MANX HERITAGE FOUNDATION ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

'TIME TO REMEMBER'

Interviewee: **Mr Raymond Clague**

Date of birth: **Born 26th November 1941**

Place of birth:

Interviewer: **David Callister**

Recorded by: **David Callister**

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Topic(s):
Childhood memories of *Ballagawne* Farm
Ploughing and farming accidents
Various animal breeds
Individual names for fields common
Hearing the *newses*
Collecting wrack from Garwick
Southern Agricultural Show
Trashing with traction engine
Bounty for *long fellers* [rats]
Milking and calving
Pig and sheep rearing
Breeding cattle and artificial insemination
Supplying boarding houses with vegetables
Litts of Baldwin
Haymaking and harvest time
Winter work schemes for farmers

Raymond Clague **- Mr C**
David Callister **- DC**

DC So Raymond Clague …

Mr C Yes, I'm 59 this year.

DC 59 – ah well, you're a lot younger than I am. What date is that?

Mr C November 26.

DC 26th November, just a boy, just a boy.

Mr C Just a boy, eh?

DC But I think that's probably a good starting point, you know, boyhood and what you remember growing up, your sort of early childhood memories, we'll start with them, shall we?

Mr C Childhood memories are *Ballagawne* Farm, as I say, with my father. At the age of twelve unfortunately my mother died, she had a stroke, so I was left with my Dad and two young sisters, one sister only eighteen months of age. And we all clubbed together, as you do, we were to be broken up and various aunties took us, one and another, but I held my ground although I was only twelve years of age, and we kept together and eventually my father retired and I took over the farm with my wife and family and we farmed *Ballagawne* for nineteen years.

DC Now we're sitting on what was, or still is, presumably, a *Ballagawne* field here at Baldrine?

Mr C Upper *Ballagawne*, yes. This field was known as *Hankinson's* field, every field had a name and Miss Hankinson, a lady that's never married, but her brother was director of the airport at one time, some people might remember that name. The field down below us to our left, that's a good old Manx name, that's *Gob ny Silva* and *Gob* meaning gully, coming in off the sea, and the sea with all its moods, as you can see from here.

DC The silvery sea, is it?

Mr C The silvery sea and how is it today, it's as flat …

DC Flat as a pancake.

Mr C … as flat as can be, it's beautiful, isn't it, beautiful.

DC Well we're sitting in scorching sun, at the moment, aren't we really …

Mr C We are.

DC … which is nice to have in the summer time here.

Mr C That's right.

DC But you've seen these fields a few times over the …

Mr C I've been in some funny situations on these fields. In me early days, I can remember working with horses, one way and another, down here, harrowin' fields, rollin' fields, that type of thing. In them days if you were sowin' grain in a field of course it was ploughed, it was cultivated, the grain was sown, it was harrowed and it was rolled, and the roller was a stone roller.

DC I've seen them, yes.

Mr C You've probably seen them, different sizes, different weights, the heavier one would be for when you were rolling it with the grain, the lighter one – sorry, the lighter one for the grain, the heavier one maybe for a hayfield, when you're pressing the stones into the surface. But the very steep fields like this here, the roller would have two eyes on the ends of it and you'd have two ropes in your hands, and you were holdin' the roller back so it didn't roll onto the horses' heels, to get to the bottom of the field, once you'd got to the bottom you were right because you criss-crossed from side to side always moving up the hill, so there's no fear of anything happenin' then.

DC So you wouldn't dare go up and down a hill like this?

Mr C No, well you'd have a horse with no legs, shall we say, you know, and they'd probably be down in the tide.

DC Well there's a terrific drop at the bottom here, isn't there?

Mr C Very, very steep, very dangerous, had to be respected, but in them days, as a young feller, you might say, you took silly risks and then you realised after what a predicament you could be in.

DC Did you go down a few times then?

Mr C I've slid sideways, particularly the field, if you're cutting hay off it, it gets quite polished and a tractor and a baler will jack-knife, the baler having the ram, it's hittin' the ram every few minutes and that tends to nudge the tractor back on. I suppose when I was maybe nine, ten, I can't remember exactly, this particular field I'm talking about, *Gob ny Silva*, it was one my uncles, who's passed away now, Eddie Clague, he was in the Navy many, many years and when he came out of the Navy he worked with my father. And there was an Irishman here at that time, Tommy Cunningham, and they were cutting hay, one way across the way the crop was lying, they went one way on it and back empty, as they call it, a drag reaper, Tommy was on the back, and we didn't have a telephone at that time, but people at Clay Head seen this drama whereby the whole lot went down over sideways. Tommy held on to the tractor, *Fordson Major*, a quite high tractor, Eddie held on to the tractor, sorry, Tommy jumped off, above the bank. The tractor went down over, there was no hedge, just a fence, it dropped down over. Tommy couldn't see it, he thought that was the end of everything, it was in the tide. But fortunately there's a small ledge just under the hedge, about twelve feet down and the tractor rested upside down, the reaper, the wooden pole, draw bar in it, was twisted like a rope, in the briars, but that held it.

DC It's still there as well?

Mr C No, no …

DC It was hanging on?

Mr C It was still there, Eddie was underneath, but there was high mudguards, he was only scratched, but people from Clay Head had seen this drama, they ran in, or somehow got in touch with me Dad and we went down, and Tommy was still sittin' in that position, in that field, like a frozen block of salt, he wouldn't dare look, he thought that was the end of it.

DC Yes, yes.

Mr C And when we did get down, Eddie's underneath shoutin', you know, like frightened, shock I suppose, you would say …

DC Of course.

Mr C … but apart from that just a few scratches and it took three cranes to bring that back up.

DC Where did the cranes come from, how did you get the cranes down here as well?

Mr C The small cranes, not like today's cranes. E.B. Christian's organised that because she was a Ford tractor and it was taken to Douglas and repaired, but it was never right after.

DC That must have been a hellishly scary time.

Mr C It was, it was the only time we have ever lost one, you know, but as I say I've been in some funny predicaments. Me father never drove anything, nothing, he had no interest in driving and of course when you were balin', or whatever, he maybe stackin' the bales in eights or tens or whatever, and if he seen her jack-knifin', of course he was hands up in the air, you know, and he'd be shouting, 'She's gone, she's gone,' like, and he would even be shoutin' that in his sleep sometimes.

DC Nightmares.

Mr C But you'd an idea that you would get out of it at the bottom, you know. Quite often if you knocked the tractor out of gear, believe it or not, because when she's jack-knifed the wheels are going backwards, the drive wheels, but if you knock it out of gear she'll free wheel, and I tell you, you're motoring on.

DC Have animals been lost over the cliffs here?

Mr C We've lost, in my time, only about two, and one, the fence was quite close and she was obviously itchin' herself on the fence and the ground give way under her feet.

DC A sheep?

Mr C No, this was what we call a *Friesian* heifer.

DC Oh, right.

Mr C Well, due to calve soon after that. She more or less tumbled down, we didn't see it happen and she tumbled down onto the beach, and you could tell the way the saplings and the fern [spoken with Manx accent and pronounced as *fee-ren*] as I call it, good Manx word, bracken, was knocked about, that she'd only tumbled, but unfortunately when she hit the beach itself she just struck a small rock standing up, which pushed her ribs in and she was dead, but the calf was still alive …

DC Was it?

Mr C … inside like, you know, it died shortly after. And the other one was out on Clay Head, a farm we can see from here, called, *The Howe*, and that was a dog had got in to these young cattle and chased them and chased them, and of course they panic, and it was some of the times when the *Charolais* first started over here and she took the hedge, she took the wire, the lot, and down over onto the rocks in a little bay we can see called the Stowell, the Stowell Bay, just out from Garwick beach, and of course …

DC That named after somebody, is it?

Mr C It probably would be because it's spelt Stowell in the Manx way, like. But there's another little bay out there called the Braggan, that's another Manx word, I would say. But all we could do out there was bury her with boulders and rocks, the best we could, there was no shiftin' her, but that's the only two I remember.

DC Well that's enough probably, is it?

Mr C It is enough, yes, but cattle, usually, they've got a sense, they respect things quite often, you know.

DC How often would you lose a cow, not necessarily from an accident like that, but

on the farm, some of them would have illnesses and so on?

Mr C You could lose maybe one or two a year, believe it or not, that's the only thing, lots of people think, you know, in farmin', everything's gain, but there's quite often losses, losses you can't recoup and usually it would be, as you can see, we've got a lush sward of grass in front of us, now if you put animals in that, full of clover, they would get bloat, as they call it. In other words they would eat and eat and eat and the gas would build up inside the stomach, it would squeeze on the heart, it would squeeze on the lungs and she would just drop, like a stone.

DC Really?

Mr C Yes. So if you put them in that sort of grass, you might leave them there for a couple of hours a day, and then put them on to a poorer field, you know. But that was usually the main thing, grass staggers, it's known as, but that's about the only thing, you know, the reason like, apart from that, maybe an odd calf in difficulty, where you may have to have a caesarean, usually the cow would get over it, but there may be an odd time she wouldn't, and that was more so when they brought in the continental breeds, they were a very big animal, a big muscled animal, and your normal – normally you would have the *Shorthorn* or the *Ayrshire*, or the *Friesian* or something like that. But, as I say, the modern day housewife wants her lean beef nowadays so that's where these continental breeds came from.

DC Did you have milk cows as well?

Mr C Yes we had dairy cows. It was very interestin', when I was going to school, of course it was all hand milkin' and we had about eight, nine cows. A big herd – still some of the brothers alive, and sisters – *Baroose*, Gellings, *Baroose* Farm, a family of fourteen, you'd think they'd need all the cows to feed the family, but they had up to twenty cows and that was reckoned a big herd.

DC Was it?

Mr C A big herd, in them days, as I say that's the 1950s and '60s. And Irwin has just retired, but they ran a milk round into Douglas, seven days a week. Ourselves, we had a small milk round, round about the door, but not a big – but we were

mostly mixed farming into poultry, beef, dairy, like most farms were in them days. Now it's either milk or you're in spuds or whatever, it's a totally different day.

DC Well farming is in hard times now, and I think everybody knows that, but at any time prior to this, do you remember hard times for farmers?

Mr C I don't think so, no, no, not at all.

DC I mean you'd have to go back to the '30s probably, for that?

Mr C You probably would but nowadays there's a lot of money borrowed and, you know, particularly young men, they're borrowing a lot of money and they can easily come unstuck unfortunately, the way agriculture, you know, I'm not in it, but I would still like to be in it even though it is – but it's a way of life, it's a lovely way of life, you know.

DC So let's go back to when you started out then, as a young boy, I mean, your earliest memories would be working on the farm, presumably, were they?

Mr C Working on the farm, as I say, the day wasn't long enough and working with horses and then the first tractor we had was this old *Fordson Major*, that went over the cliff, and the little grey Fergy [*Ferguson*] but you could be out, half past four in the morning, because we grew a lot of potatoes, or spuds as I would call them. We grew a lot of them, twelve, fourteen acres and all the weedin' in them days, there was no such thing as sprays, it was all done by hand, so the spuds, the blossom of the potato at night, that curls up, it straightens up, shall we say, in the day when the sun comes out, it spreads out over the ridge. So you'd be out half past four in the morning so you wouldn't do any damage with the wheels, that's harrow ploughin' or grubbin', between the spuds, you may do thirty, forty ridges, now then they'd be wed by hand throughout the day, sacks on your knees.

DC Rather like thinning turnips, in a way.

Mr C Very much so, the oul' man, my father, I should say, never believed in hoes, neither did I, the hands, no damage, you could get in round the blossom of the potato and get the weeds away.

DC Wasteful farming in a way, wasn't it?

Mr C It was, in a sense, but ... and then in the evenin', late evenin', when they've closed up, you came in with the ridger and you soiled them or moulded them up again, you know, but the days weren't long enough, as I say, and it's a wonderful way of life, and hopefully it still is for many.

DC But even in those bitter cold winter days as well?

Mr C No, you just got on with it, you know, and I said to somebody, I shouldn't tell you this on the radio, but down at Laxey I was building a wall with beach stone, just by the kiosk, you know, and a lady come up to me, nothing to do with agriculture, and she said, 'Aren't you frozen?' I said, 'No, you just get an oul' coat on, put your behind to the wind and get on with it,' you see.

DC So that was it.

Mr C You see, didn't think anything about it, no, you'd be docking turnips, you'd be ... even for the veg round you'd be pullin' carrots, pickin' sprouts, they had to get them, you know. Thursday, all day Thursday you were getting stuff ready for the veg round, mainly Douglas, and all day Friday, all day Saturday, from early morning till late at night. We were some of the last goin' out of Douglas with the van, it was a big 3-ton van, finished up in Demesne Road, that was the last houses, and that could be anything after 11 o'clock at night and just a 6 volt battery on this vehicle. You could swing her with the handle as well but halfways through the day the battery was flat, and I suppose nine times out of ten we'd be going along Buck's Road, and the policeman would flag you down, 'Come on, young feller,' he'd say, 'get the headlights on.' Little did he know they were on! But it wouldn't do today, that sort of thing, would it, you know?

DC So your sisters, then, must have had to learn pretty sharpish the ways of being a housewife in the farm, would they?

Mr C Well, we had one old lady, she's dead now, she's dead and gone, Annie Kelly, she was a wonderful old lady, she lived over at Lonan, and when me father died she helped us out an awful lot, she'd come every morning and she had three houses in particular, there was a Mrs Cubbon at the bottom of the Church Road, there was a Maggie Kermode, and you may remember the name, he was an

MHK, Gerald Bridson.

DC Yes.

Mr C Now she called in on the three of them for the *newses* and gave whatever *newses* she had, and that was part of her day coming over to the farm, and she'd stay for maybe five, six, seven hours, she'd wash the milk bottles, do a bit of housework and whatever came along.

DC Do the cooking, would she?

Mr C Do the cooking to a degree. I learned to cook meself a lot. I must admit with me fruit cakes all the fruit went to the bottom, but it was still good. But as I say we pulled together and we were still a family, and were, up till the girls, me sisters, got married. One of them is farming, Margaret, out at *Kenaa Farm*, at St. Johns, now, and my other sister and her husband used to have 'Playground,' next to 'The Buttery' in Douglas, there. Unfortunately Fred had ill health and they had to give that one up.

DC Cow sheds, cow dung, pollags, manure, that was an important part of farming life, wasn't it?

Mr C Oh pollags, aye, yes, yes, not just of dung or manure, dung is – nothing wrong with the word, that's the word that was used, but the posh ones, now, it's manure, you see, but not only with cow dung but wrack. We carted no end of wrack off Garwick beach, it doesn't come in the same now, probably hundreds of tons throughout the winter period, originally dragged up with two horses, and a stiff cart you might have 30 cwt., 2 ton on and there'd be a good trace horse in the front. One feller we had, it was an Irish horse, he was brought over for the tram, the trams in Douglas, the horse trams, but he was too powerful, too big, he could bring a load up on his own, but when you were leading him you had to be watching that his feet didn't come down on yours or you'd have nothing left.

DC This was the seaweed of course, we're talking about.

Mr C Seaweed, aye.

DC What did you do – when you got it to the farm then what did you do with it?

Mr C Well, in the hacket, or the stack yard, as people would better know, it was tipped and tipped and tipped and at that time the Highway Board, as that was known, were cutting the hedges with a sickle, it was butted, and they were looking for a home for it, and it was young growth every year, so that was dragged up to *Ballagawne* from maybe the whole parish of Lonan and the midden's were six foot wide, and maybe six foot deep and as long as you like, and there'd be a layer of hedge trimmings, and a layer of wrack and so on and so forth.

DC What about the cow dung then?

Mr C No, that was just on its own, that was put into a midden and that'd be put out in the winter time. As you said, in pollags, which you used to draw grap to drag it out of the trailer, or the horse and cart as it was more so then, you'd an idea how much you would pull out at each time, and then you would step six yards, the horse would go on six yards, and another one, and them rows would be six yards apart, and then that would be spread with grips, and ploughed under. But as I say the wrack itself, that would be let to rot down until the following springtime. But the oul'[old] man would never ever put that under spuds, he reckoned it tasted them, but that would be used for turnips and carrots and that type of thing and it was good, it was ploughed in, but never put wrack just on the ground, because it was reckoned nine tenths of the good was gone up in the air.

DC So you had to plough it in?

Mr C You had to plough it in, yes, and it would last there for four or five …

DC But it was stringy, straggly stuff, wasn't it?

Mr C Well there was tangles which come in from out of the beach and the button wrack off the rocks. It takes a good sou'east gale to bring it in, but in them days there wasn't the rubbish, the refuse, that's in the wrack today, the plastics, it was clean, pure tangles. There was nothing nicer than being down Garwick Beach on a frosty mornin', and quite often we'd work the tides where you'd load it onto a stiff cart and tip it at the end of the road and re-load it later when the tide was in, you see, you couldn't do much with the tide in and you'd cart up for the rest of the day. I can well remember there was an old man, Fred Cubbon,

lived over at Church Road, at Lonan, and Fred would do two or three days with us, a man that had been sailin' most of his life, and I was only a young feller then, we had a horse and cart, June, she was the last horse we had and she was a faithful little mare. And we'd gone down on the Monday mornin' and of course there was still a bit left at the end of the road from the previous week and I backed the first load in, put the upside wheel on this and threw the cart over, horse and all ...

DC Oh dear.

Mr C ... and we were always told, trained, if that did happen, even on the fields, somebody to jump on her head, sit on her head, because she would bash her brains out trying to get up, you see, but if you could keep her head down – and I shouted to Fred, 'Jump on her head, boy,' you see, while I got the hooks out, nothing broken, and she gave one almighty heave with her head and poor oul'[old] Fred was halfways down the beach, me worrying about Fred more than the horse then, but we got her out and the cart back on its wheels, and away you go again, nothin', no damage, nothin', no, not at all.

DC How important was the vet on the farm for you fellows?

Mr C I would say the odd time you needed the vet, it was a Mr Stubbs originally, and then there was John Vanderplank and Gwyn Davies took over from there, but there was a Mr Stubbs and he was very, very important, but very seldom you needed them. There was an occasion, we were at the South Show, we had a nice herd of pedigree *Shorthorns*, we built them up when I first got married, and we showed quite a lot of cattle. But this was the Southern Agricultural Show, this day, and she was a lovely red *Shorthorn*, we've still got a photograph of her, and she was due to calve, you see, in about ten days, but we thought she'll houl'[hold] on till we take her to the Show and what have you like and as it happened with the upheaval and what have you, she calved at the Show.

DC At the Show!

Mr C At the Show, and that was the height of the day for literally hundreds of people, they'd never seen anything – that's nature, and even for children to see it, you know, that to me, that was wonderful and there was one or two people sayin', 'Aren't you getting' the vet, aren't you getting' the vet?' I said, 'No, we've had

a little feel round,' shall we say, 'and everything is comin' as it should be,' the front two legs and the nose, as long as they're there, give her time, maybe a little bit of help when you see the feet. And they were absolutely thrilled, over the moon, to see this happen, and to watch that calf, after maybe ten minutes, tryin' to get on his feet, and lots were coming back throughout the day to see the progress, if you know what I mean.

DC How would that go down with the Show organisers then, they wouldn't be too keen?

Mr C They weren't, because it was the attraction. But regarding vets in general, very, very seldom – most things you could cope with yourself.

DC You'd have to pay the vet, of course.

Mr C Oh, of course you did, and that's probably why you held back, you know, being Manx, like, every penny was a penny, wasn't it? But I would say one of the highlights of the farming era was the mill day, the thrashin' mill, where you would, and I can still remember the steam mill, the oul'[old] steam mill.

DC That's the traction engine.

Mr C That's the traction engine, your mill itself, the thrashin' mill and the press, the baler and straw.

DC How many belts were involved, because the belts went from the traction engine to the mill itself?

Mr C To the mill and from the mill to the press, or the baler, as that was and if you – usually you had an idea, maybe one or two days before the thrashin' mill would arrive, but I've jumped the gun a little bit here. My father's main talent, and it was a talent, was buildin' a corn stack and each one was five yards wide at the base, fifteen yards long and thirty foot high, and when it got to the top you had a special long handled fork and, never thatched, just the very peak, the way it was built it never took water and it took a full day to thrash one stack, and that would be fourteen men. But as I said before about the steam engine, they reckon the *long fellers*, although I call them rats, would know when it was comin', they could sense it, and if there was any in the stack, they'd be gone. So maybe a

week before, you'd put short posts right round, out from the stack and fine chicken wire and of course in them days the steam engine, like, he could take forty-five gallon of water in seconds, he'd put a big hose down in the drum, and we'd only a little stream at that time, and I'd get a day off school, I've wrote a poem about that, the mill days, that was wonderful, get a day off school, and all I'd be doing was draggin' water from this little dub in the stream, and fillin' these drums, and you can imagine him puttin' this hose down, two seconds and the whole lot's gone and you have to start again. But then of course, a chap, name of Ernie Kelly, who has passed away, he had a *Field Marshal* tractor then, and what have you, and he would come along, and as I say it took fourteen men. But regarding the *long fellers*, I can still remember, at night you may have twelve or fourteen of them, or more, you'd have a dog going round inside the wire all day, just two shakes, or you'd hit them with a pitch fork or whatever, not the dog, the rats, the *long fellers*. And there was Jimmy and Janey Cannell lived where Captain Stephen Carter lives now, and he was an agent for the Local Government Board, and you would take the tails up there, male and female, the oul'[old] male feller had a big thick tail, people will think it's terrible me saying this, but it's a fact of life. Now you got tuppence for the she one, because she was breeding, and you got a penny for the other feller, and you would always go at dark, dark of night, never in the daylight, mind you winter time was the thrashin' time, so it would be dark then. And then we'd go down by Garwick Stores and watch for Jimmy going up the garden with a shovel or a spade to bury them, wait till he went in the house and dig the beggars up again and bring them back the second night, but only twice, because they're getting a bit ripe after that.

DC This is a bit like the rabbit bounty, this story, isn't it?

Mr C That's right, fur coats and all sorts getting cut up down the north, they reckoned, you know, because them fellers in Government didn't know a fur coat from a rabbit, like, you see.

DC But the *long tails*, as some people call them, have been troublesome to farmers though, haven't they?

Mr C Very much so, very much.

DC I mean today you'd use – to get rid of them, you'd bring in Rentokil or people

like that?

Mr C Well you probably would do, but quite often a good dog was as good as anything. We'd a whippet, Toby his name was, like, and if there was a rat in a drain or anything, he would know and he would sit there all day and all night …

DC And wait for it?

Mr C … till you put a rod up through and, you know, poked him out, like. He used to get them in the pig sties mainly where you'd get a drain coming out, an underground drain, because the pig is a sloppy eater, shall we say, and there'd be bits of food and what have you, you know, but you'd – in general you could keep them at bay. There's one story I do remember, we were going out of a winter's night to check the cattle an' all and the horses to see if everything was all right and there'd be big high mangers in front of the horses, but just inside the stable door a little narrow, a little narrow cupboard where you kept spare nails and grease and polish and this, that and the other, always a good place for one, you see, and he would make out under the door and the dog would know and he'd have him, two shakes and he was gone. But this particular night he must have sensed the dog was down there and he went up by the horse and up on the manger and the oul' [old] man went to knock him off with a pitchfork and before he could turn round it come down the handle of the fork, over his shoulder and out in the ground …

DC Really?

Mr C … and the oul'[old] man was white.

DC Yes, he would be, he would be, wouldn't he, yes?

Mr C But it's part of country life, they're there, they're part of the countryside and as long as you can keep them at a level, they're not too much of a problem.

DC And they were mainly, if they came to the farm, they were in the outbuildings, rather than getting into a house, presumably, were they?

Mr C Oh, yes, very seldom in the house, and not a lot, and you found if you put, as I say, poison down, at the back end, usually they'd be out in the fields and the

hedges throughout the summer months, before they made their way in, and they got, you know, you got them on the way in, you'd very little problem otherwise, very little.

DC You'd hardly be a teenager when your first mill day took place, would you?

Mr C Oh, no, I'd only be quite young, very young, nine or ten years of age, and younger than that too, I suppose, but by seven and eight you were hand milking cows when you come home at night, even though it was only eight or nine, there was nothing nicer in the winter time. I would say even in latter years, we were growing a lot of turnips then, and it was traditional, there was very few growing silage, so it was hay, rolled barley, or rolled oats, more so, the barley came in later, mostly oats in them days, but there was nothing nicer, in my opinion, in the winter you come in off the cold oul'[old] fields, and what have you, the cows were cleaned out, they were milked, they were fed, they were bedded down, the path was swept in, you jumped on top of the meal bin, you got a slice of turnip from under the turnip cutter, and you chewed away and the smell of – just in the cow house and the cows, everything all contented, and you'd eat this lump of turnip and then go in for your tea. But it was, it was contentment and there's many the night, you know, you'd have a cow, or particularly a young cow, a heifer, as we say, with a first calf, she could maybe have problems, well you would try to be there at every calvin'. But quite often, for some unknown reason, it would be between twelve and two in the morning that they would calve …

DC That was the favourite time, was it?

Mr C … that was the favourite time, nobody could explain why, whether they were more relaxed then or what, I don't know, but you'd be sitting there, you'd – quite often you wouldn't go to bed – you'd sit on a bale by the wall in the cowhouse, and it'd be warm and you'd be tired and you'd fall asleep and she would start calving, like, and she'd give a shout and it would waken you up and you would wonder for a minute where on earth you were, like, but that was the sign that things were moving, like, so and more than that, I would say, we kept a lot of pigs. The pig dung, which is very, very rich, was kept for going under cauliflowers, the oul'[old] man grew acres of cauliflowers for Robinsons, or Mr Baxter, as it was then, grandfather of these boys that's got the business now, and he swore by it, the pig manure, to go under the cauliflowers. But if a sow

was farrowing, totally different to any other animal, there's very little movement, she'll lie there like a big ox and they were all in quite sizeable sheds, the sows, and they could have anything between eight and sixteen, you didn't know, but when she started farrowin' you might have one, you might have another in five minutes, could be ten minutes, could be fifteen minutes, and this could go on all night. And then you'd put them in a farrowin' crate, well, a box, we'll say for better words, till she'd finished farrowin' because she could be quite *nowty*, quite nasty, there's nothing worse than a bite from a pig, it's a tear, a rip, it's not a bite, it's a rip and of course she'd be, what you'd call sick, not sick as sick as knowin', but in the process of farrowin' and so you might be waitin' half an hour after the last young piglet was born because you weren't too sure and when you put them back to her for the first suck, she might not have enough teats for the number of pigs she had, so of course they'd start fightin' over the teat and cut each other, because they had little tiny sharp tusks, maybe quarter of an inch long, like needles, so you'd get a pair of pliers and you'd snap them off.

DC Would you?

Mr C They're only soft, and that would stop the fightin', they'd cut themselves to pieces otherwise, that was the done thing …

DC Really, really, yes.

Mr C … and there was always pieces of timber round the edge of the pig sty, maybe a foot off the ground, [so] that when she lay down there'd be a gap in underneath, so the li'l [little] feller wouldn't get so crushed if she came down suddenly, she's not too fussy, a sow, a big heavy sow – they weigh four or five hundredweight, you see.

DC Of course.

Mr C Many a young pig has been crushed that way, but modern day farrowin' crates there's no problem like that.

DC Did you farm sheep as well?

Mr C Yes, we had sheep, that's another story, never kept too many, fifty, sixty sheep,

particularly for winter time grazing, if there was any rough grass, whatever, they kept it nice and neat, the fields, but every field on *Ballagawne* borders on a road. If it's not the farm road, it's a main road, and if they were going to get out, it would be a Friday or a Saturday when we were on the veg round. But I do remember one funny little story, me father sent me off down the road, I think I mentioned to you when you came, Ballagawne Smithy, which is at the bottom of Ballagawne Road. Well that's another story, and there's a field next to it, which is naturally known as the Smithy field, you see. And the latch on the gate was a bit of a divil [devil] to open it, from time to time, and I was only a young feller, nine or ten years of age, and the oul' [old] man said, 'go on, take them sheep down', you see, not much – not a lot of traffic in them days, I was going ahead and the dog behind, down to the main road, and the sheep were waiting in the road, they know where they're wanting to go. I couldn't get the latch off this – they were mainly *Suffolks* – and before I knew it I got this thump in the back of me leg, and it dropped me, and it was the tup [male sheep], my gum, they can hit you, they've got a big bone in the centre of their head, and it dropped me on the groun' and one of Eric Leece's lorries came from Douglas, the cattle lorries, and he came and he opened the gate, or I don't know what would have happened – there was traffic from one end to the other, you talk about a dead leg, I tell you.

DC Let's do a bit about breeding animals on the farm, because you'll have been at a time there, I suppose, before artificial insemination came in really?

Mr C No, that's been in long before my time, believe it or not and you rang up the Board of Ag. [Agriculture] and they would come out the same day if a female was in that situation, shall we say, no end of breeds, no end of breeds, and if it didn't work the first time you always had a free go, shall we say, or the cow did.

DC But you'll have kept a bull on the farm, will you?

Mr C We kept a bull, mainly as I said, we had *Shorthorns* even in my father's time and just inside the hacket gate was what's called the bull house, the big stone trough in the corner, and I can well remember me father saying they go in every day to feed the bull, no problem, and he went in this particular day, this shed, it's near the road going up through the farm, the bull decided to be nasty and he put him out the door with his horns …

DC Did he?

Mr C … and when he'd put him out the door, secondary, he put him over the gate into the road and he never worked for best part of a year.

DC Really.

Mr C He was lucky to get away with it – of course that bull was put down. There was one young *Shorthorn* bull we had ourselves and he was in a stall, used to be for the horses, but it was a big stall, with young cattle throughout the winter, and there wasn't any water bowls in that particular shed, so twice or three times a day you let them out on to the yard, just undone the chain and out they went. Undone the chain on this young bull, he'd only be a year, fourteen months of age, he took two paces back, and he stood and he looked at me and I'm up in the head of the stall – what do you do? You freeze, because you only need one push and you're finished and I did freeze, and for some reason one of the cattle outside called and he turned round and he went out. But apart from that we bought two or three bulls, they bred them at *Knockaloe*, mainly *Herefords* in them days, big bull, weighing best part of a ton, most of them, and this feller, Roly we called him, Roland, he went out with the cows every day throughout the summer, down the low fields, across the road, and you'd get them up to the gate to come home at night and if he was near the gate you could jump on the gate and jump on his back and ride all the way up to the farm and he was so docile he didn't bother.

DC Right.

Mr C But I would say the *Hereford* bull, the beef bull are more quieter, shall we say, but never trust a dairy bull, never, *Ayrshire*, *Friesian*, *Jersey*, whatever, never trust them, no, not at all.

DC And people used to freely wander around farmers' fields in those days, I mean, there must have been cases where people were chased by bulls?

Mr C I would say so, but more so by young cattle, believe it or not. You'd get a group of young cattle in a field, people maybe out to cross the middle of the fields, quite often quite legally, sometimes not so legal, shall we say, taking advantage, now them cattle were just inquisitive, nothing more than that, but they would

come with a rush, twenty or thirty, and of course people would panic. Little did they know if they just stood their ground they would only come up to them and have a sniff round and disperse again and graze. But of course, it's natural, you know, a person that's not used to it, they would run and of course the cattle would run after them, and it was the first over the gate that won.

DC With the bull in the field then, was that a bit hit and miss, I mean, was artificial insemination brought in for better production, in other words.

Mr C It was, it was for different breeds, you see, you only had one breed, you didn't keep more than one bull, obviously. But it paid to keep the bull in a sense, because you'd have neighbouring farms who could bring cows, who'd come *a'bullin,'* is the Manx word for it, to provide a service for them and vice versa, they may have a different breed themselves, what [where] you would take a cow to that bull, but the artificial insemination it was, it was pretty good, you know, I'd say 95%, sort of thing, you know, yes, yes, and you didn't need to keep all that – you didn't need to keep a bull in the end because you had so many good bulls of good breeding, probably coming in from the other side, but good breeding which you could depend on.

DC You didn't have to worry about graded animals in those days then, did you, in your time?

Mr C No, well you could tell by your eye whether a beast was ready for the abattoir, heifer a little bit quicker maybe than a male animal, heifer got fat very quickly. Interesting thing about that, we spent a month out in New Zealand. Just a year ago our Jonathan, he went out there and he got us persuaded and it was very, very interesting. There was only two breeds of beef cattle we ever seen in the whole of New Zealand. Now over here the *Hereford* is knocked down, which used to be the tradition on the Island, because [there is] quite a lot of fat on the meat, personally I think that was a good thing because it added flavour to it, but the whole of New Zealand was either *Aberdeen Angus*, *Galloway* or *Herefords*, but mainly *Herefords*, and them people, they love their steaks and they still want that bit of fat and that bit of flavour. Now if the modern housewife would only just accept it, because I can remember, you can remember, particularly of a Sunday if we had a roast, mother would always baste the meat, always …

DC Yes, that's right.

Mr C … and that was in the fat that came out, out of the joint. But modern day things, I don't think it's got the same flavour. But regarding you were saying grading and what have you, you could tell just by the eye. You'd get a *Shorthorn* dairy animal and you could keep him for five years and you still wouldn't get flesh on him, you could cut string on his backbone, but regardin' lambs even, you would get the lambs in maybe of a Sunday, they'd be goin' to the Mart on a Monday or whatever, and you'd pick the lamb up and you'd no bother with scales, but now, the weights they want, it's unbelievable.

DC Did the tourist industry mean anything to you on your particular farm for …

Mr C Income?

DC … yes, for income.

Mr C It meant an awful lot because, as I say, we grew an awful lot of potatoes and vegetables, a lot.

DC So did they go to wholesalers, those, basically?

Mr C No, no, no, they went direct to the boarding-houses or hotels in town. You couldn't get the stuff out of the ground quick enough in the summer. Can you imagine picking, they were bran sacks in them days, on a Thursday, three bran sacks full of peas and puttin' maybe a stone or two stone of them into a boarding-house, for them to shell them for the visitors, could you imagine that today, never, ever.

DC No.

Mr C Cauliflowers, cabbage, carrots, turnips, spuds, one interesting bit, Palace Hill, we done nearly every house on Palace Hill, Palace Road, Mona Terrace, Empress Drive, all round, Castle Mona Avenue, all them different places, Summerhill, Summerhill Grove, I could go on for ever.

DC Did you take swill back for feeding the animals?

Mr C No, we never used swill, no.

DC But sometimes, some farmers did, didn’t they?

Mr C I’ll tell you, that’s another story, we could go on here for ever, but there was one instance, some of the houses on Palace Hill, going up to, there’s a Mr Teare in the top one, *Fernlea*, if I remember, he was an Advocate, I think, but this one house, part way up and all the spuds were in hundredweights then, you see, in hessian bags, and you had the first flight of steps up to the front door which could be twenty, then up through the house, and then out to the back yard, that was the only way of getting there, and I’m going up this day and the backside went out of the sack and you had spuds down to the promenade nearly and you talk about embarrassed, and visitors laughin’, they were all sittin’ waitin’ for their tea there, you know. But you were saying about the swill and things, there was men, one of the main men on the swill job was Billy Clelland, *Lanjaghan*, you know where *Lanjaghan* is, I would imagine.

DC I do.

Mr C That was quite a big business, but, he’ll probably curse me for saying this, but you can record it anyway. Cap is his nephew, he’s known as Cap, you see, the young feller, Johnny Dobson, for a better name, and Johnny was on the lorry and across the back, there was only a chain keeping the bins in, you see, going up Prospect Hill, I’m told, and the chain come undone or it was never put in and the bins all slid off in the road, you know, and I don’t think …

DC That was worse than losing your spuds down the steps.

Mr C … I don’t think people were very happy, like, but Billy would tell you, he had full silver tea sets nearly, and things, you know, just swept into the bins, like knives, forks, this, that and the other.

DC Really?

Mr C Oh, aye, lots of the staff, they weren’t fussy, like, get the plate emptied, you know, and in it goes, like.

DC So you didn’t use that, so what would you use to feed the pigs then?

Mr C Boiled spuds, mainly, and meal, that would be oatmeal.

DC You'd have no shortage of potatoes then for that?

Mr C Well, as you can see I'm sitting on a tub here now and that would be inside a boiler.

DC Let's just describe that, that's like a huge First World War German's helmet, isn't it?

Mr C I suppose it is, without the German inside it. Yes but it's …

DC Cast iron, anyway.

Mr C … but they would be bigger than that and they'd hold four or five hundredweight of spuds and they'd be the small ones or the green ones or whatever, the rejects, if you like, and that would be filled up, maybe twice a week, a little bit of water in the bottom, very little, fire underneath and wet hessian sacks put over the top and they would steam, they wouldn't boil, on that water in the bottom, it couldn't get away, so they would steam and I've seen us many a time grabbin' one out and eatin' it, nothing wrong with it, but that were mainly [for] pigs and it was mainly oats in them days, so it was the crushed meal, but no such thing as swill, no.

DC You'd grow everything that you needed to feed the animals on the farm, more or less, would you?

Mr C Everything, everything, apart from bits of condiments and things, you know, like, to add to the meal, but everything was home produced, not like today, you know, a lot of the stuff is bought in.

DC How much artificial fertiliser would you use?

Mr C It was Litts, in them days, Litts up at Baldwin, all the animals, you know, the residue from the slaughter houses and things like that, animals that died on the farm, whatever, went to Litts and that was cooked to a temperature. I think, I shouldn't say this, but regarding the BSE [Bovine spongiform encephalopathy], had them temperatures been kept going there might not have been a problem, but the temperatures were lowered. But that was cooked and cooked and dried and it was ground and made into meal and the bone was made into bone meal, a

very precious item, and that would be delivered in hessian sacks, hundredweights, ton, to the farm, and you had the drill to sow it. It got to the stage, after that, that the modern day drill wouldn't cope with that type of thing, it was like a thick powder, if you didn't use it, it went stodgy after a while, but quite often that would be sown by hand. If you were putting it in spud ridges or whatever you would open the ridges, you would put quite often the dung in the clash, the spud on top and then maybe four or five o'clock in the evening you would sow this by hand, it was called *stinky*, it was Litts, and you were used to it, and then them ridges would be split with the horse plough. But there was one particular time we borrowed a horse, for some reason one of ours got injured or whatever. The Forestry Board would let horses out from time to time they were using in the plantations, and this horse was just tied at the hedge, waiting for this to take place, ready to split these ridges and he got a sniff of this and there was just a string from his bridle on to the barbed wire, and he reared up and he snapped the wire and he went over the hedge and down the road as fast as he could go.

DC Really?

Mr C He got the smell of this stuff and me running, trying to catch, get ahead of him, I did in the end, but you try stopping a horse in full flight, a heavy horse, but that was Litts. And then of course the modern day prill, as it's called, fertilisers came in, lots of people get the wrong impression of fertilisers. Apart from nitrogen, which is man-made, phosphate and potash are natural products, they are rock products which are crushed, and you need them, you do need them and you won't cope – you get very little without.

DC They're in gardening products today, aren't they?

Mr C They are, and you get very little without them, very little indeed, you know, but as I say nitrogen is more to push the grass along, it's more the silage man that uses that.

DC You couldn't do it today, you couldn't farm like that today, could you?

Mr C It wouldn't be easy, it wouldn't be – you couldn't, certainly you couldn't, you could make, you could get by, but you certainly couldn't make a good living out of it.

DC And you're talking here about somebody with sheep, with pigs, with cattle, with horses, with all these root crops, you know, your spuds and your turnips, and carrots and everything else, there won't be anybody on the Isle of Man with that broad spread, will there?

Mr C No, and haymaking and harvest. We employed up to four men, apart from meself and me father, full time, full time men, I'd be fourteen or fifteen and the average wage then for a farm worker was £7, £8, £9, no more, but the income was very little as well, but they'd have 2 pints of milk a day, going home, and maybe a stone of spuds at the weekend, and everybody was fairly happy. Then the different types of jobs came in, there was a lot of men used to go away to Preston, and places, to the sugar beet factories in the winter, winter work schemes, which they don't have now, on the railways, on the roads, things like that, but that was the average wage, £6 - £7 and of course it got to the stage were a man couldn't live on that and he looked for other employment. The men left the land, you relied on your own family, and that's where sprays came in, believe it or not, because if you've got a crop you can't let it go in weed completely, so that is where the spray came along. Nowadays I suppose there's only one man on lots of the farms.

DC So this is where intensive farming methods came in then, is it?

Mr C I'm sure they did, because the staff wasn't there so you had to – modern day machinery and you could do so much in a day, it was just incredible. But take the parish of Lonan, for instance, which is a big parish, from down the Groudle up to the Windy Corner and down as far as the Dhoon and inside that is the Parish of Lonan and there's only one farm that I know in that whole parish that grows any potatoes, and you think, everybody did at one time, one farm, no more, you can go from end to end, so it just shows how – and I don't know of anybody in the parish that grows turnips now. I've a friend over at the *Begoade*, he grows quite a lot still and feeds them, he's traditional, but how things have changed, it's mostly silage and hay and very little else.

<u>END OF INTERVIEW</u>