

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

‘TIME TO REMEMBER’

Interviewee(s): Mr John Johnson

Date of birth: 25th September 1937

Place of birth:

Interviewer(s): David Callister

Recorded by: David Callister

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Topic(s): Willaston Estate
Steam Rollers
McCormick & Davies
Apprentice bricklayer
Harbatta & Dougherty
Jokes and pranks
Workforce and timekeeping
Eastcliffe
Palais de Dance
Pay and working conditions
Pulrose Catholic Church
Top Secret job for Air Ministry
Nobles Park
Holidays and bonus schemes

John Johnson - Mr J
David Callister - DC

DC So it's John Johnson ...

Mr J Johnny or John, whatever.

DC John or Johnson – is that with a 't' or without a 't'?

Mr J Without a 't' – 'John-son.'

DC 'Johnson,' – that's it. And for the record, your date of birth, then?

Mr J 25th, the 9th, 37.

DC Right. We're at Willaston, today it's the – what is it, the 6th of August, is it?

Mr J Yes, 6th of August.

DC 6th August '03. Right – we're going to talk about the Willaston Estate and the building of it 50 years ago. And some of your recollections, John, and I really, I suppose, down towards the main road, here, we're not in the estate as such. And that is where you remember the sort of site offices.

Mr J That's right – there was two offices just as you come into Willaston. One was for the plans, and you'd get the Clerk of the Works who was Willy Gilmore – he used to have his office in the front, and in the back, wages and that with Don Watterson and his sister who were in the office.

DC Oh, of course, yes.

Mr J Yes, and yea, and it went on from that. As you come back further, there's a bus shelter, and that was a compound where they made concrete lintels and concrete cills – you know, all the pre-caste stuff ...

DC Yes.

Mr J ... and then, as you come round further, used to be parked here at the bottom, a steamroller.

DC A steamroller?

Mr J A steamroller with – it had a box trailer, and that – he actually lived in that, four-wheeled on a sort of metal wheel, used to tow this from site to site. Now he either worked for the Highway Board or for the Corporation, ‘cos the Corporation put all the roads in.

DC So it would be a caravan, sort of thing, would it?

Mr J Yes, yes – there’d be a window and there’d be, like a sort of a coke stove with just a pipe out the roof, you know, for heating.

DC I remember the Highway Board used to have them around the Island, didn’t they?

Mr J That’s right, it would be pretty standard, yes.

DC Yes.

Mr J And then you’d get the coalman come about once a week with two or three bags of coal (*laughter*) for the steam-engine – it seems ridiculous now, but ...

DC So what was he doing – rolling roads, or something?

Mr J He was rolling – doing all the rolling of the roads. Now the roads – there was fellars working up here – there was one guy, well known character, called ‘Nugget’ Duggan, who’s no longer with us, but he used to – they used to pitch the stones on end. You know, anything from a foot to 18 inches – all pitched on their end. And that’s how they used ...

DC So that’s how they used to give it a sound base ...

Mr J Oh yea, that’s how they used to do it generally. Now they’ve gone to all this dust, sort of, you know. But, yea, and then the steamroller would run up and down. And on the front of this steamroller he had a – quite a wide wheel – it would be about say three to four foot, and then the other back wheels would sort of roll the bits that didn’t get. But we used to get him to roll the corrugated iron sheets, to take the wrinkles out of them, to put mortar on.

DC (*laughter*) To flatten them!

Mr J (*laughter*) To flatten them out – it worked – it was a treat! It just ran across them and flattened them out, it was brilliant. ‘Cos the mortar was all made on site, and there was a wagon – Donald Fletcher had a wagon permanently on site here, which ran round with the mortar – maybe a bag of cement if they wanted a bit of cement mortar. They’d – the hod-carriers would just knock it up on site, you know, that’s how it went. And then, on the stacks, we were supposed to parge the inside of the stack – parging ...

DC Hang on – can you explain that?

Mr J Parging just means plastering ...

DC Oh yes, right

Mr J The inside of the flue, and that had to be done with cow-muck and mortar.

DC Really?!

Mr J So if Willy come round and you weren’t using that – I’d be sent – no fields there now – and just gathering this cow muck in the field, and mix it with mortar, (*laughter*) and so you had two spot-boards – one with this cow muck which was plastering the inside of the ...

DC Yea – well I mean it is, it is a building material from time back, isn’t it, of course, and used in many ways?

Mr J Oh yes. Yes, and it probably worked, it probably worked well, yes.

DC And who was the Clerk of Works?

Mr J Willy Gilmore.

DC Willy Gilmore, right.

Mr J He worked for the Corporation. You see, that’s when you had people looking after things, and responsible. They don’t have these things now, that’s why they get into so much trouble, David, just built a new hospital – I shouldn’t say this, but I will, and err, no, the trouble they had before it was finished – no Clerk of

the Works. If you leave it all to the builder, well, you know it's going to happen. And subcontractors – nothing against them, but they'll do what they have to do, and ...

DC What age were you, then, when you started working here with McCormick & Davies?

Mr J Fifteen. I'd left ...

DC You'd come from school then, would you?

Mr J Yea, I left school at fifteen – that was from the High School, and it was Christmas, and I remember the lads saying, 'Well, if you last the winter, you'll be alright.' (*laughter*) 'Cos you know, it was pretty rough, the conditions. I'd probably come in me schoolboy cap, you know, and they'd be saying this fellar's ... you know! I'd be in long trousers, because in them times, they used to wear short trousers until you were about thirteen or fourteen, and they had this saying, 'Who dropped you?' What they meant was, 'Who dropped you into them long trousers,' see. Well I got over that one, I left Pulrose to come to Willaston to live, I changed then, I changed me school and I went from short trousers to long trousers and ended up in Willaston here.

DC So did you have to come up here and find somebody and say I want to do an apprenticeship – how did that come about?

Mr J No, I think my mother at the time worked for somebody called Brown, who lived in Port-e-Chee Avenue, and I think this man was either a surveyor or an architect with the Highway Board. And she must have said, 'Oh, the young feller, he'll be leaving school, I'd like to get him a trade.' You know, the usual stuff, so he must have a word with McCormick's 'cos they'd surveyors and architects, they're all sort of, you know. They're all together and they know each other, and he must have said – he give her a reference for me, to go to see the McCormick's for a job, and they said, 'Yes, you can start, but you won't start serving your time, you can start just after Christmas holidays, you won't actually start serving your time 'till September.' So I was message boy, and still doing a bit of apprentice bricklayer stuff – just patching and ... about in the afternoons, 'cos I was all morning doing the messages – there must have been 100-150 fellers up here, so when you went to town for cigarettes, you went for

hundreds, you know, they'd be ... you know the packs of 200 you'd get, I'd have three or four of them packs!

DC Yes, of course, yes. Now where's your nearest shop from here at that time?

Mr J Oh no, now this was the other thing – I had to go – I was told where to go for these, I had to go for the cigarettes to Harbatta & Dougherty. Now they were in Drinkwater Street; now there was something not quite right there because he was ...

DC Were they wholesale?! (*laughter*)

Mr J (*laughter*) Well, there was somebody getting a ... it wasn't me!! (*laughter*) Somebody was getting a piece of the action here – must have been George or Jim – I don't know, but I never went into that, (*laughter*) I just did what I was told in them days. But I remember Jim McCormick, and me coming back from town this day, I had a bicycle tyre round me neck – you know, the pushbike – a big bag with all the can – he said, and the went like this ... and he said, 'What's that?' And I thought this man must be an idiot! (*laughter*) 'What's that?' – it's obvious! What he meant was, what are you doing getting ... he said, 'You're only here to get cigarettes, matches and tobacco.' Well, in them days they smoked pipes and they chewed the tobacco.

DC A whole lot of them did, didn't they, yes.

Mr J You know, you'd see them – this black stuff, and they would peel it off with a penknife and they'd be eating this. Oh, you know, and their mouth would be absolutely black, you know. But, oh, it was great times. But see, my wages then were only 19/6 – I was making three or four pounds in tips – on the messages – plus me wages (*laughter*) so I was well away with it! A tradesman's wage then would only be round about ten pounds a week, that's for a full week's work.

DC And a labourer would be, what, six or seven?

Mr J Roughly, yes, yes.

DC Yes.

Mr J But there was always good fun. You know, we had a lot men working together, you always – there was a bit of banter and a bit of, you know, ‘cos they worked hard and they played hard.

DC The apprentice, though, they used play jokes on them, didn’t they? Did that happen to you?

Mr J Oh yes, oh all the time, sort of. They’d send for a – ‘I want you to go and get a long stand still,’ or a supercharged flat brush, or a sack full of foot-lock holes and all this sort of damn nonsense, (*laughter*) and they know when you come in, Cannell & Harvey – all them, Tod Hunter & Elliott, they’d all know – ‘I’m sorry, lad, we’re fresh out, but if go to such and such ...’ (*laughter*)

DC And they’d send you to somebody else! (*laughter*) But you got caught out with it?

Mr J But if the bosses found out like, that you were being sent on all these wild goose chase, whoever sent you would be in trouble, like, but it did happen, oh yes.

DC I’ve seen fellers sent for the stysalls [sp ???] me self, but I don’t think it’ll work so much these days as it used to, though.

Mr J No. The other thing they did, Mac’s, they were organised, they were spot-on, like, you know, there was eyes down looking. And they paid extra cash – just coppers – so they had one fellar working against the other. Now the bricklayers, the corner men, they would get more than the ordinary guy, like, you know, and this is how it went. But, oh aye, there was some fun and games, alright.

DC Well, I think we’ll wonder off now to where you first started working, and that would be further up the site.

Mr J Well, we’ll go to the farm where they made the slabs, if you like.

DC Oh, they made slabs at the farm?

Mr J Made slabs at the farm, yea. So we’ll go over there and I’ll show you exactly where they did this.

DC We've come down to, what is now, I suppose you'd say, an old peoples' home, for want of a better expression. But this corner was originally a farm on the site here.

Mr J That's right, and McCormick's used the buildings – the farm buildings at the back – for making their pre-cast concrete slabs, 'cos all Willaston house was all three x two slabs – there's no concrete patches, it was all slabs, and they were all made here on this corner. And a fella called Sid Cordonly, he run the place, like, yea, yes. There'd never been a lot of fellers working, actually, in this yard, you'd see more activity if they were moving onto site, but it was only probably two or three that actually worked on this site.

DC So a bit of the farm was still here, then?

Mr J Oh yes, all the buildings were still here, and the house was probably empty – I can't remember. But the house was there on the corner and that was taken down later and all the buildings, and obviously this building went up. In fact the buildings would probably be still here 'till that happened, yea, yea.

DC Well, this is, of course, Johnny Watterson's Lane at this end, and the farm would have been named after Johnny Watterson, or the lane would have been named after Johnny Watterson, I think.

Mr J That's right, yea, that's right, yea, 'cos we're on the corner of Ballanard Road and Johnny Watterson's Lane.

DC Well these fellers making slabs here, then, would have been pretty busy, because the houses were going up at a fair rate, as well, weren't they?

Mr J Oh yes, they were, they were kept going all the time, I never seen them anywhere else on site, only here. They might have came round with the wagon dropping them off, but I doubt it, 'cos they, you know, they had a full time job, because these house were going up quick. They reckon 'Mac' [McCormick] was about the third fastest builder in the British Isles at the time, 'cos he had the pick of labour in the '50s – there wasn't a lot of work, and this was a big site, when you think about that time, sort of, you know.

DC Well, just a handful of men, as you say, here, but if there was 150 people on the

site, checking on whether they were at work or not would be a bit tricky, there was no clocking-on, or anything was there?

Mr J Oh yes, yes (*laughter*) – it wasn't like British Airways – what they did, they had a time-keeper called Willy Gale, and you had to go – his office would be in the centre of everything, like – canteen and plumbers' shop and Willy would be at the end of the plumbers' shop, and they would all have a number, and you'd have to shout your number at him, 'cos he'd have you ticked off, and he'd have your name alongside your number, see? But the hod-carriers had a trick, they would come, if they knew their mates weren't in, they'd know they were on their way, they would shout half a dozen numbers at Willy (*laughter*) – there was nobody there!! He'd be saying to me, 'Who was that, who was that, who was that?' 'Oh yes, you're alright Willy, yes, did you get that done? They're all there – I've seen them, yes – I'm not getting involved in this!' Yea – 'cos I had to work with these fellars so, you know, you'd never seen anything, really.

DC No. Well, how would they get to work then, would be on pushbikes would they, or on a bus?

Mr J Pushbikes, bus or wagon – he'd run a wagon sort of, sometimes probably open top, but I can remember later on they just had a joiner would knock up a box and this box – the men would just lift it onto the wagon to go home at night, and when they got to the site they'd lift it off 'cos the wagon would be running round the site all day. So, oh yes, it was great fun. But it was enough to keep the rain off you, but there was a terrible draught went underneath and cut your ankles off in the wintertime.

DC Yes. Well, when the bosses came round the site, then, they'd be in their own cars, would they?

Mr J Oh yes. George Mac had a black *Singer*, and it was came in 303. Now 303 was the bullet of the *Royal Enfield*, see, so it would be nicknamed the 'bullet.' So as soon as you heard it, it would be, 'Hey up, here's the 'bullet' coming.' It would be eyes down working, see. And Jim had a red *Riley*, so it would be either, 'Look out, here's one of the Mac's are about!' or something like that, but the bullet, yea, 303 yea, George, yea.

DC And the slab work, then, must have been pretty heavy going, because lifting 3 x

2 slabs and making them is not a light job, is it?

Mr J No. But when I worked at Eastcliffe – that was after I left the building trade – they had a concrete unit, and because I’d – tradesman, you know, I was ideal for a tradesman, and they used to do 3 x 2 slabs in moulds, but you had to watch the lads – they were big strong lads, but you had to watch they didn’t them go – some of them would decide, ‘Oh, I’ve had enough of this,’ and let it go – well it didn’t half send a shudder down your spine when that other end hit the floor. But, no, they stopped making them and nobody does them now, they’re too heavy – Health & Safety wouldn’t allow that now, sort of.

DC What about the – what sort of equipment did they have here to make them with, did they have modern gear?

Mr J Yea, mixers, and they’d have metal – I’m pretty sure that they were metal boxes, and vibrating table – the full works, oh yea, yea. And the fine shingle they used for the slabs, and they laid the slabs in a black sand. I don’t know where that came from, but it was more coarse, you know, than the other stuff, but they didn’t want them to sink, you know, and that.

DC And they would order sand and gravel, then – who would do that ordering for them?

Mr J Well, that would be done – I would – Sid would say to me, ‘Give this to your man in the office.’ And it would be Don in the office.

DC Don Watterson, yes.

Mr J Don Watterson. So he would write a load of sand, load of shingle, ton of cement – this sort of thing. And he’d write ‘Be-bop’ on the bottom, well that used to wind Don up something rotten because he had this crew-cut hairstyle with the DA – you know, combed back, and he was a bit of a flash dresser, Don – nice fellar but just – you know, Don was a drummer, you know, and at night he’d be playing in the band and all this. Well that used to – as soon as you’d see Be-bop – ‘That ...’ *(laughter)*

DC *(laughter)* It got him going, did he, yea?

Mr J Oh yea it used to wind him up – and he was a big fellar, Sid, Don wouldn't tangle with him, he'd be worrying 'cos he would say to me. 'I'll kill him!' And he knew it, he used to do it deliberate!

DC Well when Don was playing in the band, where would they be, was that at *The Palace*, or?

Mr J *Palais de Dance*.

DC *Palais de Dance*, yea?

Mr J *Palais de Dance*, 'cos I worked at *The Palais de Dance*. In the summer there was dancing every night of the week – I think it was carnival night on Wednesday night – that was a late night, but Sunday they'd have a concert on, now in the winter, Harry Maher [sp ???] was the manager at the time, and they would just have dancing and it wouldn't be as regular. But these spot waltzes came up summer or winter, you know, and I was upstairs in what they called ...

DC It would be a sort of an electrician's area, was it?

Mr J Yes, right at the back, like, you know, *The Picture House*. And it would have this big spot-lamp, and it was two carbon rods, and you had to walk them together, to do this light out, sort of. And Don would be on the drums, so I'd have one eye on him and one eye on me mates for the spot prize, (*laughter*) and I had to do it in such a way that it didn't look obvious – no swishing about with this light, 'cos it's like a searchlight.

DC Well these prizes couldn't have been all that good, could they?

Mr J Well you'd have – the fellar would have about 20 *Players* [cigarettes] and I think there was a bar of *Toblerone* for the girl he'd be dancing with. Yea, it was alright – 20 fags in them days.

DC So you used to fiddle the spots, did you? (*laughter*)

Mr J Yes – confession time – not all of them, but most of them! (*laughter*) But err, oh aye, it was good. Well I can remember cigarettes – *Players* – when I started with Mac they were 1/9½d for ten or, I think it was ten. And *Woodbines*, some

of the ‘cheapies,’ as they used to call them – ‘thickies’ and ‘thinnies’ – used to call them – the *Woodbines* were 1/4, so you know. But that was a lot of money at the time, you know, ‘cos wages – a tradesman would only be on £10 a week in them times, you know. I was only on 19/6d

DC What – even when you’d turned into your proper – to serve your time?

Mr J Once I’d served me time, I only got a few week’s full money ‘cos I had to go and do me National Service, you see, so there was ...

DC Oh right, yea. But what about your first year, did your money go up after – on your first and second, third year, graded up, was it?

Mr J Oh yes, there was an increase every year. But I had to do nine months at the 19/6p, then another full year when I start serve me time, ‘cos I was classed as a first year apprentice, but I wasn’t actually signed up – I wasn’t indentured, you see.

DC But you were still picking – were you able to still pick up these tips or not, then?

Mr J No. Once I started serving me time properly ...

DC So your pay went down? (*laughter*)

Mr J (*laughter*) The pay went down, that was a bit of a loss, yes.

DC The building sites were always great places for jokes, and practical jokes as well, weren’t they?

Mr J Oh yes.

DC Can you remember anything that went on?

Mr J Oh there was lots of tricks they used to do, you know, they would get a fella – especially if he was a grumpy old bugger (*laughter*) – they seemed to pick on them fellas – fellas with no sense humour caught – I felt sorry for them, really. They’d take a fella’s pushbike and strip it down to as many bits as they can do

and just put it in the corner, all neat. (*laughter*) It was amazing – I never knew there were so many bits on a pushbike, yea. And then this fella would be looking for his bike and they'd say, 'Oh it's in the corner, Charlie.' 'Bloody hell's!!!' (*laughter*) You know, 5 o'clock, time to go home. Another fella, they hung his bike up on the scaffolding – up as high as they could get!! Oh the tricks they used to do. They took a – stripped an apprentice – you had this initiation ceremony – stripped him naked. And I think that this was at Spring Valley – I heard about this, and they put his trousers up on a chimney stack, and across the road these houses were occupied – he had to go up with a bare arse to get his trousers down! (*laughter*) Well, you can imagine, he had to go home, he couldn't stay with no clothes – they were all up on the chimney stack. Oh, but this is the boys – 'Whey hey!!!' – you know, but that's fun they had. They worked hard and they played hard. And no, there was good 'crack' – it was really good, really good.

DC What happened, then, in wet weather when the men couldn't work outside at all? I mean, were they laid off or what?

Mr J Yea. The foreman, usually the foreman bricklayer, he'd have a whistle and he'd go down and blow the whistle and your time stopped until he blew it again to go. And lunch breaks – the whistle to start your break and finish your break.

DC There was no sitting about then?

Mr J Oh no. You'd have – at 10 o'clock you'd have 10 minutes for a cup of tea, but they had a guy on the canteen – the water would all be boiled, he'd make all the tea – you know, Gerry cans – not Gerry cans, the Billie – you know, the one with the lid on the top.

DC Yes, the one with the lid on, yes, that was the cup, was it?

Mr J That's right. You'd put your tea in that and he would fill them all up, so when you'd come in you're ready to drink it 'cos you'd only have ten minutes – the whistle would go again and you were out, oh aye. And they'd be there to make sure you did come out sort of on time, and to go home ...

DC And if you were laid off for bad weather, then, you lost time and lost pay, did you?

Mr J We lost time, yes, yea. Apprentices didn't, they could – we were poor enough! (*laughter*) But, oh no, the tradesmen did, yea, the time started ...

DC So there was no guaranteed week, or anything like that?

Mr J No. See, the other trades weren't so bad, the joiners, 'cos they'd have inside work, but bricklayers, it was all outside. Even plasterers had inside work, but err. But I can remember a time when plasterers used to get more money than anybody else, 'cos they had two separate gangs – they used to have an outside gang and an inside gang, and they never – the inside people did all the inside work and the outside did all the outside. That wasn't the case with Mac's – they did both. But there'd be inside work, see, they'd have so many houses ready, so they would say, 'Right, it's too wet – inside.' Sort of, you know, and err ...

DC When you got up to speed as a bricklayer, then, was it a job to keep up with the other fellers because a lot of these fellers would be well experienced and laying hundreds of bricks – well, not maybe a 1,000 a day but they be laying well in the long hundreds, wouldn't they?

Mr J Oh yes, yes. Well, you hear of people laying a 1,000 bricks a day and it's probably true – not so much now, 'cos it's all blocks. But I didn't get many weeks – only got a couple of weeks of full time. I thought I'd never be poor again – £10 a week – that was a lot of money in them times. But I had to go and do me National Service, then, so that was it. So when I come back I just went to different firms, like, I worked for Skillicorns in Onchan when they did the extension to *The Castle Mona*, they put about a hundred bedrooms on, you know – joined *The Palace* there, and places like that. Oh aye, different firms, and I did a bit on me own – yes, quite good.

DC Well, let's go and have a look at where you might have first laid a brick up here, then, shall we?

Mr J Yes, yes, yea.

DC We're at what are the Willaston shops here, and the police station just down the road. This road is, what, coming up here?

Mr J Snaefell Road, and Keppel Road, yea.

DC Keppel Road, right.

Mr J So we're at the bottom of Keppel Road, one side the shops and the police station's across the road.

DC But we're on a green patch of land that dips down a bit.

Mr J Yea. And what happened, this is where McCormick made all his mortar. Now in them days, Kniveton would bring the limestone as such; they would tip it into here, and there was a guy called 'Boxer' Kewley used to be in charge of this department. He would shovel it into a big box and then put water on it. It used to all burst open and it would turn into the lime, sort of, and it ...

DC Yea. This was the quicklime that was being turned into, really the lime for the mortar, yea?

Mr J For the mortar. And in this box, he would have three slides, one for each pit which was down maybe six foot below him – everything was worked on the slope – came in at the top, went out at the bottom. And that was fine. And then, at the bottom, there was a mortar mill where the sand and the lime was cut out in squares like ice-cream, you know, with shovels and ...

DC Now the mortar mill, then, was a roller, really, was it?

Mr J That's right. It was a round, flat machine with two big rollers that turned. Imagine something that used to crush grain to make flour – that type of thing. These big solid wheels – they'd be steel, but they would run over the mortar – really made a good job of the mortar 'cos there was – it could only be used for mortar, 'cos anything, stones, it would just crush any stones, but it was just for the mortar. And then ...

DC So your lime and the sand mixed together ...

Mr J That's right, that made the mortar. And then, when it came out of this machine, it went down onto another platform, and the wagon backed into this platform at the same level as his wagon, and he just shovelled it into the wagon, and that wagon would be one of Fletcher's going round the site permanently delivering mortar, or timber if they were doing a roof, or whatever – anything they needed,

that wagon would be on site all the time.

DC So that mortar was on its way to the bricklayers, and you were one of them using it, weren't you then?

Mr J Bricklayers and plasterers, yea, yea. And the other lad, I forgot, to work it was Benny Blackburn, he was mixing the mortar. Benny and 'Boxer' – there might have been somebody else, but it was 'Boxer' Kewley I remember at the top 'cos he was the man who used to chew the tobacco that I was talking about (*laughter*) was 'Boxer.' But there has been a few 'Boxer' Kewley's – they seem to take the name, don't they – from father to son, and this sort of thing.

DC Yes, yes indeed, yes.

Mr J But Benny – he would tell me how many shovels he'd worn out on this mortar hill.

DC So the McCormick's were well organised with something like this on the site, really, weren't they?

Mr J They were, they were organised – no messing, 'cos old George and Jim and them, they just went round watching all the time. And they had foremen for each gang as well. And, oh aye, it was eyes down, look in or out, this sort of thing.

DC Oh aye. Who was the bricklayer foreman?

Mr J Fred Riley was the bricklayer foreman – tall, slim fella.

DC Oh aye – I remember Fred.

Mr J Yes, Fred – he was a – I don't know whether I mentioned it, but when he was in a good mood it would be, 'How are my Irish lambs?' and when he was in a bad mood – well, I'm not saying what he said! (*laughter*)

DC Dare not say it! (*laughing*)

Mr J No. No, it's not – wouldn't be politically correct, but we knew the score right

away, so we'd get out of the road, yea, but ...

DC Now the one trade depended on another, as well really, didn't it, you see?

Mr J Oh yes, yes. Well, one trade pushed another on. They'd say things like, 'You nearly finished in here lads? 'Cos the joiners are coming in.' Or the plasterers – oh aye, it was all – yea, 'cos the gangs would be all sort of – if anybody got behind, they'd probably have to work a bit of overtime, if it was a genuine sort of – it would be genuine because there was, you know, everybody was sort of working – they all worked hard – they earned their cash alright.

DC And there was no 'lump' men, was there, really, at all?

Mr J No, but it was probably as good – it was probably better than 'lump' because it was highly organised, lump, it was done in a different way – the extra coppers.

DC But there was no cash incentive – oh well, there was some – just a few, yea.

Mr J No, there was coppers, but he had them playing one off against the other – 'Don't tell him, but I'm putting you on an extra tuppence an hour.' And they were all at it.

DC Oh right, (*laughter*) yes.

Mr J Well, Tommy Keggin will tell you – I was talking to Tommy – he'd know.

DC (*laughter*) Yes.

Mr J He was a tradesman at that time, yea. Well Tommy was the mason – he used to do walls and things. In fact, as you go up to Onchan from *The Manx Arms* there's a wall – well, it's probably – yea, it's still there, at the back of the pavement, and it must run for miles, and he did all that. I think he was on his own – just with probably a labourer. I know he tried to get me on it, but they wouldn't part with me at the time.

DC Of course. Tommy told me about that wall, yes.

Mr J Oh yes, it was quite a wall, yea, yea, yea. So if we go from here, now, further up

Johnny Watterson's Lane, I'll show you where the roll of lead went absent. (*laughter*).

DC Oh! We're still at Willaston and we've moved further up the hill. We've now come to an area where a misdeed occurred, then?

Mr J Yes. We're actually just opposite the new cemetery on Johnny Watterson's Lane. And they used to move workshops and huts and canteens about, sort of, they were only like a light frame building, and they had a canteen here, and they had a plumber's shop and the timekeeper's hut. And the plumbers shop – the lead used to come – pretty big rolls, like sort of ... (*laughter*) and they used to roll it off the wagon and it dropped and they left it there, 'cos the plumbers would just roll it out and cut off what they wanted.

DC 'Cos they were huge, those rolls, weren't they?

Mr J Oh, they were heavy, yea, you know. Anyway one of these rolls went missing. So – I've never seen so many bosses around this area – I thought, 'What's going on here?' like sort of, and they said, 'Somebody's pinched a roll of lead.' Well, it would have to be an inside job, because they'd need a wagon and probably twenty men to lift it onto the wagon, see. So it would be down to the scrapyard or whatever, you know – beer money! (*laughter*) But, oh, it was great fun, yea.

DC So they were never found out, then, as far as you know?

Mr J No, as far as I know they never found out – they wouldn't make a big fuss, 'cos it would sort of be an embarrassment that that could happen, sort of, you know. But ...

DC But, I mean, you'd be talking about several hundred pounds worth of lead.

Mr J Possibly, yes. I'm saying one roll – it could have been more – if they were there with the wagon they might as well have the lot, mightn't they? So I don't know, (*laughter*) but I heard it was a roll of lead – that's how it was told to me.

DC It would be hardly covered by insurance, would it? (*laughter*)

Mr J No, no, 'cos they'd left it outside thinking – well, nobody's going to go move it

– need too many men. But they had another system – they had so many blocks of house would be, you know, they would do them in blocks, say maybe 30 or 40 – I don't know how many it was, and then they'd pay a bonus at the last house. There was an apprentice – I'll not mention his name – and he put the flag up on the stack on this top house up the road here. Well, nothing happened – no bonus – so we raised it – oh hell! That caused a bit of trouble (*laughter*) with those signals going all round 'We've seen it the first time,' like – you know, that sort of thing. But yea, we always got the bonus – they were good to pay, but you worked, you know, it was hard graft. It wasn't so bad for me 'cos I was an apprentice, sort of. 'Cos you were sort of there and, you know, any odds and sods you'd get them to do, like. But the tradesmen, they were kept going, they were busy.

DC Well if you look over at the houses, now, some of them are pebble-dashed, some of them have got different ...

Mr J It was a cold render, that. It was just like – the plasterer would just spread it like, you know, on top of the finished coat.

DC Just to give a textured finish, really.

Mr J But they had blues and they had like pink icecream – oh, they had some weird colours, but the colour's gone out of the cement now. But they never had the cracking problems, 'cos, again, the mortar, clay bricks, you know, so now they've got to put these expansion joints in because you're talking sand and cement. They are – I know they are using mortar again, because Corlett's – don't they put mortar out in a box, and I think, whether you just knock it up and it – it's a slow setting job, so, you know, you can have it on site. You'd see that in the cities where they haven't got the space for mixers and all this storage.

DC We should never have stopped using mortar, really, then.

Mr J No, no, no, no – it's a natural thing.

DC But you'll have used sand, cement and used mortar and you'd have preferred the mortar every time, wouldn't you?

Mr J Oh yea, definitely, it was nice to use. It was really nice. And if you wanted a bit

of cement, and that made it even richer again.

DC Yes.

Mr J Yea, yea. But the mortar went out and they started – they only had the bag lime then, so you didn't ...

DC Now that was a plasterer's job putting that dash on, wasn't it?

Mr J Oh, yes, yes.

DC Now, did you have to keep out the way? Did they do that by hand or did they have machines to do it or?

Mr J Oh no, by hand. Bucket and a paddle, but they'd put sheets on the floor, so, most of it fell on the floor, but they would use it up again.

DC Pick it up and use it.

Mr J Well, they'd wash it – they'd have a bucket full of hose, and they would put the dash in that, put it in a forty-gallon drum, and screw the sides to get all the cement out of it and they used it up again once they'd dried it off ...

DC Right.

Mr J ... 'cos the dash all came in sacks in them days, small sacks like the sandbag type sack.

DC Oh aye.

Mr J Oh yea, it was all used up, yea, yea.

DC And the roof – are they tiles, then, all of those roofs?

Mr J Yes, all tiles. Jacky Tooms done most of the roofs – in fact he probably done them all, yea.

DC Yes.

Mr J You know there's Tooms Brothers – it was their father.

DC Oh right.

Mr J Yea, Jacky, Jacky – he lived at Pulrose, Jacky, yea.

DC Now these workmen that were up here, then, about 150 at the best, I suppose, were they all Manx fellers or were there Irish and Scottish boys.

Mr J Oh there was all sorts, yea, there was sorts. There's a bricklayer called George Hindley who lives at the bottom of Keppel Road, now, I think he came over probably from Liverpool, or somewhere, and he stayed, and married, and lots of them did this, like. They moved to where the work was, which you had to, you know, they moved round, and as there was a lot of work going on they stayed, yea. Oh aye, there was quite a lot. There was Irish, there was Scotch fellas – there was all sorts came in. See, Mac would probably be advertising in the English papers for tradesmen, too, because he had the work, yea.

DC So when the Clerk of Works was inspecting the brickwork then, did he ever find any fault with it, that you can remember?

Mr J Oh, what they would do, you know, they'd look down the cavity – that was the obvious thing like, and sort of – they wanted you to sort of – they had what they called a galvanised tie, but it was what they call a 'fishtail.' It wasn't the 'butterfly' that they have now. Now them, to be done properly, had to be built in. So you put five courses of brick, and then five inside, and then you lay them across and then you build on them. Mind you, they didn't always do that – some of them would be tapping them in after, like. (*laughter*) But the 'butterflies,' – you could build them in in the outside skin, and then come back later, 'cos that was already built you could bend them up. But them others – used to catch your arms on them and they'd rip you to pieces.

DC Really?

Mr J Yea, 'fishtails' they used to call them, yea. They were a heavy galvanised ... yea. But Willy would come round – things like parging the flues, and that. I mentioned that, probably earlier on.

- DC** You did, yes. But no walls had to be taken down or anything like that?
- Mr J** Oh no. The only wall – well, it would have fallen down, this particular wall, it wouldn't have been taken down, and that was down further. Had this heavy frost this night, and the frost hit this wall – just a single brick inside – and it bowed right out and over. And it was the frost that was actually holding it up, it had gone that far. And it would have collapsed once it had thawed out, but it was taken down. There was nothing – in fact Willy would go round with a thermometer and say, 'I'm sorry, no you can't, it's freezing.' You know – too near freezing and they wouldn't be allowed to work, so you'd have to sit in the hut playing cards and (*laughter*) the old fire would be going – you know the coke fire with the pipe out through the galvanised roof, and coats drying everywhere, and all (*laughter*) – great.
- DC** Oh aye – 'cos there'd be one or two hard winters you'd have up here, I suppose.
- Mr J** Oh yes, and you've got a lot of wind – like gables used to go over – well they could happen anywhere, because ...
- DC** Really?
- Mr J** Oh yes, yes. And if they go, if they fall in, they make a mess because they break all the joists as they go down – 'cos you're talking tons of material coming in one piece. A gust of wind could put – like lots of times they would put planks up to support them, but until that roof was round to give them some support, and it set – even when they'd set, there was no guarantee the wind couldn't knock them over, you know. 'Cos it was such a big area – no windows, no openings or nothing for the wind to go through, so yea.
- DC** What stage would the painters come in then? Everybody be pretty well finished before they come on the job, wouldn't they?
- Mr J** Yea. They were the last to come in, yea. And I can remember – this is before fitted carpets and that – they used to have this thing, they would paint like a black stain maybe two foot out from the skirting board, and they probably just put lino on the middle bit, you know. And I suppose, if you lifted some of the carpets here you'd still see that black stain on the floor. But, oh the painters, once they got in, and when it got to the glossing stage – see, the houses would

be locked up, and Willy Gill, the timekeeper, he'd have all the keys and the house numbers and he'd be issuing locks, 'cos every house would have a proper thing – so much for each, you know, to keep control of the materials.

DC So would these houses, then, be occupied pretty well as soon as they were finished painting there?

Mr J Oh yes, yes. As soon as they were finished painting, and then they'd have a crew of Mac's fellas going in at night – sort of overtime – cleaning them all out, you know, and all this – the final cleanout before the people went in, yes, getting rid of any rubbish and that. But err – why the rows there would be, once the painters were in glossing, 'cos anybody making a dust – 'Ooh, ooh, ooh,' sort of – 'Get out of here!!' (*laughter*)

DC Yes.

Mr J Winston Cubbon – he was a painter up here. Winston, now Winston – they used to call him 'Oxo' – he wasn't very big – a nice enough fella, but you know the nicknames – everybody had a nickname ...

DC Oh aye.

Mr J ... and his father was a barber at Pulrose.

DC Oh yes.

Mr J Now the police station at Pulrose was opposite the Catholic Church – still there, but not for much longer, I don't think.

DC Yes, yes.

Mr J But the police station started to sink and settle, so they eventually pulled it down. But along the police station there was an air-raid shelter – not very big, well, Winston's father, he was a barber and he used to cut hair in there, you know, and the tricks they used to play on him. They'd have a four inch pipe vent through the walls – he'd have pictures over the hole inside, well, outside the boys would be with a stick, knocking the pictures off the wall. Well he'd be out chasing them and all this nonsense, (*laughter*) but there was no electric, it

was all hand clippers, you know, sort of thing.

DC Oh aye, of course, yes. So an air-raid shelter became a hair-raid shelter, I suppose. *(laughter)*

Mr J *(laughter)* That's right, yes.

DC But as far as the site is concerned here, I don't suppose you'll know how many houses it finished up with, but it was long hundreds, of course, wasn't it?

Mr J There could be 500 houses on the whole of Willaston, but as I said, Morris Clark built some, and I don't know whether there was any other builders that built the houses – possibly, but Mac's did most of them. And then you had the others like the churches, Grimshore's, I think did the Catholic Church. I don't know who done the Methodist Church. I think the Universal done the shops, I don't know, I don't know who done the police station, 'cos these all came later. You see, the bricklayers moved on, they didn't see the finished article, well up here you would, because there was that many houses, but we just moved onto the next, sort of, you know.

DC Your time with McCormick's then, would be spent entirely up here, or did you do any other jobs?

Mr J Oh no, no, no. We did quite a few other jobs in fact. We'll go – I'll show you the job we did on the side of Snaefell, which was a big hush-hush job, yea. It's now a motorcycle museum, but, yea.

DC Oh – it was a hush-hush job?

Mr J Oh – top secret!

DC Was it?

Mr J Yea, honestly – on the plans was stamped, 'Top Secret – Air Ministry.' They had a Clerk of the Works and an engineer on site, making sure everything was ... the walls – massive – Peel clay brick again, but the conditions up there – dear, dear – it was desperate, you know. *(laughter)*

DC Right, John, we're in Nobles Park now – why are we here?

Mr J Well, we're at the restaurant, but it wasn't always a restaurant, in fact, at the side, where you've got the green-keeper's huts and this sort of thing. The concrete steps going up, and they're still there, and that used to go up to a flat roof. And there was a wall round, like a parapet wall about, say, three or four foot high, and you'd go up onto there and you could look out to sea and all round the park. So then they decided that was a bit of a waste, so they'll put another – they'll go up off the existing wall and form, you know, this restaurant.

DC Put another storey on.

Mr J Yea – another storey on, and it's a restaurant now – I don't know who has the restaurant, but, yea, the place in the park.

DC Because it became a café, I think, originally, for the Corporation, didn't it?

Mr J Yea, yea, that's right.

DC What year would you have done this, can you remember?

Mr J Well it would be in the '50s, yea, I – see I did '53 to '58, so it was that period. In that period, yea.

DC Summer time or winter time, was it?

Mr J Oh well, it didn't matter, it was a case of 'Get on with it' like. You know, there was no such thing – you didn't have a choice – it was, 'You do it' you know, so you're told to do it and you did it then, yea. But the bottom half's been here longer, 'cos looking at the structure there and these supports, they look like the old cast iron sort of supports.

DC They're original, I think, aren't they?

Mr J Yes – that would be the original part, yea.

DC Well that would be a doddle of a job, putting a top on that, wouldn't it?

Mr J Well it would because, in the sense, you could just go up and start, virtually, because you had a flat area – it was just getting the stuff up to you, that was the bug, but Mac’s had these builder’s elevators for putting bricks and stuff onto sort of, yea. If they were a bit pushed, the apprentices would be called to give a hand, like.

DC So you didn’t have to have pulleys and chains, and anything like that?

Mr J No, no, there’d be these lifts, and then they eventually got better hoists, you know, sort of, where they could take a whole barrow up, but err – yea, they had these petrol elevators which take two, maybe four bricks at a time in these little buckets – the sort of thing you’d see on a farm for putting bales up, you know, that type of thing.

DC Well, I suppose most people just think that a brick is a brick, but there’s all sorts of bricks, isn’t there, and different types and purposes.

Mr J Oh yes, yes. Well the Peel brick originally started out with a double ‘frog.’ Now a ‘frog’ is not a frog that jumps about, it’s an indent in the top and they had one top and bottom. Then they went to just the top ‘frog.’

DC So that was to assist with the jointing, was it?

Mr J That’s right, the mortar would all bind it together, see, the mortar would lie in that ‘frog,’ sort of, which was just an indent, maybe of half an inch, sort of. And they had different ones – the deeper the ‘frog,’ usually meant the tighter the joint, ‘cos you could get it tighter, you know.

DC Some of the very, very oldest of bricks wouldn’t have had a ‘frog’ in them at all in them, would they?

Mr J Oh I would think so, yea, and they would sort of – but they only had a very tight ...

DC Tight one?

Mr J No, a very tight bed, ‘cos with this they could squeeze the stuff into the ‘frog,’ sort of, you know, when they’re bedding it down. But there was Peel clay brick,

there was a white brick – like Corlett does one now, a sand lime brick, but there was a firm at Ramsey made them – I don't know what they went as, but they were quite organised, too, because they had overhead gantry which picked all the bricks up, put them on the wagons, whereas at Peel, they trucked them out on like sack-trucks to fill the wagons. But now Corlett's are doing the sand lime, but the firm at Ramsey, it was Ferguson & Harvey's old yard, they went off to Australia, lock stock and barrel, 'cos they found this climate wasn't suitable for the brick ...

DC Oh, I see.

Mr J ... so off they went.

DC Facing bricks are a different thing again, of course.

Mr J Well, rustics – Mac used to bring a boatload in, because all the garden walls at Willaston are all red rustic bricks, and they don't do any on the Island – rustics. And they had to come in, and they would come in on the boat, but they would be in like the railway boxes – you know, the box they had – four hooks so they could crane a box full out onto a wagon. The apprentices would come into their own again, unloading all these – the skin would be off your hands and ...

DC Well that must have been the worst thing for a bricklayer – the hands, I mean.

Mr J Well, what they did, they used to get a piece of an inner-tube and make a panel for your fingers, cutting notches in the back and just one for your thumb, 'cos if your fingers wore through, that was painful – would go right through until it went into a hole and it would bleed.

DC Oh, oh dear!

Mr J That was painful. But then some used the tape, and something, you know, that sort of thing, but err ... they put the rubber on the hods, yea, and all that.

DC Different today, though, when you've got to be handling 18 x 6 inch or 4 inch bricks.

Mr J Well, the blocks, yea.

- DC** The blocks, yea, yea.
- Mr J** Well, see, you're getting about six – the equivalent to six bricks there. So it's the old back, you know, when you're craning over, yea.
- DC** I suppose you'd get used to it after a while.
- Mr J** But they should be using the mortar for them, because, you know, it's a concrete block and then it's sand and cement, so it's got to go, it's got to – you know, the cracks.
- DC** There's no movements, is there?
- Mr J** Well, what they've started to do is to put these expansion joints down, you know. In fact I've done it in my place at Farmhill, but yea, yea, but the mortar was the boy, really, was the boy.
- DC** Well, your jobs still here, then. We can see the top of that building again, that's pebble-dashed. And Willaston's fifty years old, or thereabouts as we talk now, isn't?
- Mr J** Oh yes, yes, it will be. They'd started in 1950 I would think. Was '53 when I started up there and they well, they were well up Johnny Watterson's Lane then. But that dash on this restaurant, it's only like the gravel, the ordinary gravel, it's not white spar or anything. 'Cos the first lot of dash, and they tend to do it with an ordinary cement render, but now, they put white spar, but they have a white cement back, as well – they put the white cement back – it looks a bit, you know, brightens it up a bit.
- DC** Used to look best in Dorset pea-gravel, didn't it?
- Mr J** Oh yes, the brown pea-gravel, yea, yea. But they do so many different dashes now, it's unbelievable – you can get any colour, really. 'Cos they're like glass chippings, a lot of it, too, sort of, you know, yea?
- DC** But when you think about Willaston in all those different colours – it's all grey now, isn't it, so colours ...

- Mr J** Well that was coloured cement, but the colour eventually fades.
- DC** It disappears, doesn't it?
- Mr J** It's like coloured slabs, the sun bleaches it and, you know, they go eventually, yea, yes.
- DC** We've come to the top of First Avenue – First Avenue and Second Avenue in Douglas to look at a couple of houses.
- Mr J** Now these two houses were where George McCormick lived. He built the first one when we were working at Willaston, 'cos I was message boy and can-lad and bag-lad – all the odds and sods – I would have to come over here to see the men to see what they wanted, you know, cigarettes, matches, the usual.
- DC** Oh aye.
- Mr J** So ummm ... that was built while Willaston was being built. But I'm not sure about – he then built the one next door, later on, so whether George bought the two plots at the one time, he probably did. But this is a much more swish number two, isn't, than the first one, yea – [unclear] faced brickwork on that.
- DC** It is different faced brickwork.
- Mr J** Yea well the other's dashed, yea.
- DC** And did he live first in the one and then move to the other one?
- Mr J** I would think so, yes. In fact he might still own the first one, I don't know, 'cos I never went back to McCormick's after I'd served me time, 'cos I went off to do National Service, and then when I come back I was with different other firms, and I eventually went on me own, and then, after all that, I went to Eastcliffe, worked with the handicapped in workshops – I was there for eighteen years, so that was my building trade bit, but yea. But McCormick's did quite a bit of building.
- DC** We talked a bit about holiday stamps earlier. That was the system, that you had to have stamps on your card in order to acquire enough pay for your holiday,

didn't you?

Mr J That's right, yea. And it became law in the building trade. You had to have – the way it worked out, the stamps were worked out, you had a day a month holidays, so you would get twelve days a year.

DC Twelve days.

Mr J Yea, roughly. And they had to put them stamps on the builders, and there was a firm operated that from across, 'cos there was a 'hoo ha' later on, that there was a bit of a wangle going on, you know, how these things – money, you know, the root of all evil! (*laughter*) But you definitely got holidays and them stamps paid. So you'd say, 'I want me holidays,' such and such, right? And they would cash them stamps in for you and they'd pay you in cash.

DC Did you get Christmas days and Boxing days?

Mr J Oh yes.

DC And New Year's days?

Mr J Yes, yes, yes.

DC They'd be paid holidays, would they?

Mr J Yea, they'd be paid holidays, yea.

DC Christmas bonuses?

Mr J Yes, some firms did, yes, McCormick's had a bonus scheme – after so many houses you got a bonus, yea.

DC Yea.

Mr J Oh yes, but there was different schemes. Some bonus schemes were a right fiddle because it was just to 'gee' you up, really, and then at the end of the day they'd say, 'Well, you didn't really make any bonus,' (*laughter*) and then there'd be another row.

DC *(laughter)* You didn't get your pay-out.

Mr J I never heard that with Mac's, funny enough, but others were, 'Oh well, you'll be alright for a bit of bonus.' 'Well, how does it work?' 'Ah well, we'll sort that out later,' or something. And that usually meant you got nothing. You know, you'd be working away and say, 'What about the bonus?' 'Oh well, you didn't lay enough last week.' And you couldn't, 'cos it was raining, you know, and all this. *(laughter)* Oh, you just – when it was raining, that was it, you're rained off, that was a common enough thing, yea.

DC Did you find eventually then that you were doing specialist work of any kind, or – I mean, did you get other work other than bricklaying as such?

Mr J Oh yes. When I went to work – after I come back from me National Service, I went with Parkinson's and I done five years there, and I learned more in that five years than I ever learned – see, nothing against Mac's, but they were house builders and it was all bricks, brickwork, laying bricks. But Parkinson's, they had some old masons and the gang I was in were the Peel gang – like they covered Peel and Douglas and South. There was another gang from Ramsey and they come under somebody else. But Sonny Maddrell was the foreman and he run the place and he definitely got you, he got, you know, he got your pound of flesh, Sonny, but – oh aye, but it was good stuff.

DC Would you have to spend more care and more time on these private residences than you would on Corporation houses then?

Mr J Well no, the builder ...

DC I mean – it wasn't a question of throwing them up, was it?

Mr J No, no, it was a case – the building is the same, no matter where you are, it's just the finishing off bits, you know, the fitting, fixtures and fittings. But, see, I'm going back to when we had salt glazed pipes – they don't know what a salt glazed pipe is today. It was a pipe about two foot long, with the collar already on it, and it was a salt glazed pipe, and you had to line them, on the top and on the side – there was – you looked down a line of them and they were spot on. And the gaskin and the cement collar, you know? And the LGB [Local Government Board] would come round and test them – they wouldn't just say,

‘Oh, that’s alright – fill it in.’ Today its twenty foot lengths and you just bang them together and they’re all over the place, but, plastic – fair enough, the pipes are right enough, but it’s the fellas that’s putting them in that worry me!
(laughter)

DC The tools of the trade won’t have changed much though. I mean, you’re talking about a trowel and a mortar board, aren’t you really?

Mr J Well, yes, sort of – a bricklayer didn’t have that many tools, but if you’d gone into the masonry side there was more, yea, there was hand-boards and sort of all different, all stuff for stonework, you know, the different hammers and that. But basically, the bricklayer didn’t have – we used get ribbed all the time, ‘These fellows!’ The joiner would come with a box full of tools, and we’d have a little bag! *(laughter)*

DC *(laughter)* Yes – come with a trowel.

Mr J Yea – fella would come with a hammer and a trowel and a level and ...

DC So what would the kit be, then, it would be – you’d have a flat trowel, wouldn’t you, and you’d have pointing trowels of various kinds?

Mr J You’d have a bricklayer’s trowel, a pointing trowel, gauging trowel, plasterer’s trowel, hand-board, lump hammers, chisels, levels, you know, lines, that sort of thing, yea. And anything else – straight edges – you’d pick up on site if you were concreting or something like that.

DC And a hod-carrier only had a hod, did he?

Mr J He had a hod and a shovel, but they supplied their own shovel.

DC Yea?

Mr J And they didn’t lose them and they kept them clean. Now today, you see them laying everywhere, don’t you, shovels. ‘Cos they get them supplied – they don’t even clean them, they just ... but if they had to supply their shovel, they would look after it. The shovels – when I’m talking about Mac’s time and that, when they supplied their own, they were that clean, I’ve seen a fella at lunchtime

frying an egg on his shovel!

DC *(laughter)* Really?!

Mr J Honestly – over a fire. You know, bit of grease on it and sort of – that’s how clean they were – they were shining, you know, the steel. ‘Cos if something’s in mortar and sand all day, it does – so you just wash it off at night. But today they can’t be bothered. Well you can’t use a dirty shovel ‘cos everything sticks to it – you can’t get it off the shovel, you know, it just sticks to the old stuff that’s left on. But everything’s supplied to them now, but they don’t look after it – doesn’t mean anything.

DC If you were working at a height, then, how did you get your bricks up to first floor level, or second floor level or whatever?

Mr J Well, Mac’s had elevators, you know, putting the bricks up.

DC So you didn’t have to wheel stuff up on planks or anything?

Mr J No, no, no, no, no – The only wheeling with barrows would be down on the floor, you wouldn’t be up anywhere. Like might have a barrow up on the top and you’d be taking the bricks off an elevator into a barrow, and then wheeling it round, and load it all up, but that was common with Mac’s. They would load a whole pair up – as many bricks as they could get up there. And the bricklayers up and sort – and then they’d be able to keep them going, then, sort of, with mortar and ...

DC So there wouldn’t be a need for a hod-carrier in that circumstance, would there, or was there?

Mr J Oh yes, yes – he would be topping up after, sort of. The elevators would just put, you know, packs of, they’d put and they’d have ...

DC Right. So he’d then fill his hod and carry them over to the bricklayer?

Mr J That’s right, yea, or they would be spaced so the spot-boards would go between and then, once the bricklayers arrived they’d be keeping them going with mortar and as the bricks went down, they’d be topping up the packs with the hod, with

the ladder and the hod up the ladder.

DC How many bricks would a hod hold?

Mr J I'd say about ten or twelve, so it was a good weight.

DC Yea.

Mr J But you don't see hods now, do you?

DC No.

Mr J There are things died out too. And the mortar, they would stack it up sort of – be on their shoulder. And they would tuck it in – a hod-carrier would go up a ladder – he wouldn't hold the hod, he would balance it on his shoulder, and the shaft would be the side the leather, and both hands would be on the – like monkeys going up ladders! (*laughter*)

DC (*laughter*) Yea.

Mr J I remember seeing a fella going up, he got about six or eight rungs and the rung broke, and his leg went inside and he went back, but he couldn't sort of – he was hanging upside down – the boys had to go and lift him, 'cos, you know, bent on, you know, the back of the knees.

DC And his hod was on the ground, was it?

Mr J Yea – well that went – that was the first thing to go, like! (*laughter*) I've seen guys getting up the top – three quarters up the ladder, and the whistle would bloody go and they'd lob the whole lot and off they'd totter. It wouldn't go down well with the boss, if he knew, but yea. Somebody would say, 'Well he'd got three quarters, he's got to take them up again tomorrow – why didn't he carry on?' But that's the way it was.

END OF INTERVIEW