

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

**‘TIME TO REMEMBER’**

**Interviewee:** Mr Bill Denard

**Date of birth:** 1925

**Place of birth:**

**Interviewer:** David Callister

**Recorded by:** David Callister

**Date recorded:** 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2003

**Topic(s):** Ronaldsway airport  
Contractors John Laings  
The Air Ministry  
Discovery of skeletons from the Battle of Ronaldsway  
Major problems with drainage and marsh land  
Irish workforce  
Torpedo Attack Centre and Castletown Camp  
Isle of Man Airways  
Radar station operated by the Wrens  
Sale of Ronaldsway airport to Isle of Man Government  
Completing studies in UK  
Rural Industries  
Runway extension

**Bill Denard - Mr D**

**David Callister - DC**

**DC** Ok ... umm, well this disc is Bill Denard – full name would be William, I suppose?

**Mr D** William, just William.

**DC** Just William, (*laughter*) born in Carlisle, was it?

**Mr D** I was born in Carlisle originally, and as I say, I went down to London with my parents when I was about seven – seven years old.

**DC** So what year were you born then, Bill? What year was that – when you were born?

**Mr D** I was born in 1925.

**DC** Right, '25, so London first, but back to Carlisle.

**Mr D** Yes, educated in London and I went back to Carlisle during the war – '42 – around '42, anyway. Then I was employed by John Laings, the builders in this case, on the construction of the Crosby-on-Eden airport there. Then, after that, I was given my instructions to go to a place called, Isle of Man that I would have a warrant – travel warrant – I had to go to a place called *The Castle Mona Hotel* and (*laughter*) how I got there, because I had two days to get to the Isle of Man.

**DC** Two days from Carlisle, (*laughter*) yes.

**Mr D** Two days from Carlisle (*laughter*) and in those days, of course, it was a question of waiting for a boat. Anyway, I made it, found a place called *The Castle Mona* by walking down the promenade, because it was all covered in camps and Italians and ...

**DC** A little leather suitcase of some kind, was it, yes?

**Mr D** Oh aye, well that's about all I had. And I went to this hotel, then I was told that if I wanted any help I'd better go to the Labour Exchange, and get a labourer to carry the level staff. Told to ... I managed that – probably took a couple of days – and then I had to do the initial ground survey – that meant setting out a rough line of the runway, taking a 50 foot grid each side, all the way along, on each of

the four runways, with ... so there was myself and this chap – I'd never done a survey so large in all my life! And of course, as you measure out from the centre line, you might hit a hedge so you plotted where the hedge was, and all this. And you finished up with a complete hand-measured site.

**DC** Yes, so that was the land profile – be a bit up and down, then, at the time.

**Mr D** As it was ... that was because of trying to get the runways reasonably level.

**DC** There would be one runway already there, presumably, for the air traffic that was already coming in.

**Mr D** Oh no, no, no, no, no, no – the planes used to land at the back of the houses in Derbyhaven – on a field.

**DC** Oh really! So there was no proper runway as such, then?

**Mr D** No, just grass 'cos they'd all be like De Havilland *Rapides*, you know.

**DC** They were still coming in while the Ronaldsway work was going on, presumably, during this period?

**Mr D** Oh yes, yes, yes, yes.

**DC** So this would be 1943?

**Mr D** '43 – February '43 when I first came. And then we – they started digging behind me – they sent a lot of scrapers, huge things.

**DC** Laings sent them, did they?

**Mr D** Laings – they were all their machinery 'cos you couldn't get anything here of course, in those days, and they were chasing me, in the end. However, as time went on, of course, more help came, and someone else did the Castletown camp, and Ballasalla camp, and the Orisdale Station – wireless station, and one at Faragher's farm.

**DC** So where would ... was there a site office somewhere? Where would that be?

**Mr D** Well, at first it started off where we actually went into the farmhouse of the Creggins – that was vacant. And we shared it with the Air Ministry. Then, as more people came, we were pushed out into a wooden hut, alongside the Creggins, and that was our headquarters, surveyors department. Which – surveyors department – it was do everything you could, in those days.

**DC** Yes. How many surveyors would there be, eventually, then?

**Mr D** There was about ... only about six in our office. And we – mind you, that was our department – there was site managers, foreman, you know, from the actual work outside. We even got involved in ordering materials (*laughter*) you know, actually ordering asbestos sheeting and bricks from wherever we could get them from.

**DC** Oh right, yes, yes ... because getting materials – I mean, the stone would have come from local quarries presumably, would it?

**Mr D** Yes, local quarries, Braddan and Turkeyland quarries.

**DC** Turkeyland, yes, yes.

**Mr D** It was a job – they couldn't supply fast enough for us and it held us up.

**DC** Well the Island wouldn't have seen anything like this in engineering in ...

**Mr D** Not on that scale, no.

**DC** But the farms, then presumably – now there were three farms – there was *Ronaldsway*, and *The Creggins* and *Ballagilley*, weren't there? Were they still there when you came?

**Mr D** Yes.

**DC** Yes, so that they were demolished during what – '43 or something?

**Mr D** Yes, plus a lot of houses. The runway, the runway was three-one in those days from Derbyhaven – it's now disused – and it used to ... it ended where Strix was. That was the first one to be finished, I think.

**DC** And there was houses there?

**Mr D** And they had to move houses, and they had to move houses from two-seven – that’s the zero-nine end – that’s Castletown Road end ...

**DC** Oh yes.

**Mr D** ... they moved some there – well, you can still see where they were, can’t you? ... where the lights go through.

**DC** Yes, yes, yes.

**Mr D** That one, then of course the farms had to go, unfortunately, and of course the most impressive one was *Ronaldsway* farm.

**DC** That’s the one that had, supposedly had, secret passages, did it?

**Mr D** Well, yes, as far as I can remember, yes. We had to demolish it, and I think that that’s where they came from, all the passages and that under there. But it was quite interesting, the – I forget the name of the curator of the museum, then, a nice fellow, and he came down to see what he could take out. And I remember Roy Gardiner telling me, ‘cos he was in charge of all this demolition, and Roy said that he couldn’t get him interested in anything except the door knocker! (*laughter*) Now I would presume that the door knocker is still in the museum. (*laughter*)

**DC** In the museum, (*laughter*) so there was nothing there of interest other than that?

**Mr D** No! – maybe a few skeletons.

**DC** Ah well now, that’s another story! (*laughter*) Because the skeletons that were found there – were they proved to be from the Battle of Ronaldsway – from 1260 or 1290 or something?

**Mr D** 1290 or whatever, yes

**DC** What ... I mean, did you come across them, did you see them?

**Mr D** No. We were digging up at the end of, what was then, runway two-seven, and of course it came up in a bit of a rise, and of course, once they started digging in, they suddenly found big stones and skeletons coming out, so they were told immediately to stop, and get people down from the museum, and of course, my boss was going spare – you know, there was a war on, you know, you’ve been told before. *(laughter)* Anyway, it was stopped for about two days while they exposed most of them – I don’t think there was any great interest in the skeletons.

**DC** Was there any weapons found as well?

**Mr D** No, not to my knowledge. I don’t think there was anything very much at all. But the coffins were quite thick – slates!

**DC** Slate coffins, yes, right.

**Mr D** Yes! And they took all the bones back and measured them and presumably buried them somewhere else, but I don’t recall.

**DC** Did you keep any souvenirs of those in the office?

**Mr D** Oh yes, I had a skull on my desk for about a couple of years, anyway. *(laughter)*

**DC** Right, now the other thing that, of course, was needed out there on the runways was electric power for the lighting and so on and water had to be presumably ...

**Mr D** Hah, yes, water was a problem.

**DC** Was it?

**Mr D** Oh, yes. If you can imagine – well, when you look at the airport now, you wouldn’t realise, but, as you – we travel, say, from Castletown Bay, up the runway three-six, when we came to the top there was a ridge, and it – we had to take out rock – two and three feet of rock, to get any sort of a crown of the ground and it took ages – we didn’t blast or anything in those days ...

**DC** So was it marshy in places?

**Mr D** Yes, from where the airport building now, is, across to the houses in Derbyhaven on the lower part of the land was extremely wet.

**DC** Right, so there was a big drainage job, as well then, was there?

**Mr D** It was a big drainage job, but we couldn't – for some reason we couldn't get rid of the water, and someone read of this wonderful scheme where, having got all the pipes and the manholes in, they put a vacuum pump in one place, dug a few holes, and opened the drains, put the vacuum pump in and they sucked out water beyond belief!

**DC** Yes.

**Mr D** Yes, and it worked – still does – amazing!

**DC** Yes, does it still have to be pumped now, or not?

**Mr D** No, no, no, no, no.

**DC** So it was a one-off job, really.

**Mr D** Yes, I suppose that when the ground got stabilised, and it started picking up the water – you know it obviously has worked because there was sewerage works down there, as well. That's just by – there's a gap down there, and it used to be in – I don't know if it still – well it won't be working now, but that's where it was, down at the houses.

**DC** Now, you spoke about ordering materials, presumably most of the material that would be needed, would be stone, bricks for the buildings.

**Mr D** Stone, well, the main thing was to get the runways in, so that was stone, blinding and tarmac.

**DC** Tarmac topping – but we wouldn't be used to having tarmac on that scale, would we?

**Mr D** Well, we had a *Barber Greene* sent over from the mainland. It was sent back because they couldn't supply the tarmac fast enough.

**DC** Where was it coming from, the tarmac then, there was two or three locals doing it?

**Mr D** Well, yes, old Pritchard – do you remember Pritchard?

**DC** I remember the name.

**Mr D** He was asphalt.

**DC** Oh yes, Trinidad ... oh yes.

**Mr D** Trinidad – they used to have several little places where they made tarmac.

**DC** But the machine couldn't ... there wasn't enough for it?

**Mr D** No, you couldn't feed it. So that was sent back and it was done by hand and roller.

**DC** Really?!

**Mr D** Yes, quite amazing, isn't it?

**DC** How many runways were being worked on then, was it four?

**Mr D** Oh, it was all four at once – trying to stabilise it. Just down at the – where the sanatorium used to be, the King Bill's [King William's College] sanatorium, just there it was a big bog, and we didn't know what – how you cope with this at all, it was something entirely new to us. And it was an old Manxman who said, 'Fill that with gorse.' I said, 'You've got to be joking!' He said, 'I'm telling you ...' And to cut a long story short, that is exactly what we did – filled the bog with gorse, underneath the runway, and it's been there and it's never moved.

**DC** Really, just ...?

**Mr D** Rolled it, put it in, rolled it, put more in, rolled it, put more in and rolled it and then filled it up with hard-core, and carried on.

**DC** Really?

**Mr D** Carried on, yea, that was just ... yea, just behind where the sanatorium was.  
*(laughter)*

**DC** Yes. *(laughter)*

**Mr D** *(laughter)* So you learnt something every day.

**DC** Yes, now the power, then, presumably there would have been power to the farms, electricity to the farms?

**Mr D** Yea, they had a whole – they had to put a whole new electrical system in – and a generator of course, a spare generator – a standby. That was down by where the hangers are now, the bit we call Balthane, it isn't that now, it was down there – in fact I think it still is, I wouldn't be sure about that.

**DC** It was. I think in Gordon Kniveton's book that at one time Laings had 500 men working on the site. Does that sound right?

**Mr D** Oh yes, I would imagine that, yes a lot of Irish people.

**DC** How did they all get – were some of them living in Castletown, some in ...?

**Mr D** Everywhere, but there was no problem – I was never ever conscious of any difficulty in finding some place to stay. There were lots of boarding houses.

**DC** But no transport for them to work or backwards, backwards and forwards?

**Mr D** Oh no, you had to find your own way to work in those days ... the bus mostly.  
*(laughter)*

**DC** Yes, yes. So sand, gravel – there must have been cement work there as well, of course, needed?

**Mr D** There was a lot of concrete; we had trouble with the drainage – we put a – runway drainage – we put French drains. They were like – called them French drains – very fine gravel put down with a layer – loose concrete on the top, just

to form the edge of the runway and hold the tarmac in position. That worked. Eventually, they – I think they put gullies in in the end, but it worked while I was there, certainly.

**DC** So it was done fairly quickly all this really, was it?

**Mr D** Oh yes, I think the runways were operational by ... I came in the February ... it would be June, the next year, or roundabout then.

**DC** Right, because this was – it was the Admiralty that were actually – had Ronaldsway at that time.

**Mr D** Oh yes, we worked with them and the Fleet Air Arm – well, it was the same thing, I suppose. But they were – it was the Fleet Air Arm that sort of gave the instructions via the Admiralty.

**DC** Were you there when the first aircraft started coming in and using the runways?

**Mr D** Oh yea, oh yea.

**DC** What do you remember of that?

**Mr D** Well, (*laughter*) it wasn't anything new, actually, because when we got – I can remember like it was yesterday, the, the – when they'd finished two-seven-zero-nine, which is the longest one – it was 1400 yards, was it in those days? Which isn't long, anyway, we'd just got it 'blinded' on the top, and we were about to put the tarmac in and Jimmy Hesketh – did you ever meet Jimmy Hesketh?

**DC** I've heard the name, but I don't remember ...

**Mr D** Ha, well, Jimmy was – what would you call him – Air Traffic Controller ...

**DC** Oh yes.

**Mr D** ... down in the Ronaldsway buildings. I got a telephone call from him – I didn't answer it, but somebody shouted along to me, 'What do I do about this?!' I said, 'What?' He said, 'There's a DC3 in trouble – wants to land!' Well, I thought, I don't know ... I can't give him permission, you see, (*laughter*) so we rang

Jimmy back – he said, ‘Well, you’ve got to do something.’ I said, ‘All right – we’ll go down and chase the men off.’ So we jumped in our old banger – down the runway saying, ‘Get out! Get out of the way!’ And they landed.

**DC** This is before it was tarmaced, is it?

**LD:** Oh yea – they landed and I said, ‘What’s the matter?’ ‘Having trouble with the port engine.’ They weren’t having any trouble at all with that port engine. But the doors opened, out came a jeep – ‘We’re just going to see what we can do about it.’ Anyway, off they went, around all the farms, got all the eggs they could lay their hands on, (*laughter*) drove back, took off, (*laughter*) and it happened about three times – we had to ring up and stop them; they were coming from ... from Anglesey I think. Had to stop it in the end but we had one or two genuine emergencies, where they had to really clear the men seriously – get them off the runways and let them come down.

**DC** Now the terminal buildings, then, they weren’t going up at this time, were they? What was there?

**Mr D** Well the farm was there. And where – well, you know the control tower – well, we were actually building that – that’s it.

**DC** Oh, you were building it?

**Mr D** Yea, then. That was ... that would be early on, that would be during ’43. It’s a brick-build, as it is, the top is new, of course, but it’s the original building.

**DC** Right, yes – so there’s – would be local bricks in that, would there?

**Mr D** Yes, all the local stuff they could get.

**DC** Peel bricks, yes.

**Mr D** Yes. They were coming from Peel. They were getting concrete ones – anything we could get in the way of bricks.

**DC** Because there wasn’t – I mean, there wasn’t such a thing as err ... one of the concrete dumper lorries, was there?

- Mr D** Oh, no, no, no.
- DC** Presumably they came in tippers or something, did they?
- Mr D** Yes, anything, they just came on a lorry, because we had awful problems even getting enough lorries – to cart the stuff.
- DC** Yes, of course. Well, there wouldn't be many lorries operating during wartime here, anyway, would there?
- Mr D** No, we managed, we did manage to get – we didn't bring any lorries from – to my knowledge, but they had everybody ...
- DC** All the hauliers out on ... gosh.
- Mr D** I believe they went on strike, actually, at one time. Very vague in my memory ... and, I think the farmer said, 'If that's your attitude, we'll bring them over.' And it was immediately settled and ... *(laughter)*
- DC** *(laughter)* They cracked on with it!
- Mr D** Yes, but next to the ... it was rather interesting, alongside the control tower, latterly, this is when the station was operational; they built what they called a torpedo attack centre, or trainer. And it was just a tin shed, huge tin shed, with a dome at the bottom, and then a projector in this dome showing seas. And it moved, and you could sit up on this top in a false aircraft and watch the boats coming along. And they used to go up there and aim their torpedoes – yes, and press it and a light came up to see whether they got it or not.
- DC** Yes, oh right, well, it sounds like a computer game, now, but that was high technology then, wasn't it?
- Mr D** Oh, absolutely wonderful to go and watch this, really something! *(laughter)*
- DC** So the services, then, got in fairly rapidly, once the runways were built?
- Mr D** Ah, yes. As soon as they got tarmac they were over. And of course, Castletown Camp was then being built, and the administrative sector, where Strix is now,

that was the doctor, dentist and all the ... it was all built there.

**DC** Was there any civil aircraft movements at this time, as well, or where they still coming up on the field, running up the field, were they?

**Mr D** Still in the field – they were in the field and – I can remember – I remember, quite seriously, though, we'd come to dig, was it, runway three-one end and this was out the back of the houses at Derbyhaven, and I went down to see them in – they had a house in the Crescent in Derbyhaven for Isle of Man Airways and ...

**DC** Oh yes, 'cos people had to get their tickets there, didn't they?

**Mr D** That's right, you had to get your tickets there, and hold the wings down on the plane, if it's too windy! (*laughter*) And I said, 'Look, I'm sorry, but I don't know what you're going to do, but we've got to dig across here tomorrow – right across your landing strip.' He said, 'Well, how wide will it be?' 'Oh,' I said, 'it's not very wide – 30 feet or something.' And he said, '30 feet – that's alright, carry on, I'll jump over it!' (*laughter*) And the plane ... he used to come in ...

**DC** Just bounce over it?

**Mr D** He used to come in, run along the grass, go *vhoom!* ...

**DC** (*laughter*) Up and down!

**Mr D** ... 'cos they had a blister hanger up the other end up there. (*laughter*)

**DC** When did you actually fly yourself, then, was that in one of these – around this time or not?

**Mr D** Oh yes, yea.

**DC** What do you remember of the flight and ...

**Mr D** Ahhh ... well, it was primitive by ... well, I tell you what, one thing you'll find amusing, when all the lights were finished then, funnel lighting, which was like a funnel at the end, so that if a plane was coming, then he'd see the lights of the

funnel and it'd guide him to the ...

**DC** Yea, yea.

**Mr D** ... I mean, that was it in those days. And I was told I had to go up at night and check all the runway lights of the funnels. I said, 'Well, [unclear].' 'Well,' he said, 'you gotta go with the electrician, and that's it.' So, we go along and it was an *Anson*.

**DC** Who was that?

**Mr D** An old *Anson*.

**DC** Oh, an *Anson*, an aircraft, yes, yes.

**Mr D** Aircraft, and ... took off, we went round, we went down the main runway, both ends, funnels checked, and the pilot said, 'That's all right then, is it?' I said, 'Come on, you know very well we've got three more to do.' 'Oh crikey' he said. So we're going on, and every runway we completed he said, 'Is that all right, then?' And I said, 'What's worrying you?' And he said, 'I've never done a night landing before!' (*laughter*) So, we finished very quickly, checked it all, wound the undercarriage down, and he made a perfect landing, of course, but we weren't very happy about it. (*laughter*)

**DC** Now, let's just talk about ... first of all about the buildings that went up, in actual fact, quite apart from the terminal building itself – was later, but presumably you were here during the course of building some of the other facilities.

**Mr D** Oh yes. After the station was operational, we were then sent on the hill, across the Balthane road, to build what was known as 'bomb stores' – they were simply partially built in – you could see some of them, but partially built into the earth and flat roof, concrete, basic construction – and we also built the radar station up there, which was a *Nissan* hut, basically, where they had this very primitive radar system, and it was operated by Wrens, practically all – they were all Wrens in there. But you had to go in – it was dark, and it was – it took quite a few seconds – almost a minute before you could even see the screen, which was green, you know. And ... I ... it meant nothing to us, looking at it – it was

just dots – meant absolutely nothing, you know. That worked for quite a while, and they had what they called a – I don't know – called a system, but err – friend or foe, it was. And if you pressed a button, it told you whether it was a friend or a foe.

**DC** Oh really?!

**Mr D** And they had a very primitive signal in the nose of the aircraft, you know, and if you didn't have one it came up 'foe,' if you had one, it was 'friend'. And that's how they recognised it. But that was quite – that took quite a while to build, that section, and of course, all the Balthane hangers had to be built.

**DC** So you were still surveying and working on ...

**Mr D** Oh yes, whilst it was all going. And of course, the first chap I knew was Kim Verica [sp ???]. Lieutenant Commander Verica ...

**DC** Oh yes, he was the Commander of the whole site.

**Mr D** Engineering chief, yes.

**DC** And another man who stayed on the Island, of course, didn't he?

**Mr D** Oh, indeed, he did, yes, yea.

**DC** What – for all these men, there's 500 men there, presumably there's half an hour or whatever for lunchtime, they would have to have that, they would have to have washing, toilet facilities and so on.

**Mr D** Primitive, very primitive, the toilets was in the centre of the runways, at the junction – intersection of the four runways, which comprised a fence, if you could so call it – about four feet high, covered with canvas, so nobody could be seen, of course, behind this. And one day there was an emergency landing over – I think it was a *Lancaster*, from memory, and it was sliding down towards this intersection across the grass. And I happened to be there, watching this, and – I – petrified in case it was going to mow the whole thing down! Didn't know if there was anyone in there, but ... anyway, to cut a long story short, it started to slow down quite rapidly, and the nose of the aircraft pushed into the canvas a

couple of feet – that’s about all. But at that very point in time, about five or six chaps ran out pulling up their trousers, (*laughter*) which ... and every ... of course, nobody was hurt, but everybody was laughing their heads off. And fortunately the pilot and crew of the aircraft were all right. (*laughter*) Oh dear!

**DC** So these are kind of happy memories of working there, but of course, you’d come in, I think you said in the winter, in February, was it? The conditions – the weather conditions – must have been rough at times, were they?

**Mr D** Well, yes, the weather was – I don’t remember it being terribly bad, actually, ‘cos you only remember the good weather.

**DC** Yes, you do, don’t you?

**Mr D** When I was doing the survey, I used to get dreadful hayfever, and oh, but it made no difference; you couldn’t have a day off, because there was a war on. And we used to work from morning, early morning ‘til we’d finished our job for the day, which could be any time. There wasn’t any question about not staying on – everybody was keen to push it on. And when you think of the time it was completed, you know. I know there was a lot done after it was operational, but it was a good job, interesting.

**DC** Now, the Government, of course at this time were negotiating – or later in the ‘40s, negotiating to buy it, and I think they bought Ronaldsway for £200,000 eventually.

**Mr D** Yes, it wasn’t very much in my view.

**DC** Yea, but what ... a bargain, really.

**Mr D** Oh, absolutely.

**DC** But what was going on with the building of the airport terminal and so on – had that come later? ‘Cos that didn’t open until the ‘50s.

**Mr D** No, that was the ‘50s. And they built the main building, and then, if you remember, they put a prefabricated building on the end of that, on the Castletown end, which formed the café – much in the same shape as it is now.

**DC** Because that was ... there was a definite architectural style about that building, wasn't there?

**Mr D** Yes, that was err ... trying to think who did it ...

**DC** Not Davidson Marsh? *(laughter)*

**Mr D** *(laughter)* No, it wasn't, actually, it was ... I've forgotten. But I thought it was pretty good, actually.

**DC** But that would be ... it was getting built, sort of, early 50s.

**Mr D** Yes.

**DC** This is after you'd have left the site, there, presumably?

**Mr D** Yes, we'd left the site – I left about – '46, because I had to go back and complete my studies, which had been night schools in the first instance, correspondence course during the war, and then ... I felt, well, I'm not going to get anywhere, so I went back to England, and I was sent to a couple of jobs there, and then I said, 'Oh, that's it.' Got my qualifications, came back over here, where Roy was busy making concrete.

**DC** This is Roy Gardner of course, yes, Rural Industries, yes.

**Mr D** Yes, Roy Gardner, yes, he decided he'd stay, and, of course, I couldn't get back fast enough, so there, that's it.

**DC** Who did you work with when first came back here, then?

**Mr D** Eric Marsh.

**DC** Oh yes, so it wasn't Davidson Marsh at that time, or was it?

**Mr D** Oh, no, no, no, no.

**DC** So he teamed up with Alec Davidson some time later?

**Mr D** Yes, well ... I think, when I first joined them, Alec Davidson was still in the forces. He was over in Chester, I think, somewhere. But Eric Marsh hadn't been in the forces, and I joined him – and there it is ... another story!

**DC** Oh yes. But the runways that were built then are still the runways that are being used now, presumably?

**Mr D** Basically, yes. They widened them, I think, and then I think – and, of course, they obviously extended them.

**DC** That's right, yes, yes.

**Mr D** Because three of the runways were only, I think, a 1,000 yards, or something, you know ...

**DC** Yes, yes ... and these – I mean, the job you did there, was good enough to last all this time.

**Mr D** Oh yes. Though, obviously, you have to do a lot of repairs – I mean, standard of tarmac wouldn't come up to today's standard – you know – nor would it be thick enough, I suppose. *(laughter)* But it served a very useful purpose until after the war. We didn't anything really heavy in for years.

**DC** No, and of course, all this was being paid for – although Laings were your employers, it was UK Government was paying all this, presumably.

**Mr D** Yes. We were told we were being paid by the Admiralty, if that meant anything. *(laughter)* But it is still the taxpayer, isn't it, at the end of the day?

**DC** That's right. And was pay good or poor or 'get by' on?

**Mr D** Do you know, we never thought about it.

**DC** No, you wouldn't have time to think about that, would you, really?

**Mr D** As long as we had enough. I think we used to go out on a Saturday night, and that was our lot. We used to go walking a lot. I think Roy and I – Roy Gardner and I – climbed every hill and mountain in the Isle of Man during that time.

There was a crowd of us, when we eventually lived with the Walkers at Belle Abbey. There was George Thompson – he was an architect, he was much older than we were. There was Frank Ballard – Frank was hell-bent on being a structural engineer. Then there was Roy and myself.

**DC** Yes. So you did a lot of walking then, did you?

**Mr D** Yes, lots and lots of walking and of course we fell in love with the Island, and that was it.

**END OF INTERVIEW**