

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

‘TIME TO REMEMBER’

Interviewee: Mr Peter Craine MHK

Date of birth:

Place of birth:

Interviewer: David Callister

Recorded by: David Callister

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Topic(s): Lifelong interest in history and railways
Standing as MHK for South Douglas in 1974
Joining *Mec Vannin* and election to House of Keys
Member of Manx Electric Railway Board
Member of the Agriculture and Forestry Board
Chairman of Sea Fisheries Advisory Committee
Running family bakery business
Endangered Species and Wildlife Bills
National Service
Working as station master at Ballasalla
The Isle of Man Heavy Horse Society

Peter Craine - Mr C

David Callister - DC

DC At 27 Cedar Walk, in Douglas, and it is 7th February today, isn't it, 7th February 2002, well, we're both glad we got this far, I suppose, Peter. Let's talk first about your time in the House of Keys and the lead up to the House of Keys and the sort of things, there must have been some issues, I suppose, that made you want to go in for that political arena.

Mr C Well, as a younger person I wasn't terribly interested in politics but I was very interested in the Isle of Man and the Manxness of the place and it all came about through reading a book, as a small child, in the 1930s, called, 'From King Orry to Queen Victoria.' And here was a whole new history, because at school we were taught English history, we were taught about William the Conqueror, Henry VIII, and people like that, we weren't taught anything about the Isle of Man. And I read this and I sort of realised that we were somebody different, and that the whole Island was something different. Well, of course, that was as a child and later on, well, I think when I was about thirteen, I went to Manx classes to learn to speak Manx but I only stuck it for a few months because there was no-one there of my age, they were all older people, there was no – nobody was interested in my age group and I dropped out and eventually took up motor cycling and of course the things that teenagers do, went to dances and that sort of business, but another interest, of course, was the railway, I always was very interested in the railway and its history. And then round about the 1960s, or late 1950s, I could see that the railway was running down and there was every likelihood it would close. So I thought, I had a few photographs that I'd taken myself with a box *Brownie*, belonging to my mother, and so I bought a little camera and I started to take colour slides and I met up then with Stan Basnett and Stan and I were about the only two that were taking photographs at that time, and of course eventually the day did come when the railway decided they were going to close. So there was a public meeting called by a group of people, one was T H Colebourn, and this public meeting was in *The Villiers* and they formed, what did they call it, the Manx Steam Railway Society, I think it was called, and I was put on the committee because I think I was the only one there who knew anything about the railway. But we tried all sorts of ways and then tried to work out how it could be saved, could it be run by volunteers, and anyway we eventually came to the conclusion that it was too big for a volunteer organisation to run, and then all of a sudden, out of the blue, Lord Ailsa appeared on the scene and he took it over and of course we supported him. Then of course he dropped out eventually and it went back to the Railway Company, with a government subsidy, for a number of years, and then of course the

directors made the final decision, they wanted out, they wanted to realise their assets. So I was arguing with somebody in *The Quarterbridge Hotel*, one night, about why the railway should be kept and one of the fellers alongside me said, 'You ought to stand for the House of Keys.' So I thought, aye, I will, so there was a by-election coming up, I hadn't a clue about how to go about things but I struggled my way through, and Matty Ward came out for the Labour Party ...

DC Tough opposition.

Mr C ... and I knew once Matty came out I didn't stand a chance, but anyway I carried on and I did reasonably well, that was a by-election about 19 – it would be '74, something like that.

DC It would be for South Douglas, wouldn't it?

Mr C For South Douglas, I think it was about two years before the general election. Anyway I had a go then at the General Election. Well, in the meantime *Mec Vannin* had started, I wasn't wholly happy with the way they were carrying on. Some of them were a bit, a bit naughty.

DC You'd become a member of *Mec Vannin* yourself then?

Mr C No, I hadn't become a member, I used to go to their meetings, because they used to hold lots of meetings round the Island and at a meeting at Laxey one of them came up to me and said, 'Would you stand for *Mec Vannin* in South Douglas? And I said, 'Yes, I'll have a go at it.' So I joined *Mec Vannin* and stood in the by-election and I got a seat.

DC In the General Election?

Mr C In the General Election, yes, and of course the very first thing I did when I got in was to put a resolution to Tynwald that they make some steps to acquire the railway, and there was terrible opposition to it. I mean all the big guns turned out against me, Sir John Bolton and, oh, all the big nobs that were in the – they wanted shut of it, they said it was a waste of money, the public couldn't – the public purse couldn't afford it, it required a lot of money spending on it, and anyway the debate went on until, oh, about 7 o'clock at night. In the finish it was put to the vote and it just went through, there was no division called.

DC Really?

Mr C Yes, I think they were that fed up with talking all afternoon and all night that they just let it go through.

DC So that was in Tynwald then?

Mr C That was in Tynwald. So the Steering Committee then opened negotiations with the Railway Company and then they came back to Tynwald, we had another debate, and they decided to acquire it. And in the meantime I'd been put on the Manx Electric Railway Board, and they decided that the Manx Electric Railway Board would be the Board to run the steam railway as well and I was vice-chairman and I was sort of put in charge of the steam railway side and the late J. J. Christian from Ramsey was Chairman of the Board, he sort of looked after the electric railway. So that was that. I was also put on the Board of Agriculture, which I thoroughly enjoyed and the Forestry Board. I never turned down a job.

DC Right, yes.

Mr C I was rather surprised a few years ago when somebody turned down a job and said he didn't know anything about agriculture. Well, I didn't know an awful lot, but the first thing I did was go down to my newsagent's and order the *Farmer's Weekly* and the *Farmer's Stockbreeder* every week, and read up on it.

DC And get to know.

Mr C And get to know it. And, what else, I became chairman of the Sea Fisheries Advisory Committee, and as I say I was on the Forestry Board, and later I became Chairmen of the Assessment Board, and then of course when it came to the Election, re-election, I lost my seat.

DC But when you were in there, on all these various boards, you didn't get paid extra for being on Boards in those days, did you?

Mr C No, no, you just got a multi allowance, I forget how much it was, something like £300 or something a month, I think, it wasn't the big money they get today.

DC No, no.

Mr C And of course I also had the business to run. I mean you couldn't, you couldn't have lived on your expenses, and I mean I was fortunate that, being in the bakery business, I got up at half past three in the morning to start work, when the men came in at 5 o'clock and by about 9 o'clock things were sort of sorted out and I could leave June to see to things and I could go off to meetings. Sometimes I used to fall asleep at the meetings.

DC It's understandable, yes.

Mr C I remember one hot day and I used to sit next to Clifford Irving, and Clifford said to me, he said, 'You're going to sleep,' he said, 'go on home,' he said, [unclear] only wasting our time here.' I enjoyed it.

DC When you, during your five-year term then, was the decision to close the Peel route of the railway, was that made during that time or afterwards?

Mr C No, that had already been done by the Railway Company and by that time, by the time the government took it over the Peel and Ramsey lines had been lifted.

DC Right, and all the sleepers were sold off and so on, were they?

Mr C It was all sold off. And really, the Railway Company were very clever, because they sold them the lines, but in actual fact what they actually did was sell them the right of way. They maintained that they didn't sell them the track work, so they lifted the track work and sold it. Oh, they were very clever.

DC But the land that went along with it became government land as well?

Mr C Oh, yes, that was government land, we were responsible for the fencing and drainage and things like that.

DC But then government decided to sell off bits of that land to various individuals, didn't they?

Mr C They did, yes, they said it would never be needed again. I fought against it but anyway it was sold. So it would be virtually impossible now to rebuild the line although when I was on the Railway Board, we did look into it, when Bill Jackson was the manager, and we estimated it would have cost about £1million

to re-open the line to Peel.

DC Back then?

Mr C Oh, yes, because you'd have to put new bridges in and everything. The Ramsey line was, well that was virtually impossible, it never paid from the day it was built.

DC Well, just to go back, leaping back a bit there now to *Mec Vannin* and the people who were involved and I mean we're talking about, in those days, people like Alan Bell and Hazel Hannan were members of *Mec Vannin*, I think, weren't they?

Mr C Oh, yes, indeed.

DC And didn't, at the time you stood in that General Election for 1976, didn't *Mec Vannin* put up, or try to put up candidates in all the constituencies and you were the only one who actually got in?

Mr C Yes, we put candidates up, I think, in every constituency, we might have missed an odd one, but I was the only one that got in. And the others eventually got in as independents.

DC Yes, so Manx nationalism didn't appeal to the voters then, did it?

Mr C No, but we had a lot of support, but ...

DC Not enough.

Mr C ... not enough. I mean at one time we had about 300 members.

DC Really?

Mr C Oh, yes, and then we had a bit of a falling out. There was a few of them who were very much involved with the Irish Republican Movement and I couldn't just go along with that at all, so I eventually resigned from *Mec Vannin*, along with several others, Audrey Ainsworth and quite a few of us.

DC You'd be disappointed not getting back for a second term in Tynwald then?

Mr C Yes, I was, I only lost by 50 votes.

DC Really?

Mr C Yes, because I'd done a lot of work, I'd never turned a job down, I think I put about seven bills through the House of Keys, whenever the Speaker asked me to take a bill I would take it and there was – you had to do an awful lot of research in a lot of them. Most of them were to do with the Board of Agriculture, there was the Endangered Species bill, the Wild Life bill, there was a bill on rabies, I spend days and days with the government vets writing up because all these bills come out in legal language and you've got to get up and speak in ordinary every day English.

DC That's right, that's true.

Mr C So I used to have to sit with the government vets and plan these things out.

DC But along with this then you were running the bakery?

Mr C Yes, yes.

DC Now, tell me a bit about that, when did you actually start work in the bakery, was that as a very young lad, was it?

Mr C Well, I started as a nipper on the bread van with my father, and then when I left school I went – I served my time as a baker and confectioner, and my father died very young, he was only 42, and I was 18, I was doing my National Service actually, and I came home and it was actually through Sir John Bolton that they got me a compassionate discharge to come home, on the grounds that, you know, I had a mother and two sisters to support. So I came home and from then on that was it, I was running in the business and then when my mother died, of course, carried on and – well, eventually, both my children, they didn't want to have anything to do with the bakery business, David's a chartered accountant, and Diane didn't want anything to do with it so I said to June, I said, 'Look, we're working ourselves to death in this job, unsocial hours and one thing and another,' so I decided to sell, and that was it.

DC When you were running the bakery where did you get flour from, was it from across?

Mr C Most of it came from Laxey, but I always bought some flour from Spillers because they made very good flour – Laxey flour wasn't all that good in those days.

DC No, not as it is now, of course.

Mr C Oh, no, no. Because they were using imported Canadian wheat, because they hadn't found out how to grow wheat in the Isle of Man, bread-making wheat, and they were using imported Canadian wheat, but they were mixing Manx grown wheat with it and sometimes it wasn't quite right and I used to mix perhaps two bags of the Laxey flour to one bag of Spillers, and I found I got a better loaf.

DC And in those days of course there were all different kinds of loaves, weren't there, different styles, different types of bread?

Mr C Oh, yes, yes.

DC What were you making then?

Mr C Oh, we made the ordinary tin loaf, what was called a standard loaf, but we made quite a lot of small cobs, and large cottage loaves. Now a cottage loaf to me was the best.

DC Right, why was that then?

Mr C I don't know, it always tasted better and I always kept one back for ourselves.

DC Was it a different mix to the other bread then?

Mr C No, it was the same mix but it was baked in a big pan, about twelve big rolls of dough in each pan, whereas the other loaf was baked separately in a tin.

DC In separate tins, yes.

- Mr C** Yes, and for some reason it always tasted better and had a better crust on it.
- DC** Did you make *Hovis* then?
- Mr C** Oh, yes, we made *Hovis*, wholemeal.
- DC** *Hovis* was a special trade name then, was it? Was it a registered name that you paid royalties to, or anything like that?
- Mr C** You bought *Hovis* flour from the *Hovis* mills.
- DC** Oh, right, so that's how it was paid for.
- Mr C** Yes. And *Hovis*, they were very keen on advertising. For instance if you got their name put on your van and I had four vans delivering, they paid you I think – they sent you the transfers and the local sign writer put them on, and they gave you about £5, which helped towards ...
- DC** The advertising.
- Mr C** ... having your vans painted up. All our vans were green.
- DC** There wouldn't be a big call for brown bread in comparison to white, would there, I suppose?
- Mr C** Oh, no, no. I don't particularly like brown bread myself. I think a good white loaf – I remember buying some flour, Matt Elder, from Elder's, had an offer of some flour from a firm in Liverpool and this flour was milled in Canada and it was brought over on liners as ballast and it cost five shillings a sack to bring from Canada to Liverpool and it cost us £1 a sack to bring it from Liverpool to Douglas. But it was excellent flour and Matt didn't have enough storage room and I had a garage down the lane so I bought a few tons and it was good flour, made good bread.
- DC** There was a few people, quite a few of them actually, delivering bread round the Island in those days, I mean you had quite a few competitors, didn't you?
- Mr C** Oh, yes, I mean in Douglas there was William Quirk & Sons, there was Elder's,

Elder's didn't do much door to door delivery, they had two or three shops. There was J J Crellin's, of course, and ourselves, I had four vans and three shops.

DC So it was a full time job really to keep that business running, wasn't it?

Mr C Oh, yes, I'll say, I mean you worked seven days a week too.

DC Did sliced bread come in, in your time, or not?

Mr C Yes.

DC Did you have to get slicers?

Mr C Had to buy slicing machines and ...

DC Was there a different technique making bread then needed for a sliced loaf, was there?

Mr C No, no, no, not really, it's ...

DC At what stage would you slice it then?

Mr C Oh, you had to wait at least a couple of hours before you'd dare slice it. That was why we had to start so early in the morning so that you had your vans going out about 9 o'clock with sliced bread, you see, fresh sliced bread.

DC Would that cost more than the ordinary loaf or different, or ...

Mr C I think we charged a penny extra. That was an old penny.

DC Just as a bread eater then, did you eat sliced bread yourself?

Mr C No, and I won't eat it now, either.

DC Nor I, and yet everybody uses the expression, 'The best thing since sliced bread,' don't they?

Mr C Oh, no, I like an ordinary tin loaf or a batch loaf.

DC Do you still do any baking now at home, or not?

Mr C No, no. I'll do a bit of cooking and ...

DC You don't make bread?

Mr C No, no.

DC You've had enough of that.

Mr C Oh, I've had enough of that. And the funny thing is that a few years ago my daughter-in-law bought us one of these automatic bread makers and I said, 'Look, lovey,' I said, 'I told you once I was finished with the bakery business I would never make another loaf,' so – June's had a go and made a couple, but it's lying out there doing nothing now.

DC Right, let's go to railways then, because as you say, you had this interest in railways from really quite young then. How did that spring on to you as a youngster?

Mr C Well, of course I'd always lived in Peel Road, near the railway, and I was very interested in the history of it because the history of the railway is really, if you read through it carefully, is the history of the visiting industry from the mid say 1860s till its demise in the 1960s. And it's fascinating to read because the early managers of the railway, they kept diaries, and I was fortunate enough to be able to read them, and there was always the annual reports, the managing director's reports to the shareholders and to me it was a fascinating history. And I was always interested in it and it is unique, it's probably the most unique railway in the world. And of course after I lost my seat Bill Jackson was still manager there and he said, 'Look,' he said, 'would you fancy going down to Ballasalla as a station master for the summer?' I said, 'It'll suit me fine.' So I went down there and I was there for fifteen years.

DC Right, through the '80s, into the '90s, yes, as the station master.

Mr C The station master at Ballasalla, and then in the winter time I used to go in the

workshops and did whatever job was doing, helping with the painters, helping them and then I used to do a bit of upholstery work, repairing seats. Because a lot of the older carriages only had wooden seats, and Bill Jackson said, 'Do you think you could mock up a seat using foam rubber and material, and plywood?' So I did one compartment and he said, 'Right, carry on, do all the others.'

DC Right, yes, a huge amount of work goes on really on the old carriages and renewing them and so on, doesn't it?

Mr C Oh, yes a tremendous amount of work and now, I think, they've sort of got on top of it, but in those days the railway, the rolling stock had run down quite a lot.

DC Yes, yes, and as station master, then, that was something you really enjoyed doing down at Ballasalla, was it?

Mr C Oh, yes, and I enjoyed the little garden I had down there and got to know the people round about, in the area. I thoroughly enjoyed being down there. Planted an awful lot of fuchsias round about there and I noticed last summer they're still flowering.

DC They're still there, are they?

Mr C Yes.

DC The railway then, you must have travelled on all the railways, as a youngster, out to Peel, to Ramsey and so on, as well.

Mr C Oh, yes, the only place I'd never travelled to was up to Foxdale.

DC No, there won't be many who have now, I shouldn't think?

Mr C I wouldn't know of any. Well, I knew of one woman who used to go to school at St. Johns and she used to catch the train from Foxdale down and she said if they missed the train they could run down and get to school at St. Johns before the train got there.

DC There was George Hoggatt, Union Mills, who tragically was killed, I remember,

when I was a youngster there, but he had a magnificent looking station, didn't he?

Mr C Oh, yes, he did, he was a wonderful gardener. He used to have a big white 'Three Legs of Man' made out of concrete, up on the wall, up on the embankment.

DC Yes, he did.

Mr C Well, that's down at Castletown now, actually.

DC Oh, is it? Well, I'm glad it's been saved, yes.

Mr C Yes, it was rescued and it was put down there.

DC What about the other stations, I mean there was nothing quite like that, I suppose. Douglas station I remember the canopy, of course, over the platforms and it's a pity that that got lost in the end.

Mr C Well, it was in a pretty bad state when the government took it over and the glass panels were falling down, I mean they were a danger, and the iron pillars that were holding it up, they were rusted through, it would have cost a fortune to renew.

DC Yes, yes, and it was only a summer run that train really as well, wasn't it, I suppose.

Mr C Well, of course the canopies were built to save people from the weather in the winter actually.

DC Yes, that's what I mean, so they weren't so necessary in the summer time, really?

Mr C No, no.

DC The other remarkable thing about the railway was the way the Victorians created the buildings, the offices, the stations and so on.

Mr C Oh, yes, of course the original station at Douglas was a wooden building, and I think it was about 1899 they dismantled it and it went up as a pavilion to *The Falcon Cliff Pleasure Gardens*, and they rebuilt the new, well the present building, and the timber from that station building eventually was used in rebuilding those yellow and red bricked houses in Duke's Road.

DC Oh, really, yes.

Mr C So there's probably still some timber from the original building hanging about up there.

DC Isn't it amazing how the old engines have lasted though all these years?

Mr C Well, yes, but of course, you know, they've had new boilers and new cylinders, new wheels, and – but still to the same design. I mean the Railway Company had those engines, well, they were designed specially for them, they were adapted from engines that were built for the Norwegian railways and the company remained loyal to Beyer Peacocks, of Manchester, all its lifetime, you know, never bought engines from anywhere else.

DC Really, oh,

Mr C They were ideally suited for the Island.

DC Some engines would be tougher, stronger than others, were they? I mean which would pull the best load?

Mr C Oh, well, No. 16, the last one they got, *The Mannin*, that was the biggest one, that was the most powerful. They gradually got more powerful as the years went on, they enlarged boilers by a couple of inches and put larger side tanks on them.

DC Well, as I look through your living room here I spot in various places some fine models of heavy horses and that's another of your interests, isn't it?

Mr C Yes, I've always been interested in heavy horses, I think one of my earliest memories is going back to Cretney's stables in Hope Street, with my grandfather, to bed the horses down at night, I must have only been about three,

and I've always had an interest in them. I remember going out camping one time and the farm we were camping on they were carting stuff in with horses and I left all the others and went on the cart with the feller who was working the horses. And I've always had an interest and as a matter of fact I was talking to Sir Charles Kerruish, as he is now, we called a meeting to form the Isle of Man Heavy Horse Society, because there was very few people left who had heavy horses, in the Island, and we've got quite a thriving society now. And I've been to Canada and America to see horse shows, people think I'm mad, but I went to Detroit to a show they call the Michigan and Great Lakes Draught Horse Show, and there was 1000 horses there, 1000 heavy horses, yes. It cost them \$10,000 to move the manure heap at the end of the show.

END OF INTERVIEW