



ORAL HISTORY

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Interviewee:	Jack & Pat Corrin
Interviewed & recorded by:	Vi Ritchie
Date recorded:	n/a
Topic:	WWII memories of schooldays

- VR:** I'll begin by recording my name, which is Vi Ritchie, and I am recording the war-time memories of His Honour Jack Corrin and Mrs Pat Corrin, of The Epin....
- PC:** Yes, Devonshire Road...
- VR:** Devonshire Road, Douglas.
- PC:** Yes, I was just saying that we had a knock on the door, and it was the person who was on warden duty that night, who'd seen a chink of light coming from the bedroom. Mainly we had black-out – I can remember we had black-out curtains, of course...
- VR:** Hmm
- PC:** To hide any light at all, but there must somewhere just have been a chink of light, and the warden was saying just make sure you cover it, because we weren't...
- VR:** No...
- PC:** You know, if we'd had lights, the aeroplanes passing over, no doubt, would have thought it was a ship or something, and would have bombed it.
- VR:** Hmm, hmm...
- PC:** But we were very lucky in that sense, that we could see, and many people will tell you about this, the lights – the fires in Liverpool raging, which was quite frightening, but they didn't – they didn't get to us.
- VR:** No
- PC:** So that was, was very lucky.
- VR:** Hmm
- PC:** Yes, so yes. Thinking about lighting, too, the...St Ninian's was the church I went to, but St Ninian's Hall had all...that was all we had in those days, were concerts and events...
- VR:** Yes...
- PC:** And whist drives and so on. I was too little, probably, at the beginning to take part in much of that. But I can remember how careful we had to be about our torches...
- VR:** Oh

- PC:** And no street lighting, so of course we had to take torches to get to St Ninian's Hall...
- VR:** Hmm, hmm
- PC:** But I think we...from what I can remember, we had to sort of cover the light, and just have the merest little pencil of light on the ground to get us there....
- VR:** Yes...
- PC:** And, of course, there were many concerts which were always a highlight – there wasn't anything else very much....
- VR:** That's right....
- PC:** And that was what lit our lives up, I suppose...
- VR:** Yes
- PC:** And then I can remember at school, when I eventually got to the high school, that one of the most – the best excitements for us all was when we got a half-day's holiday...
- VR:** Hmm, hmm
- PC:** And a half-day's holiday was to go and gather blackberries...
- VR:** Oh...
- PC:** And, I don't know what happened to the people who didn't bother to bring blackberries into school. What they did with those blackberries, I have no idea! (*Laughter*) We actually brought them to school, I presume they were sent off to be jammed or something...
- VR:** Yes...
- PC:** But nobody ever knew – we just handed them in and that was it. But it was a half-day off (*laughter*) and...
- VR:** That's important!
- PC:** That's very important. Oh well, probably the most important thing – the highlight of the week (*laughing*)! But that was just in the autumn, of course.
- VR:** Hmm, hmm...

PC: And then I can remember I used to – I had an aunt and uncle who lived in Quarterbridge Road, and I went for tea, two or three times a week, actually, I would go from Park Road and I would take a route going up Albany Road and then down Selborne Drive. And on quite a few occasions, I was passed by the boys – ‘cos that’s all they were – I mean, not to me they weren’t, but they’d be the young men of fifteen and sixteen who were the...who were going to classes at Ballakermeen School, because Ballakermeen was taken over by the Navy and so these were the young lads, the cadets I suppose, of the Navy who were marching home after school, and I was walking up Albany Road, and to my intense embarrassment, I would be followed by wolf-whistles and, so much so, that I then decided I would find all the back lanes (*laughs*)... So I actually found all the back lanes behind Albany Road, down behind Selborne Drive and so on, and avoided the wolf-whistles...

VR: Yes, embarrassing...

PC: I mean, probably later in my life I would have been delighted to have them (*laughing/laughter*).

VR: Yes, probably (*laughing*).

PC: But not then, not then, indeed. So there we were.

And then, you know, as remembered the beginning so clearly, of course I remember the end very clearly, too, because by that stage I was nearly thirteen...

VR: Hmm, hmm...

PC: And so that was an age when you do remember things a little bit better. And I can remember I was actually in the Gaiety Theatre that night, and it was the first night of the Guild. And I didn’t realise this, but we found – we actually found the programme for that week. And it was actually called in those days, The Manx Music and Drama War Time Festival.

VR: Repeat that name....

PC: Yes...

VR: Just repeat that name..

PC: The Music and Drama War Time Festival – I don’t remember that, but here it was on the programme, and I’ve got the programme for that night, which happened to be dancing of some sort.

But we knew that something was imminent, and I so well remember, at the end of it, Jack Lynch, who was a well-known headmaster of the day, coming on the stage and saying, ‘War is over, hostilities have ended!’ and, of course, the relief...

VR: Yes!

PC: I mean, I understood the relief by that stage...

VR: Yes, yes...

PC: Although we had known it was coming to an end...

VR: Hmm, hmm...

PC: And it was that night in the Guild, so...

VR: Oh, wonderful!

PC: Yea, well, it....it was quite an occasion, really...

VR: Yes, indeed.

PC: I have other memories, but not that particularly linked with the war. I can remember I used to go to Ingleby, I used to walk with a friend that I picked up in Somerset Road, and we would walk down. Sometimes we’d walk through the field, which is now Ballaquayle School...

VR: Right...

PC: And we’d again take back lanes and drift to school, really, I suppose. Sometimes we would go down the main road, but on just one occasion, which was war time, probably about 1942 – I can’t be quite certain, we had heard there had been a tremendous fire in the night, and in fact a house in Woodbourne Road had been very badly – in fact, pretty well burnt down, which belonged to a gentleman – a very well known gentleman of the day - called Harold Rowell. I think that house, of course, was re-built, it was taken down and re-built. And I think it’s probably the Children’s Centre – where the Children’s Centre is now....

VR: Oh, hmm, hmm....

PC: That was just about the area. We couldn’t get near, of course, because they’d roped it off, but we did manage to have a look at it. And that was quite a memorable thing for youngsters...

- VR:** Yes...
- PC:** That a house had been burnt down.
- VR:** Absolutely.... Was that - that wasn't through enemy action, though?
- PC:** No it wasn't enemy action, it was an accident, and it was just a house fire.
- VR:** Just an accident, hmm, hmm....
- PC:** I always remember when we went through that field where Ballaquayle now is, we always sort of thought we might see enemy planes flying over (*laughter*), and we would be able to hide in the grass, but it never happened, fortunately never happened (*laughing/laughter*)!
- I do remember the barbed wire and the various camps that there were. I had a friend whose father was a baker. He was called Bobby Christian, and many people will remember him. And he would – he delivered bread and confectionary to the various camps....
- VR:** I see....
- PC:** And he had lots of stories about the internees. And, in fact, one or two of them became his very good friends...
- VR:** Hmm...
- PC:** And he knew, I think, members from the Amadeus Quartet...
- VR:** Oh yes!
- PC:** Who were getting together at that time, so he always had stories about them which were interesting.
- VR:** Hmm, hmm
- PC:** And one of the – not one of the internees, but one of the one naval ratings, I suppose of that day, was a gentleman called John Pertwee. And John....
- VR:** The John Pertwee?!!
- PC:** The John Pertwee (*laughter*), and my only connection with that at all, I mean, it didn't mean anything to me at the time, was that when I came home, I joined the Service Players...

- VR:** Hmm, hmm...
- PC:** And John Pertwee, and a lady called Olga Cowell had actually started – they were the originators of the Service Players...
- VR:** Oh, hmm, hmm...
- PC:** So I sort of felt that there was the connection there which was...
- VR:** Yes
- PC:** But...
- VR:** Did he live on the Island, then?
- PC:** Well, he did...he was...he was, obviously, he was in the Navy...
- VR:** Oh, I see...
- PC:** And I don't what his rank was, I don't know, really, anything much about him, except he was very well known...
- VR:** Hmm, hmm...
- PC:** As a radio star, and he had started up the Service Players. Presumably, the Service Players were service people, and that was that. Fine, so, you know, I think those are mainly my memories that of...
- VR:** Yes...that's wonderful...
- PC:** It's amazing how you remember some things, don't you...
- VR:** Yes
- PC:** And yet, when you try to remember what did you do last week....*(laughter/laughing)*.... It's all gone – well, not quite gone, but...!
- VR:** No, I know...
- PC:** That's right...
- VR:** Yes....

PC: And, you see, I would be, what – nearly thirteen when the war...the end of the war came...

VR: Yes...

PC: And things got better, of course, then...

VR: Yes

PC: And I don't – I was trying to remember about the food, but the only thing I really have a main recollection of is the fact that we ate an awful lot of rabbit.

VR: Oh yes

PC: Rabbit stew...

VR: Yes...

PC: And roast rabbit, and whatever you could do with a rabbit, because of course there wasn't...

VR: There was plenty of them around (*laughs*)...

PC: Plenty of those around.

VR: Yes

PC: And I can't really remember being...you know, because we lived on an island with a lot of farming, we did get probably more than our share...

VR: Hmm, hmm...

PC: Of eggs and butter and so on...

VR: Yes, yes – well, that was the lucky thing of being here..

PC: Well, that's right, that's right...

VR: Yes...

PC: Yes... so, so there we are, and that....

VR: Well, thank you very much, that was very informative.

I'm now recording His Honour Jack Corrin, husband of Pat Corrin.

- JC:** Yes, my name is Jack Corrin, and I was born on the 6 January 1932 in Douglas. My parents had a boarding house in Demesne Road, in Douglas...
- VR:** Hmm, hmm
- JC:** They came from Foxdale – the village of Foxdale...
- VR:** Hmm, hmm...
- JC:** Where my grandfather worked in the Foxdale mines, in the late nineteenth century. And they emigrated to Douglas (*laughter*) in the early nineteen-thirties, and I was just born in Douglas, rather than in Foxdale. And I was born in Demesne Road, I'm not sure...they had a boarding house in Demesne Road, the maternity home in those days was in Demesne Road, so I know I was born in Demesne Road, but I'm not sure whether I was born at home or in the maternity home. Because what was then the new maternity home, the Jane Crookall Maternity Home, was built in, and opened in 1937.
- VR:** Oh, was it?
- JC:** My recollection of the Second World War, really relates mainly to the military. Because Douglas was absolutely full of the military, as it were. And, living in Demesne Road, of course my parents had to close down the boarding house in 1939, but in 1940, Bucks Road, which was adjoining, was occupied by the King Liverpool Regiment.
- VR:** Oh, right....
- JC:** And they trained there, trained in Douglas before being posted abroad. And so my parents let off rooms...
- VR:** Hmm, hmm...
- JC:** To the soldiers, many of whom were getting married before embarking abroad, and so we became very friendly. They occupied rooms in our house...
- VR:** Hmm, hmm...
- JC:** And we became very friendly with the...with the soldiers. Most of them came from the Lancashire area, because they were in the King's Liverpool Regiment. And, of course, the whole of Douglas was filled with these people. All the promenades, the Villiers Hotel, which was recently demolished, on the promenade, now Royal Bank of Scotland building, that was occupied by the OTU – Officer Training

Unit – and they would march, and have their passing out parades where the – on the bus station site, in Douglas...

VR: Hmmm, yes...

JC: And then they were joined by HMS Valkyrie, which was a shore-ship – the Royal Navy, all the way along the Loch Promenade, including the Promenade Church...

VR: Hmm, hmm...

JC: And then as you went further along the promenade you came to what we called the Palace Camp; where there were internees...

VR: Hmm

JC: They were behind the barbed wire.

VR: Oh...

JC: And then, in Hutchinson Square, there were again there were internees.

VR: Hmm, hmm

JC: So Douglas was really filled with these people.

VR: Hmm, hmm

JC: The soldiers were very...the soldiers who stayed in our house were very nice to me as a child. I would be nine in 1941. I can remember the particular soldier playing with me and teaching me how to ride a bicycle, and that sort of thing.

VR: Hmm, hmm...

JC: But the interesting thing is that my mother and father kept in touch – or they kept touch - although they went abroad after the war, they kept touch with my parents...

VR: Hmm, hmm

JC: And after my parents died, they've kept in touch with me, and I'm still in touch...

VR: Oh, goodness!

- JC:** Pat and I are still in touch with two of these soldiers; one died earlier this year; there's still one alive that we are in touch with...
- VR:** Hmmm
- JC:** And, of course, they've had their diamond wedding anniversaries...
- VR:** Yes...
- JC:** And the last couple that we were in touch with, they've been married 65 years.
- VR:** Oh...
- JC:** So that takes us right back the 65 years, really...
- VR:** Yes, yes...
- JC:** Many of the internees in Douglas were Italian – Italians; and they were sent out to work on farms around the Douglas area.
- VR:** Hmm, hmm...
- JC:** And my uncle had a farm in Braddan...
- VR:** Right...
- JC:** Where they worked. And one of the things they were very good at was making ships in bottles...
- VR:** Ah!
- JC:** So my cousin, who's still on the farm, has these ships in bottles in his houses.
- VR:** Oh, right, yes!
- JC:** Mementos of the Second World War...
- VR:** Yes, yes...
- JC:** But when Pat and I went to New Zealand on our trip in 1998 when I retired, we went into the museum in Whangara, in North Island, where my first cousin lives, and there was one of these ships in bottles in the museum, and a little not on it saying that it was made in the Isle of Man; but, of course, the museum curator didn't know how it had been made in the Isle of Man, so we informed him (*laughing*)!

- VR:** Yes!
- JC:** That it had been made by these Italian prisoners in the Island.
- VR:** Yes, wonderful!
- JC:** In September 1943, I actually went to school at King William's College, as a boarder...
- VR:** Hmm, hmm...
- JC:** And King William's College, of course, is very close to – well, it's really build on the Ronaldsway Farm...
- VR:** Hmm, hmm
- JC:** There was also another farm, Ballagilley Farm, and in fact, in April 1943, just before I went to college, the Admiralty requisitioned what was then Ballagilley Farm, the King William's school sanatorium, and a house called Croit y Gilley House, and...
- VR:** Can you just spell that?
- JC:** Yes, umm...
- VR:** Balla whatever....?
- JC:** Ballgilley is B A double L A G I double L E Y Farm...
- VR:** Right...
- JC:** The school sanatorium and Croit y Gilley, which was C R O I T, which means the cross of, Croit y Gilley – G I double L E Y, House, which was a house; and also about six acres of land, all of which belonged to King William's College. And the farm, and the adjacent farm land were converted into an aerodrome, and the house and the school sanatorium were demolished.
- VR:** Hmm, hmm...
- JC:** And the Fleet Air Arm took over the station, which was named HMS Urley, that's U R L E Y...
- VR:** Yes...
- JC:** With living accommodation in Nissan huts...
- VR:** Oh...

JC: On the requisitioned portion of the land. And so I spent my school days in 1943-1944, with the Fleet Air Arm adjoining. And the planes they had in those days were called Barracudas; and they were very, very noisy, and so our school lessons were interrupted (*laughter*) constantly by these aeroplanes, these Barracuda planes going over.

But we had quite a happy time at school during the war. We were well fed; we didn't seem to miss out very much on food...

VR: Hmm, hmm...

JC: Of course, adjoining this Admiralty airport, we had to be very careful with blackouts...

VR: Hmm, hmm...

JC: So we all had blackout duties - a rota of blackout duties to make sure that every window was blacked out at night.

VR: Right, hmm, hmm...

JC: As being near the airport.

VR: Hmm, hmm...

JC: One of my recollections of the war in relation to the school was; that nearly a hundred, nearly a hundred old boys of King William's College lost their lives in the Second World War.

VR: Oh, really...?

JC: And I can remember in those days we had to go to church on Sunday twice, and at the evening service on a Sunday night, I used to dread the news, because the principal, at a certain point of the service, would say the following old boys of King William's – of this school, have lost their lives. And they would read out their names, and that would be followed by the Nunc Demitis – 'Lord, let thy servant depart in peace...'

VR: Goodness me....

JC: So that's something I will always remember, really....

VR: Hmmm, I'm sure....

JC: One of the things I remember at school was, that, during the war, we didn't have any bananas at all...

- VR:** Oh...
- JC:** They were unobtainable...
- VR:** Hmm
- JC:** But on occasions, boys whose parents were either serving abroad or living abroad, would send food parcels. And I can remember food parcels coming to King William's College, and these being opened up and bananas inside (*laughter*), which was a great surprise to us all. Of course we were rationed with the sweet coupons...
- VR:** Hmm, hmm...
- JC:** And that was quite a handicap to young boys (*laughter*), 'cos I was fond of sweets – I have been all my life – and umm...but we would go to the tuck-shop on a Saturday to get our sweets with our coupons in our hand, and you hoped that the person serving the sweets wouldn't take the coupons from you (*laughing/laughter*), so that you'd be able to get double the following week. So you held the coupons under the counter, and then they would say, 'Coupons, please!' (*Lots of laughing/laughter*) But, of course, sweet rationing went on after the war...
- VR:** Yes, it did...
- JC:** I mean, it went on into the late 1940s, really.
- VR:** Hmm, it did.
- JC:** Another thing at school, during the war, 1944 and '45 particularly, we were not allowed to be taught German.
- VR:** Ah!
- JC:** German was barred from the school curriculum. And it was only – I was still at school there until 1948, and it was only in 1947, I think, when German lessons were allowed at the school.
- And then at the end of the war, 1945 – on the 4 July 1945 – we had a visit at our school from the King and Queen of England. King George VI came on 4 July and visited the school; we were all on parade as cadets; he had lunch at the school with the principal and his wife, and as he left the school he said, 'I wish you all, boys, to have an extra...' not a day's holiday, a week's holiday!

- VR:** Oh, wow!
- JC:** And instead of having six weeks for the summer holidays, we had seven weeks for the summer holidays. So we thought that King George VI was a very nice man (*lots of laughter*)!
- VR:** Wonderful!
- JC:** And on 5 July 1945, King George VI actually presided over the Tynwald ceremony; and he was the first sovereign ever to preside over that ceremony. Of course, since then, we have had Queen Elizabeth II on two occasions.....
- VR:** Hmm, hmm...
- JC:** But one of the reasons that he was here in 1945, I think was, that the Queen Mother, as she then was - oh well, the Queen as she then was - later the Queen Mother; her sister was the wife of the Governor at that time. The Governor here, during the war, was Earl Grandville. And his wife, Lady Rose Grandville, was a sister of the Queen Mother. And I think, through the Queen Mother, she managed to get her sister to come....
- VR:** Yes, wonderful!
- JC:** With King George VII, so....
- VR:** Yes...
- JC:** It was good for the Island, because they were in the Isle of Man for about three days.
- VR:** Were they?
- JC:** Yes...
- VR:** Oh....
- Thank you very much indeed for sharing your memories with me. And this interview will be a great asset to the Manx archives and to the research being undertaken there. So thank you, both, once again.
- JC:** Thank you.