
Case involving Trade Unionist Bernie Moffatt

Hilary Guard - Mr G  
David Callister - DC

**DC** This is an interview with Hilary Guard, we're going to talk about the good old days of the holiday industry in the Isle of Man and you tell me that you're now, eighty-eight, is it?

**Mr G** Eighty-eight on the 21<sup>st</sup> March.

**DC** This coming 21<sup>st</sup> March?

**Mr G** Yes, I was born the first day of Spring and it was on a Good Friday and my mother named me Hilary Francis because she was determined I was going to be a girl and my name has been a curse to me all my life – even the Income Tax send me my income tax forms, 'Mrs H. Guard.'

**DC** Oh, dear, well there are quite a few men called Hilary, I think – there were.

**Mr G** Oh, there is, yes.

**DC** And where was this you were born then?

**Mr G** Wallasey, Cheshire.

**DC** Right, now can we make this Isle of Man connection as to how you came to the Isle of Man and got into that industry?

**Mr G** Well, going right back, my father was the senior chief clerk in the Civil Service, indoor Civil Service, in Liverpool and he was very fond of sailing and he used to commute between the Isle of Man and Liverpool and frequently in the summer time Mother would come over. They would hire a cottage or a house and we'd stay there for the whole summer and Dad would commute at the weekends, and that's where I got my first taste of the Isle of Man, as you might say.

**DC** So what do you remember of those days, what did you do in those summer days then?

**Mr G** Well, we stopped at Laxey, and I remember we stopped at *The Station House* in Ballasalla, and the house is still there – I often think of that when I go past it.

- DC** Did you get to know the youngsters around at all?
- Mr G** No, no, I didn't, no – two brothers, and we used to go round together like, on the shore at Port Jack and so on.
- DC** And how did you get around the Island then, did you have your own car, the family car or anything?
- Mr G** Oh, no, no car in those days, you're talking about eighty years ago because I came here when I was about three or four, I believe.
- DC** Of course, yes.
- Mr G** We stopped at various places in the Isle of Man, and of course the summers were always hot ...
- DC** People keep telling me that, this can't be – isn't this just the distance and the memory?
- Mr G** No ...
- DC** Were they genuinely?
- Mr G** No, it's not, it's genuine, and I mean Douglas on a summer's day, there were thousands on the beach, it was like Blackpool. I came – I used to remember the old bathing huts they used to wheel down, big solid tyres they had, you know, and pull them to the water's edge.
- DC** Well, didn't they keep the male and female bathers separate at one time?
- Mr G** Well, I can't remember that far back, only I remember them, you know, my mother going in one.
- DC** Into the bathing huts?
- Mr G** Yes and coming out with a swimming costume they'd wear in the arctic now.
- DC** So the bathing hut and your mother coming out dressed for the arctic, and in

those days then, when there were all those people on the promenade, I mean if you look at photos of them now, if you look at old film of them now, they'd lots of clothes on, hadn't they, I mean you were saying there were marvellous hot summers in those days but a lot of them were sitting round in overcoats, weren't they?

**Mr G** Well, no, I'm talking about the deck chairs that – every couple of hundred yards along the promenade there were deck chairs, probably two or three hundred, and they had a green tarmac cover and they always had an attendant and they used to make a little den inside this, so if it rained he was able to sit in out of the wet. They charged for these deck chairs and they went very well.

**DC** So people were not in a state of undress as they are today though, were they?

**Mr G** Oh, no, nothing like that, they were all well costumed.

**DC** Anyway this then must have been some sort of inspiration for you at this early age to get back over here to the Isle of Man to get into the tourist business, into the boarding house as it used to be called in those days.

**Mr G** Well, no, it came quite by chance really. I and a partner had a garage in Stourbridge, West Midlands, and after a year with no holidays, we worked from morning till midnight, seven days a week, and we had a good business there and I decided I'd take two days off and go over to Dublin. So I had a big *Austin 16 Six* with me and I got up to the platform and I went to the Dublin kiosk and I said, 'I want a return for two days to Dublin,' and he looked at me in horror and, 'no,' he said, I couldn't have that, too late. I think they expected me to camp out on the dockside there two days and two nights – and the boat was still there. So I went to the Isle of Man kiosk which was only a few feet square, with a little window in and I folded up a pound note about the size of a postage stamp. Now fifty years ago a pound note was worth something, because I thought if I don't get to Dublin at least I'm going to go to the Isle of Man, so I said – I pushed my hand through the little hole, I showed him the pound note, I said, 'Can you possibly get me over to the Isle of Man,' I said, 'I've got to get over for domestic reasons.' 'Oh, I don't want that,' he said, 'I don't want that,' but I insisted that he had it and I got on the boat. And as I said, we'd disappeared out of sight and the Dublin boat was still there. Now they wouldn't do it now.

**DC** No, no.

**Mr G** Anyway I was tootling along the promenade, it was mid-August and there was a clear blue sky, the sun was scintillating on the sea, thousands on the beach, and mind you it had been years and years since I'd been to the Isle of Man. The last time I'd stayed in the Isle of Man was just before the war broke out and I stopped at Cunningham's Camp; that was a good many years ago. And I thought to myself what sort of people are these that are allowed to live here in the Isle of Man – it's paradise – I really did. Anyway I tootled along the prom gently and stopped outside *The Grasmere* and I knocked on the door – the door was open, you could go straight through because it was a lovely summer's day – but I rang the bell and a young lady came out and I said to her, 'Have you got a single room for a couple of nights?' 'Of course we haven't,' she said. I mean I didn't even give her a chance even to think about it – a single room in the middle of August on the promenade. So I said, 'Well, are you the proprietor?' She said, 'No.' 'Well,' I said, 'can I see whoever is?' 'It won't do you any good,' she said. Anyway the lady came, a Mrs Matthews, *The Grasmere*, and by a strange chance her husband used to be a steward on the Isle of Man Steam Packet and he must have got into conversation with my father, because he knew him well and Dad had called upon them when he was in the Isle of Man and they knew him. And Mrs Matthews said to me, 'Is your name Guard?' I thought that's weird, how – I've never seen her in my life, how does she know me. And I said, 'Well,' I said, 'it is – how do you know?' 'Well,' she said, 'you're the image of your father,' she said. 'Well,' I said, 'have you got a single room for two nights,' and she said, 'well, you'll have to sleep here and sleep there.' I said, 'I don't mind that, I'll sleep under the bed.' So I was there for nearly two weeks because in there I met the daughter, you see, and I decided that she was the girl I was going to marry.

**DC** Right, you decided that.

**Mr G** That's right – she didn't! I had an awful job to get her to come out with me and she must have thought I was a wolf or something and of course I was. Anyway the upshot of it was, in about a year's time we got married and settled in *The Grasmere* and we were there for eighteen years – no, twelve years in *The Grasmere* – and I'd never stopped in a hotel or a boarding house before. I wasn't really fit to, you know, I was always out camping and stuff like that, so I had to learn the business, decorating and painting and attending to the visitors'

needs as regards to different things like putting in power plugs. Anyway after twelve years we'd built the business up till we couldn't make it any better and I thought well, if I want to advance anywhere at all I must get a bigger place, and then *The Hydro* came up and we took that, and we were there for eighteen years.

**DC** Right. What year would it have been that you got to *The Grasmere* then, was that – that would be – it was certainly after the Second World War, wasn't it? In the '40s?

**Mr G** '47 or '48 it would be.

**DC** So that was – I mean the tourists were flooding back into the Island then, weren't they, at that time?

**Mr G** Oh, yes, they were really flooding back, there was no doubt about that and you could fill up very easily and I decided that there were so many coming over that I could be discerning, and I took fellows for the top floor, girls for the next floor and the unfortunate married couples on the two floors below, because they had all the noise to deal with.

**DC** Oh, right, so the boys were the noisiest, were they?

**Mr G** Oh, terrible, and I used to be on the stairs until about half past twelve, one o'clock every night – in the early hours of the morning – to keep control because they were going in and out of each other's bedrooms like flies and you had to stop it, you know.

**DC** Well, why did you have to stop it – well, you needed to stop it presumably, did you?

**Mr G** Well, not that there was anything moralist or anything like that and if they had done it quietly that would have been great but they seemed to make an awful noise about everything.

**DC** So when you think of the '60s as this permissive age, but they were just as permissive then in the '40s and '50s were they?

- Mr G** Well, in my opinion – considered – it’s not altered since Adam and Eve.
- DC** Right, so there was a lot of contact going on then, was there?
- Mr G** Well, yes, I believe there was. We even had one girl – as I said, half past twelve, everybody was in bed, I mean there wasn’t any casino then, everybody was in bed by 11 o’clock at night, there was nothing going on, and this girl came down the stairs, dead quiet, and I said, ‘What’s the matter?’ ‘Oh,’ she said, ‘I can’t get into me bedroom; my girlfriend there’s has got a man in the room.’ ‘Well,’ I said, ‘who is he?’ She said, ‘I don’t know, but he doesn’t live here,’ she said. ‘Oh,’ I said, ‘I’ll go up,’ I said, ‘I’ll go up and I’ll kill him.’ So having had trouble with fellows and girls and one thing and another and I’d fitted on yale locks throughout. On all these rooms where they hold twin beds or anything like that, I’d file off the snib and they couldn’t lock the door on me, they could shut it and nobody could get in unless they’d got the key and I’d got the key, you see, and I opened the door and there he was performing and I gave him a terrific whack on his ‘btm’ [bottom] and I warned him if he wasn’t out in the street in a couple of minutes it’d be the worse for him. Anyway he didn’t even get properly dressed but he was out! (*laughter*) But incidents like that – it’s happening everywhere all the time.
- DC** Well, today they wouldn’t take much notice of that I suppose, would they?
- Mr G** Well, possibly not, but it all depends, you see, if you want a quiet house, or what sort of house you want to have and I decided that what I wanted was a house that had a lift and with a garage so that I could put my car in. And *The Hydro* came up and we started altering, renovating it. I hadn’t got much money of course but the bank was very, very good.
- DC** Yes. How many bedrooms in *The Hydro*?
- Mr G** Well, there was reputed to be up to a hundred, but of course with the bathrooms and things putting in, that reduced to about seventy or eighty. The maximum number we ever took and we reached that figure three times, was 200. We never got to 201 but we got to 200 three times. Now the dining room would seat 180 people and from the time we opened in TT week until we shut in September you could say, virtually, there was 180 people in and we had spinner [sp ???] tables which we had in the smoke room downstairs, or the television room, and

we used to seat them there, the odd ones in the bar room as well – but we had wonderful staff. We had one girl, an Irish girl, and she came to us quite by chance in *The Grasmere* and she was with us for twenty years and she was my kind of assistant manageress. And then we had a girl, a chambermaid, she came as a young girl and she was with us twenty years, in fact she lives not far away in Thorny Road, and we see her quite often, she rings up. And then there was another girl, Kit, and she was with us, oh, eighteen years that we were in *The Hydro*.

**DC** That was important really to have those people, I suppose.

**Mr G** And she was in charge of the food, the still room, serving into the dining room and we gave them a grand master key. They had the key to all the bedrooms, and floors and everything else, and they were utterly trustworthy and they were the keys, the heads of every department. Now my wife took charge of all the upstairs and we had systems there – for instance the first floor had their own master key and the second floor, third, fourth and fifth, so that the chambermaid had the key to their own bedrooms but she couldn't get in any up or down, so if there was any stealing to be done we could kind of limit it. And the head chambermaid had one key that fitted all the bedrooms, but didn't fit anything else.

**DC** With an ingoing then, rather than – you wouldn't put the money up front, it would be paid across a period of time?

**Mr G** Oh, yes, very, very, very few people had the money to buy an ingoing and they had to pay it over many years and when they went into these boarding houses, as a rule, they were pretty grotty, and I mean grotty. And by the time they'd paid for it and if they wanted to buy the hotel the landlord would then say – would ask a fantastic price, far more than what the building was worth, and otherwise – get out, you see. And the stuff that they had in the boarding house, if they took it to the saleroom they wouldn't get anything for it, so they were in a cleft stick.

**DC** And did you see that happen a few times?

**Mr G** Oh, yes, yes, yes, oh aye, it was what landlords generally did, in a way. Mind you if I'd been a landlord I'd have been doing the same I suppose, I don't know. But anyway my thought for the Tourist Board had always been, you see, all the



money they were trying on the thoughts and schemes they had of improving the business, there was one thing which would have done the job very comfortably, that is – now for instance I was moving into *The Grasmere* and I paid £3,500 for it. If I'd have taken everything to the saleroom the beds – which were about 2ft deep, it took two men to move a bed, the mattress, they were a combination of something – I'd never seen the like – and the carpets and the ancient cutlery and all that sort of business, and the cups and saucers and plates that were chipped and one thing and another, if you would have taken them all to the saleroom – if you'd have got £50 for the lot!

**DC** Really, yes.

**Mr G** And I had to pay £3,500.

**DC** You were also paying for the goodwill of the business, presumably, were you?

**Mr G** Well, I don't know whether there was any goodwill at all, but – and don't forget you couldn't pay – you had to pay interest on that, so by the time I'd got to the end of the season and paid the interest and the rates and the rent and so on and everything else it didn't leave an awful lot to refurbish the place ...

**DC** No, of course.

**Mr G** ... which is what it wanted.

**DC** And that's why you had to do a lot of the work yourself really.

**Mr G** Oh, yes, well the point is that a good many of the boarding houses were run by women and they weren't capable, many of them, of doing the repairs that a man would be able to do. Anyway my idea was this, you see, that supposing I paid £3,500 for *The Grasmere*, the ingoing, the Government would send down a valuer, like an auctioneer like Mr Johnson, he'd value everything in the house, we'll say it's worth £100, and he would repay the landlord £3,400, you see, right – and then the next tenant to come in after me would have the place valued, it would be worth more than the £100 then because it would be all new stuff, etcetera and it would be an enhanced value, but then that tenant, he wouldn't have to spend £x on curtains, furniture and everything – it would already be there and he'd have more profit to be able to look after the business

properly and pay his rates and everything else, you see. The ordinary chap was struggling with grotty furniture. Now when I went into *The Hydro* I got a brochure which was – it was started by people called Ayles, and they had a two page glossy brochure, it was about two or three feet wide, you know, folded into two, and there were pictures of the furniture in different rooms, and when I came into it, that furniture was still there, which proves my point, you see.

**DC** Yes, yes.

**Mr G** So – but anyway I worked on this and I borrowed immense sums from the bank and the first winter I remember Ashley, the chap next door, said to me he thought I was crazy, he said, ‘I counted twenty men going into your house this morning.’ This was in the winter time. And they were there all winter, carpenters, plumbers, electricians, and I decided that until I got the place right I wouldn’t build up my business properly and I wanted to give the visitors what I wanted myself. Now I went into a house a door or two away and he was showing me his flat, which was marvellous, a marvellous flat, and I knew upstairs the higher you got the worse it got, terrible. Now, if he’d have started and done upstairs what he’d done for himself in the flat below he’d have had a tremendous business. And he used to come to me for correspondence because after four years I never took any single men and I never took any single girls.

**DC** Oh, really, because of the trouble that they were making?

**Mr G** Absolutely.

**DC** What sort of things were they getting up to then?

**Mr G** Well, the chaps used to roam round the corridors all night to try and get into the girls’ bedrooms and – not that I’d have minded that if they’d have been quiet, but they wanted the whole house to know. If you had two girls, now two girls strangely enough are worse than two men, you know, because they’re in and out, they shove the drawers, banging and thumping, and they’re in and out of the toilet and bathrooms and you can hear them floors below. And the only time I ever took two girls, after a while, after a few years, was if I could put their bedroom immediately over their parents, you see ...

**DC** Oh, yes.

**Mr G** ... and the thumping and banging would so disturb them that they would do something about it.

**DC** So you'd got all this worked out after a while then?

**Mr G** Well, now, you get in young lads – we had quite a number of young Irish girls ...

**DC** As staff?

**Mr G** ... as staff, and we found that the biggest export from Ireland at that time was human beings, and if you got a good Irish girl there's no girl better in the world and if you got a bad one you'd never get one worse, I'll tell you – oh, ho, ho. But mainly we got good Irish girls and if you got fellows they were thumping on their doors and one thing and another and they were a damn nuisance and I was able to fill up without them. Now if a man or a boy and a girl booked in as a couple, man and wife or whatever it is, oh, I didn't ask for their birth certificate, I couldn't care less, morally, it's just I wanted peace and quiet. And the other visitors expected me to be a policeman to see that they got that peace and quiet, you see.

**DC** So, you were able to concentrate really just on families after that, were you?

**Mr G** On families, yes.

**DC** Did that mean children as well?

**Mr G** Well, unfortunately yes. But I didn't make a very big reduction for children and a child of one or two years of age, they had to pay as much as anybody twelve, or thirteen, or fourteen.

**DC** Was that something else to discourage them, was it, or what?

**Mr G** Well, we had a travel agent in Newcastle-on-Tyne and he was amazed, he couldn't understand why I was charging so much. 'Well,' I said, 'if you run a table for six and amongst those six was a child say, aged two, in a chair, and you got food thrown in your face and on your best suit, etcetera,' I said. A screaming child is like a barking dog, nobody hears it, only the neighbour, the

mother and father don't hear it, they think it's wonderful, you see, and it's disturbing for the business because the people at the table ask, 'Can we sit somewhere else?' you see, and so on.

**DC** So didn't this – did you not then sort of finish up with genteel ladies and retired gentlemen and so on?

**Mr G** No, no, we got a good mixture of youngish people in their thirties – twenties and thirties. And we never used to advertise, only in *The Guide*, we found that the brochure that the Tourist Board issued was the only advert needed. I used to laugh when I saw many of these adverts, some of them a whole page, talking about the golf course and all this sort of business and the electric trams and the steam railways and horse trams, which had got nothing to do with the hotel. If people are coming to my hotel, well I didn't call it a hotel, I called it a good class boarding house.

**DC** Because they were called boarding houses then, weren't they?

**Mr G** Yes, well, some of these used to – I remember the gentleman next door to me, he only took about fifty people and when the telephone used to ring he used to say on the telephone, 'Oh, *Harris Hotel* here,' and I went, 'ha, ha, ha.' And anyway mine was a good class boarding house, because we didn't do *à la carte*, it was *table d'hôte*, you see.

**DC** But you did dinner, bed and breakfast presumably?

**Mr G** Dinner, bed, breakfast ...

**DC** So you had dinners to do for all, virtually all the visitors really?

**Mr G** ... afternoon tea and supper.

**DC** Afternoon tea and supper as well?

**Mr G** Oh, yes, aye, it's ridiculous.

**DC** So it was just an endless cooking routine then, was it, I suppose?

**Mr G** Oh, absolutely, I mean the chef would have to do 150 scones a day, and when I say scones they were real scones with piles of currants in, you know – you could see it was a scone, aye.

**DC** When you first came in had rationing – was rationing still on or had it gone then?

**Mr G** Well, in *The Grasmere* yes, rationing to a certain extent was still on, as regards meat and all that sort of business you know, it wasn't easy to get. Of course mind you everybody was on the – who could – would be on the fiddle, you see.

**DC** There was a 'black market,' was there?

**Mr G** Well ...

**DC** They used to call it a 'black market.'

**Mr G** That's right, aye. And I used to go and get a hundredweight of sugar from a provision merchant up in Onchan and I'd pay him £9 for this – it's nearly £9 a pound now, I don't know about £9 a hundredweight – and people thought I was mad, the ones in the know who knew I was doing it. But I used to fill the sugar bowls right to the top in the dining room and it meant what extra I was paying in sugar, I only had to get one extra person in a week to pay for the extra in that sugar, you see. And we could take sixty-eight people in *The Grasmere* and by the time we opened – in about nine years' time – we had sixty-eight when we opened, and we never dropped below sixty-seven the whole summer till we shut.

**DC** Wonderful that, isn't it?

**Mr G** I was getting up to sixty enquiries a day, sixty, and only in *The Guide*, because in *The Guide* I just put about the hotel, and Peter Norris, when I went into *The Hydro*, he had the Norris Modern Press, Victoria Street, he did me a brochure, a marvellous brochure, it really was, it was a cracker. It would have cost about 50p or 60p to send by post now, today, the horrendous charges they had, but in those days it wasn't a lot, but – exaggerated of course – but still it was – and it served the purpose. When people read the brochure they realised that – and I put in the menu as well.

**DC** That's not often done, is it?

**Mr G** No, I put a menu in. Because in the morning, like for breakfast, we had these silver goblets, electro-plated nickel silver of course, they weren't real silver, and we had those with grapefruit and I didn't get – you could get these gallon tins of chopped grapefruit but we had grapefruit segments, you see, a little bit extra, but they looked nicer and I used to get gallon tins of grapefruit juice and top them up. And we had big shelves in the dining room and all these would be placed on the shelves at night and covered with cloths. And in the morning – they didn't have any choice of breakfast – but they could have porridge, cornflakes, bacon and egg and – you don't even see this in a first class hotel – we had bread and butter and toast on the table. In the hotels I've been in in the Isle of Man or anywhere else, you might get toast in the morning but you don't get bread and butter as well.

**DC** And sliced bread hadn't been invented then, had it?

**Mr G** Well, I had a huge slicer ...

**DC** Oh, you did that yourself, did you?

**Mr G** ... a *Berkel* slicer, oh, everything for economy. Anyway – and on the table was HP sauce, tomato sauce, pepper and salt, and when we were having meat there was mustard. Now if you go to a first class hotel today you'll never see any mustard on the table.

**DC** You have to ask for it.

**Mr G** You have to ask for it and invariably – very often there isn't pepper and salt or the sauces. So they hadn't got a clue, and it doesn't cost any extra.

**DC** This jump, then, from 70 or so people in *The Grasmere* to what would be 180 and more in *The Hydro* must have been quite a change to make for you, was it?

**Mr G** Well, of course there wasn't 180 when we went – if you got 120 in the height of the summer that was what we got.

**DC** So you had to build it up?

**Mr G** I had to build it up, it took a few years, five or six years, but of course we got a lot of following from our old business you see.

**DC** You're in *The Hydro*, you're having to build up the business, which you do very successfully of course ...

**Mr G** Well, it takes a few years to build a business up and the only way to build a business up, a big business like what we had, was you've got to be – get good competent staff – and any business, it doesn't matter whether it's a chip shop or a plumbers or electricians, the directive comes from the top and if the top is no good, the business is no good.

**DC** When you were in your prime, shall we say, in the holiday season and numbers were dwindling as well, of course, the numbers of Isle of Man visitors were dwindling, what support did you get from the Tourist Board, and was there an organization of the hoteliers themselves that was trying to improve things?

**Mr G** Well, they did have a Hoteliers Association and – I didn't have much to do with the Tourist Board really.

**DC** No.

**Mr G** I mean my ideas on the running of a business didn't coincide with what they were trying to do. As I've expressed before, that if you want to run a successful hotel you've got to get the hotel right first in the conveniences – what you'd want at home.

**DC** And from that point of view they could have used their money differently, you were saying, yes.

**Mr G** Yes, it would have been an initial big outlay in the first place to compensate the owners and the tenants for going in and paying a horrendous price for rubbish, to buy that first place, and after that it would be plain sailing, you see.

**DC** Now you then must have seen the start of the decline of tourism then?

**Mr G** Well, just about, just about, the things were happening. A number of the hotels were going on to just bed and breakfast, you see and of course I didn't really

realise what was happening until a few years afterwards when I got to thinking about it, and part of the trouble was the staff, you see, you can't run a hotel without staff and staff are very, very difficult to get. It was as difficult to get staff then to run a hotel as it is now to get staff in the Isle of Man, where every business is competing and robbing each other because there's a shortage of staff.

**DC** Why was that shortage, were they not paid enough, was it a poorly paid job really?

**Mr G** Well, I wouldn't say that, you see, but any individual would want a job which lasts for fifty-two weeks a year, if they came over to us it's just a seasonal job, and of course there were all the seaside resorts in England – and to get seasonal staff – where were the staff going to earn a living in the winter?

**DC** So that the permanent job was the thing that ... one of the major things that killed it off.

**Mr G** Well it is, you see, and then of course the number of seasonal staff was limited. For instance I went on – I always wanted to put a 10% service charge on and I couldn't do that if I hadn't got the place right, but we spent tens of thousands on *The Hydro*, re-wiring, re-plumbing, re-furnishing from top to bottom, re-carpeting, painting and decorating inside and out, putting in a new lift, going up another floor, fully automatic, and so on. And I can say that my wife and I, we were in the business twenty-eight years before I got clear of debt, you see, and the last two years we were in the business were fantastic financially. But anyway ...

**DC** So your profit margins weren't being lowered, in fact you were still making a financial profit.

**Mr G** Oh, yes, yes. Mind you I wasn't worried about owing the money, I loved the business, you see.

**DC** But you wanted to get this service charge on, did you actually put it on?

**Mr G** When I got the place what I considered right I put the service charge on at 10%, and I remember I sent all the particulars and I had a reply from a Scotsman and



he said he'd like to book in for a week, himself and his wife, but he didn't agree with the 10%. And I wrote back and said that I'm sorry, he may not agree with it but the staff do! You see, and we couldn't run it without the staff. Not that this really affected the staff, now the staff used to break – you can hardly believe this – I used to spend about £400 every year in crockery and silver. They'd smash the plates down on the dish washing machine, crack and chip them and you'd have to throw them out, you see, and the swill man would bring me I don't know how much silver at the end of the season, a bucket full ...

**DC** Really.

**Mr G** ... and we had a special index book there, fish knives, fish forks, dessert spoons, teaspoons, everything and we had the number of them and at the end of the season we'd lay them all out on the tables in the dining room, count them, find out how much was deficient and then I'd order up again. And one of the first things, when we could afford to do it, was to renew the silver in *The Hydro* and we got *Elkington's* plate and they're called 'King's' pattern, they were really lovely, you know, knives and forks and everything, top quality. And I had a chap come over from Belfast and we used to have Irish linen tablecloths, big square Irish linen napkins and we had napkin holders which were numbered 1 to 6, so if I was number 1 on the table and my napkin – I could put my napkin in there and they were all bundled together when the waitress was clearing up but you'd know your number, you see, so – things like that. But it took time, it took a few years. I remember a lady ringing up one night and she said, 'Can you supply me with a twin bedded room,' it was sometime in May, 'for a week.' I said, 'Yes, certainly.' 'Oh, I'll send you a deposit on.' 'No,' I said, 'don't do that,' I said, 'I'll send you a brochure with a booking form, if you'll fill it in for me.' So the booking form came back and she put in a £5 or £10 note, I forget what it was, and at the bottom of the booking form I'd put 'Mr & Mrs – Miss & Mr'. Anyway it came for – shall we say Mr Charles Harris, Mr Wilfred Harris, two men. And I put these initials separate, the Mr & Mrs and the Miss & Mr, so I could find out exactly who was coming and I sent it back. I had no office staff and I had a lot of printed forms suitable, 'Sorry we cannot offer the accommodation required,' 'sorry we have no single rooms vacant,' 'sorry ...' and so on, you see, and, 'sorry we are now unable to offer the accommodation required.' And I returned the money, of course. We never asked for a deposit, never asked for a deposit. A lot of the boarding house people used to ask for a deposit to pay for the running bills but I got mine from the bank and it was only

extra paper work if you got a deposit.

**DC** So you said no to this booking then and she rang up again did she?

**Mr G** She rang up, she said, 'I thought you said you had a twin bedded room you could let me have.' 'Well,' I said, 'yes we could but,' I said, 'it wasn't for you.' 'Well,' she said, 'what difference does that make?' 'Well,' I said, 'it was for two young men.' 'Well,' she said, 'what difference does that make?' 'Well,' I said, 'we don't take young men.' She said, 'Why not?' 'Well,' I said, 'it's the policy of the firm that they don't take them.' I didn't tell her I was the firm. Anyway she insisted on knowing why we wouldn't take them. 'Well,' I said, 'if you insist on knowing I will tell you,' I said, 'if you get two young men they will insist on sleeping with my staff, young girls, and if they can't get in they're thumping on the doors all night, they get to bed, they're sick in the bed, they wet the bed,' I said, 'they're a damn nuisance to us and to everybody else.' 'I'll have you know,' she said, 'my two boys are two good boys.' I said, 'Look, madam,' I said, 'I don't care if they're two disciples,' I said, 'they're not coming here,' and I said – I don't know why, but she hung up on me.

**DC** Well, I mean, other hoteliers wouldn't have taken this line, this approach that you did though, did they?

**Mr G** No, they couldn't care, they couldn't care less because they couldn't care about the condition of the house either.

**DC** No.

**Mr G** Not all of them, but a great many of them, and that's it.

**DC** So you were the exception to the rule?

**Mr G** Eventually I took Saturday to Saturday, Sunday to Sunday and Tuesday to Tuesday. Why Tuesday? Because it suited the Belfast boats, you see, and if anybody, if anybody came for six days, they paid me for the seventh.

**DC** Oh, right.

**Mr G** Oh, yes, and I remember in Scotland, several times this happened, 'Well, we

can't help it, the boat only comes on a Saturday and leaves on the Friday.'

**DC** So when you – just to go back to this 10% surcharge, it was interesting that you put this on, was that then for the benefit of – for paying the staff at the end of the year?

**Mr G** No, it was to increase my profit – but incidentally it was in a way, because I used to get these staff over and I'd pay the fare over, and during the next two or three weeks I'd take the fare back off them.

**DC** Really?

**Mr G** Yes – at the end of the season, if they stopped with me to the end of the season I'd repay their fare coming over and I'd pay their fare going home and I'd give them a bonus of £100. Now forty-five years ago £100 was a lot of money, you see.

**DC** Yes, that's right.

**Mr G** And it was an incentive because different hotels were trying to rob staff off everybody, and my staff wouldn't go because they were going to lose too much. Mind you the biggest trouble that I ever had was staff, you see, because when you've got twenty staff you've always got one or two that are a bit dodgy, you know, and we've had some experiences with one or two. We had an incident where one of the girls left us, in mid-summer, well now, in mid-summer it's ten times more difficult to get staff than at the beginning of the summer.

**DC** Of course.

**Mr G** And she was going to go home – I think her mother and father were a little bit independent really and she could go home if she wanted to, and she didn't like work, and she asked me for her bonus. And I made them write, sign a form, that they only got the bonus, and they understood this, if they stopped with us for the summer, and she even went – she wrote and sent me a doctor's note, you see, and I wrote and asked her to tell me where I could get it cashed for her, you see, because she wasn't going to get £100 out of me but if she sent us a doctor's note was going to pay for it – let us know where I can cash it. And she went to the trade union, Mr Moffatt, and I don't know whether you've heard of Mr

Moffat?

**DC** I have.

**Mr G** And he was a good trade union chap, you know, no doubt about it, and he did his best for her, he did everything he could to get the money out of me and, ‘Well,’ he said, ‘couldn’t you make a gesture?’ he said. And I explained the whole circumstances to him and I told him it made a bigger strain on the other girls, they had to do her work – yes, I could make a gesture, but it would be ‘Churchillian.’ He gave up – I wouldn’t pay that, if they’d cut my bits off me I wouldn’t have paid it.

**DC** But they – most of the girls then did stay – you had this hook to keep them on then?

**Mr G** Yes, but I mean once they got into the working of the business and let’s face it, I looked after my staff the same as I did the visitors. I mean there were, sometimes, four girls to a room, and there were bunk beds, two bunk beds, but they were full size mattresses, 3 ft. wide, 6 ft. long, you know, and each had a bed light, and there was tremendous hot water, they got a big wardrobe, proper carpets and everything else, they got every facility and they ate what the visitors had, so – and we never had much trouble with the staff as regards that, but you did get the odd one, where we got trouble, like that girl, you see.

**END OF INTERVIEW**