

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

‘TIME TO REMEMBER’

Interviewee(s): Mr Quentin Grierson & Mrs Frances Grierson

Date of birth: Mr Quentin Grierson: 12th February 1920

Place of birth: Fifehire Scotland

Interviewer(s): David Callister

Recorded by: David Callister

Date recorded: 6th April 2005

Topic(s): *Mr Grierson:*
RAF Jurby and training
Pipe band duties
Various plane crashes
Entertainment and *The Pool Ballroom* in Ramsey
Story of meeting future wife Frances
Mrs Grierson:
Meeting future husband and getting married
D-Day celebrations in Peel
Bomb dropping at Cronk Garroo
Prisoners of War
Entertainment
Mr Grierson:
Scare tactic ‘exercise’ for civilians

Quentin Grierson - Mr G
Frances Grierson - Mrs G
David Callister - DC

DC It's Quentin, Q-U-E-N-T-I-N, is it?

Mr G Yea.

DC Grierson, G-R-I-E-R-S-O-N?

Mr G That's it.

DC And where were you actually born and on what date?

Mr G Born in Fifeshire ...

DC Yea.

Mr G ... in Scotland on 12th February 1920.

DC Aye, okay, that's all we need for that, and then we'll talk about your – about Frances later. Now, we're going to talk about your – mainly about your experiences at Jurby, but you actually joined the RAF [Royal Air Force] before war had been declared, didn't you?

Mr G That's right, that's correct.

DC Why did you do that?

Mr G I saw the posters – used to be a poster on every police station with a palm tree and an airman standing underneath it. And it said, 'Join the Air Force and see the world.' And a pal of mine who had a brother in the RAF almost talked me into it – because I was thinking of joining the Metropolitan Police at the time; but anyway, to cut a long story short, his brother came home from the RAF and was telling us – and he was about six feet tall, blond and fair haired, nobody could have shone better in a uniform than his – wonderful!

DC Hmm, so he looked good and you thought, 'That's the life for me!'

Mr G He looked like Charles Atlas, if anybody remembers Charles Atlas.

DC (*laughter*) Yes indeed!

Mr G And he – I asked him and said, ‘What do you do in the RAF?’ He said, ‘I’m a flight mechanic.’ So I said, ‘What does a flight mechanic do?’ So he said, ‘Oh, they work on engines.’ And he said, ‘You know, if you work on an engine on your own, most of the time you can have a trip in it if it’s not on navigational duties or anything.’

DC Yes.

Mr G So, that was that.

DC That appealed to you, anyway.

Mr G That appealed to me.

DC Yes.

Mr G So to cut a long story short, we thought about it, and we went down to the office that we had to go to – you know, join up.

DC Hmmm.

Mr G And there’s a quick little story there because one of the things was, you picked something out of a bucket and it decided what you had to write a little essay on it – about twenty lines, something like that.

DC Oh, did you, yea?

Mr G So the chap sitting on my left, he was writing away, and I was writing away, and the little lad on my right kept saying, ‘What should I say? What should I say?’ And this went on and this bloke on my left shouted over to him, ‘For God’s sake just write, ‘to be continued ...’’ (*laughter*) So anyway, we then got down to the interviews and I had a Flight – I didn’t know his rank then, but looking back now, he was a Flight Lieutenant, and he said, ‘What do you want to do in the RAF if you pass?’ I said, ‘I want to be a flight mechanic.’ ‘But,’ he said, ‘that’s a very, very difficult job, very long course, a very severe course.’

DC Hmmm.

Mr G Whether he was joking or not I didn't know, but he – anyway, I said, 'Well, yes, I want to be it.' So he said, 'Wouldn't you like to be a balloon operator?' So I said, 'What's a balloon operator?' He said, 'Well, you've got balloons, you know, protecting areas underneath and keeping planes from bombing places.'

DC Barrage balloons?

Mr G Pardon?

DC Barrage balloons, sort of thing, was it?

Mr G Barrage balloons, yes. Well, of course, in 1939 nobody had ever heard of a barrage balloon.

DC (*laughter*) No!

Mr G So eventually I said, 'Do they get as much pay as a flight mechanic?' So he said, 'No.' I said, 'Then I want to be a flight mechanic.' (*laughter*) And at the end I got so exasperated I said, 'I don't have to join the Air Force,' I said, 'if you don't want me, that's fine.' So he said, 'Well, we'll give you a try, but don't blame me, you know, if you don't make it.'

DC (*laughter*) Oh, right.

Mr G So, to cut a long story short, that chap's name that joined with me was Bob Lochard.

DC Hmmm.

Mr G So we joined up and we were sent down to West Drayton in England to get sworn in, to get the King's shilling as it was in those days. And he went as a balloon operator – he allowed himself to be talked into going as a balloon operator.

DC Yes.

Mr G And from that day to this, I have never seen Bob Lochard – I don't know whether he survived or not, but when his big brother, Joe Lochard, came home

on leave the next time, we find out that he wasn't a flight mechanic, he worked in the cookhouse in Weston-Super-Mare!

DC *(laughter)* Oh, right!

Mr G So, anyway, now getting back to it, I did a course, I was sent to Padgate first of all to do the 'square-bashing.'

DC Yea ... did you have much square-bashing to do for the RAF, then?

Mr G Quite a bit, because they even formed fours in those days ...

DC Yes.

Mr G ... which was difficult for people doing square-bashing ...

DC Right, yes.

Mr G ... and the – our corporal – drill instructor, Corporal Fielding – I can remember him well – Corporal Fielding – he was built like Charles Atlas and he – you didn't disobey him or anything else. You'd see odd bloke running up towards the gates to get out, to try and disappear, but they never made it.

DC No.

Mr G And ... from there I spent – I don't know how long. Oh, one thing I should say – the food in the airman's mess in those days – absolutely marvellous!

DC Was it?!

Mr G Good – better than you'd get at home ...

DC Really?

Mr G ... and that's saying something.

DC Yes.

Mr G So anyway, we passed out on the old drill, and I was then posted to Number 4 wing, St Athans, in South Wales.

DC That would be ...?

Mr G Glamorgan, Glamorgan.

DC That would be into engineering to start off, then.

Mr G The flight – for the flight mechanic's course.

DC Yes, yes.

Mr G And it was, well to me, anyway, it was quite a tough course, and I think it was as tough, probably, to most people. But of course, it wasn't all flight mechanics, there was electricians; there was all types getting trained, you know, in the same place.

DC Was this about a year's training or so, then?

Mr G Not quite – it would have been, only the war started.

DC Yes.

Mr G I was lying in Padgate, in bed, the day that Mr Chamberlain declared war on Germany.

DC Oh aye – you remember him broadcasting that, do you?

Mr G I remember him broadcasting – we were all lying listening to the radio in the billet, and he – this Corporal Fielding, by the way, was an air-gunner as well, and he used to get thrupence a day extra if he were an air-gunner as well as a drill instructor.

DC Yes.

Mr G And they used to wear a flying bullet – a sort of a bronze bullet with wings on it.

DC Oh – what, on the arm?

Mr G On the arm. So, the following day, Corporal Fielding said, ‘You all think you’re going to be flight mechanics – you’re going to be this and you’re going to be that – you’ll all be in France in a few weeks!’ But he said, ‘Have no fear,’ he said, ‘Corporal Fielding will be there!’

DC *(laughter)* Oh yea!

Mr G The next day afterwards, the bullet was down ...

DC Really?

Mr G ... it was off, he didn’t need, because he was getting promoted.

DC Oh, I see.

Mr G They needed more drill instructors, and of course, it was easy for them.
(laughter)

DC Oh aye. *(laughter)* And then, it wasn’t very long, then, before you found yourself in the Isle of Man.

Mr G Well, we did finish the course, but I think that probably the last month allowed me to pass it because, I stopped going out boozing and all this that and the other, sort of thing, and I sat in bed every night swotting. And it got me through alright – I did alright on it.

DC Yes.

Mr G But it wasn’t easy, as I’ve said before. Now I could go into this and that – the night before we were due to be posted, the two blokes from London, I think they were – two big blokes, big six footers – they were letting vent their feelings of, probably being finished their course and all. And they came up to my bed and they tumbled me out of bed, and I said, ‘Nobody tumbles me out of bed without me going back!’ And I went back and I tumbled them out of bed, *(laughter)* big six footers or not.

DC Yes.

Mr G And the sergeant came out of his bunk, which was attached to our billet, he said, 'You're all on a charge.' And the following morning the two big blokes went and apologised to the sergeant and said, 'It was our fault.' So on and so forth, and he said, mentioning names, it could have been Jones, Smith and somebody else, 'You're going to Jurby; Grierson, you're going to Jurby; so and so, you're going to Jurby.' 'Where's Jurby?!' (*laughter*) 'It's in the Isle of Man.' 'Where's the Isle of Man?' 'It's in the Irish Sea.' Anyway, to cut a long story short, we arrived – I arrived – going to the Isle of Man on the boat, in the January 1940 – before my birthday on the 12th July 1920 – and anyway, there was a Liverpool lad travelling with me – a very nice lad, a very well educated lad, and during the course of the conversation he said, 'I'm the 'black sheep' of the family – I'm not too popular at home.' I never knew what had happened to him, or what it was about, but he – I said – we arrived at Jurby as I said, and frankly, I never saw anything of him after that, because he would be in a different squadron or section to me.

DC Yea.

Mr G So I got my billet, and then told – issued with overalls and all this that and the other sort of thing – toolbox etcetera – and I was placed in front of a long nosed *Blenheim* – given instructions and realised that I was in charge of that engine until it was going somewhere else, and there was another flight mechanic in charge of another engine, and we used to compete to see who could get the engines – to get the highest revs.

DC Really?

Mr G Yes. And it was very enjoyable because if it was flying, you attended to everything, you were there for that purpose, if it wasn't flying and the pilot had to get in so many hours then you could fly with him.

DC Oh right.

Mr G You could fly with him.

DC So did you do that, I suppose?

Mr G Oh yes. Now the first trip in that plane – the pilots used to wear the headgear – leather helmet and it had a tube coming out of it for speaking into. I didn't know anything about that at the time, but having blown up my 'May West' because we always flew over the sea, I spoke to the pilot, and the pilot couldn't hear me, so he pushed the tube in front of me and I blew into it (*laughter*) because I thought it was something like the 'May West.' (*laughter*) Anyway, he just laughed and then everything was alright after that.

DC But, I mean, speaking tubes are something you think belong in the previous century, wouldn't you?

Mr G Well, yes, you would, but it was – there was no modern crash helmets or anything then.

DC (*laughter*) You were telling me before we started about hanging – having to hang over the tail-plane of certain aircraft.

Mr G Oh yes, yes – when the pilot was going on a trip, the first thing he did was to run up the engines to make sure everything was in order, the revs were right and everything was – so and so. But he said – I said it was the fitters that had to lean over the tail-plane to keep it from lifting off the ground with the force of the revolutions of the engines.

DC Oh, really?

Mr G And I said you were getting batted with sand and stones and everything that was possible.

DC Of course, yes, yes.

Mr G And as I said, if it hadn't have been for the chocks in the wheels – in front of the wheels – of course the plane – well, God knows where we would have ended up.

DC Why was there a *Tiger Moth* there?

Mr G That was for the Group Captain – that was his personal plane.

DC Oh? Did you have to look after that one as well?

Mr G No, no, thank God, I never had to look at it because, if you did anything on it, you had to complete the Form 700 to make sure, that if it was examined, everything was in order.

DC Form 700 – so you had to put all the details on that, presumably?

Mr G Everything that happened on the plane – if you did a job on the plane that was, you know, improving it, you know, in any shape or form, or had to be done, then you had to complete the Form 700.

DC Right.

Mr G And you got used to it – I don't think anybody would deliberately put wrong information on it, because you would have been in trouble afterwards if they had.

DC Something went wrong with this *Tiger Moth* though, didn't it?

Mr G Yes. He flew up, came down and said, 'I want my Tiger Moth prepared.' So the bloke whoever was in charge of it – I don't know who he was, but whoever was in charge of it, he ... 'Yes sir, we'll have it ready for you.' So at the appointed time he came down, and took off – lovely – good pilot – took off and probably got a thousand or more up in the air, and it started banging and spluttering. And he came down from one side to the other, sliding down lower and lower and lower and eventually landed on grass – there was grass growing. No damage to the aircraft, no damage to him ... and it was eventually found that there were faulty plugs that, on the last inspection, had been fitted to it. So somebody must have been sweating, watching him doing see-saws coming down.

DC Right, yes. But you mentioned 'coming onto grass' – when you arrived, then, did they have runways there or not?

Mr G I'm trying to remember – I don't think there was any runways there at all, because all the planes coming into land were bouncing and bumping in over the bumps on the ground.

DC Yes.

Mr G So as far as my memory tells me, there wasn't any full runways across the 'drome [aerodrome] then.

DC Now, it would be a fairly windy place there, at Jurby, wouldn't it?

Mr G Talk about wind? You used to have to pick at the planes – nose into wind – every night before you left them.

DC Yes?

Mr G Whether it was daytime or night, you had them into wind before you left them. And it they had to be changed during the night, you changed them into wind.

DC Really?

Mr G To prevent them ...

DC Yes.

Mr G So – the force of the wind – you couldn't believe it was so strong. They used to put engine covers over them to protect them from the weather ...

DC Hmmm.

Mr G ... and when you'd go out some mornings, they would be all wrapped round the propeller – the propeller hub.

DC Hmmm.

Mr G With the force of the wind, pushing them – now, I was a fairly strong lad, and to move a prop in normal conditions, you'd be lucky if you could move it a foot or so ...

DC Right.

Mr G ... so it gives you some impression of what the winds must have been like ...

- DC** Yes, yes.
- Mr G** ... during those days.
- DC** Were these aircraft, though, were they all kept in hangers over night?
- Mr G** No, no – no, no, no – there wasn't enough hangers for them, anyway. But they were parked in dispersal sites, and then ...
- DC** Yes – where they under camouflage, were they?
- Mr G** No, no, they were all camouflaged, then.
- DC** Well, they were painted in camouflage paint, weren't they?
- Mr G** They were painted in camouflage, yes.
- DC** But there was no camouflage nets, or anything like that, was there?
- Mr G** No, no, no, not at Jurby, not at that time.
- DC** No?
- Mr G** During summer the aerodromes, you know, to hide them from the Germans, yes – but not at Jurby during the time that I was there.
- DC** Now it all seems strange to me, I mean, it must have been well known, presumably, that Jurby was a training camp of some kind, that it was never actually bombed, was it?
- Mr G** No, I believe planes flew – some German planes had flown over Jurby, but, quite frankly, I never saw any.
- DC** There wouldn't be a hint of a light at night, of course, would there?
- Mr G** Not if it could be helped at all – no, no, no, no ...
- DC** No, no.

Mr G ... blackout all the way. On my first trip to Ramsey, when I arrived at Jurby, I thought I'd better find out where I get the bus back to Jurby ...

DC Hmmm.

Mr G ... so I went down to the bus station and there was a conductor with a torch – a blue torch, because it was blackout ...

DC Yes.

Mr G ... showing a bus reversing out of the garage. So I went up to him and I said, 'Excuse me please, does this bus go to Jurby?' He said, 'I can't do two jobs and once!' So I didn't have any further conversation with him. *(laughter)*

DC That's a bit of Manx, really, isn't it? *(laughter)*

Mr G Oh, he was a good Manxman.

DC Yes. You being a Scot, then, found yourself not only looking after these aircraft, but getting into kilts, now tell me about that.

Mr G Oh yes – the pipe-man. Oh that was – that was the making of Jurby. The Group Captain decided that he – some form of marching should take place on sails [sp ???] parade, and all the other parades that were needed. And he said that he would treat the WAAFs – this is what I was told, anyway.

DC *(laughter)* Yes.

Mr G He said he would treat the WAAFs in their stride – pipe-band. He said, 'My wife was a Scot, and she suggested that we get a pipe-band.' So I got a pipe-band going – they asked for volunteers from the staff on the camp, and eventually they got enough to form a band.

DC You volunteered, then?

Mr G I volunteered, yes, with a pal.

DC But had you played the pipes?

- Mr G** I hadn't played the pipes before, no, I'd been in a flute band as a young lad.
- DC** Oh aye.
- Mr G** But that was – I was pretty musical. The man in charge of the band was Squadron Leader Blair – perfect gentleman. And the Drum Major – he was a pilot – a wartime pilot squadron leader, Blair. And the Drum Major was a Flight Lieutenant Bill Muir. He was a 1939 pilot – he was a pilot. Just to give you an idea, you know – the type of class we had in there – in the pipe-band.
- DC** Yea.
- Mr G** And of course I was a fitter – I ended up a fitter, so it was 'class.' *(laughter)*
- DC** So you – as a pipe-band, then, you'd have to have time to rehearse, presumably. You'd be taken off the normal works you were doing, would you?
- Mr G** Well, we had an hours practice every working day, and the – some of the rest of the staff probably didn't like it, but it was work for us – if you were learning the pipes, it was still work for us.
- DC** Hmmm.
- Mr G** And eventually, we all got together, you know. I was a drummer – tenor drummer – swinging the sticks, at the beginning.
- DC** Yes, right.
- Mr G** And one or two pipers had to go for one reason or another. One went off with – I think he had TB ...
- DC** Oh?
- Mr G** ... and he got de-mobbed because of illness, and I think there was one or two. So they said, 'We're getting short of pipers.' And I thought, well, I could manage that. And a little bit of training – watching the Pipe Major and having a good ear for music ...

DC Yes.

Mr G ... I could play the pipes. *(laughter)* And we were a good band – it was a good band – we went everywhere.

DC What time of day would you rehearse then?

Mr G At lunch time – at lunch time and the people who were on night flying in the billets close to us, they weren't too happy when the pipes would start ... [Mr Grierson sings a tune] ... so they couldn't do anything because it was – a Group Captain was in charge and nobody could argue with a Group Captain. *(laughter)* So we played – now, hut 29 was a pipe band hut ...

DC Right.

Mr G ... and very few people wanted to come into it – only those who were in the band, because we played the pipes at all times of the night and day. *(laughter)*

DC Yes.

Mr G So the pipe band duties were parades on and off the Isle of Man.

DC Oh!

Mr G We played at Dumfries on an army parade, and the Pipe Major, Jock Duffy – he was only a small little lad, he wasn't more than five feet tall – and he was a Pipe Major who was in charge of the pipes and woe betide anybody that said you're going to do this, you're going to do that. So we were in Dumfries and it was an army parade, and the officer in charge of the army parade came along and he said, 'Pipe Major,' he said, 'You know we're running late,' he said, 'it's time ...' and of course Joe Duffy wouldn't let anybody blow their pipes until they were tuned properly – and that was the secret of good pipe music ...

DC Yea, right.

Mr G ... if they were tuned properly.

DC Yes.

Mr G So he came along and said, ‘Pipe Major, come on, come on!’ ‘Sorry’ he said, ‘I’m the Pipe Major,’ and he said, ‘nobody moves until I give the okay.’
(*laughter*) And that was it – he had to wait.

DC Yes.

Mr G So that was a good incident in Dumfries.

DC Yes.

Mr G Incidentally, the big drummer ended up in jail that night because he’d been in a pub and some French Canadians didn’t like what he was saying or something
(*laughter*) so, you see, he was an ex KOSB – Kings Own Scottish Borderers ...

DC Yes.

Mr G ... he was demobbed before the RAF, before the war started, and then he joined the RAF when the war did start.

DC Oh aye.

Mr G So he was a pretty tough *hombre*.

DC Oh yes.

Mr G We then – we went to Walney Island – I can’t remember what we were supposed to be doing over there.

DC Hmmm.

Mr G Peel Castle, Foxdale, *Villa Marina* many times.

DC Oh, yes.

Mr G *Palais de Dance* a few times. Ramsey – walking round Ramsey. We played out at Lezayre – the Lezayre Road – you know, that chap who used to be out there with all the antique cars and everything ...

DC Oh yes.

Mr G At *Milntown* ...

DC Oh hmmm, yes.

Mr G ... played out there. We played at Tynwald Day. We were on – we played up from – we came in transport to the – where the old station used to be ...

DC Yes.

Mr G ... and then we marched all the way, playing the pipes, up to the Mount ...

DC Up to the fair, yes.

Mr G Up to the fair, yes

DC Right.

Mr G And then we lined the road that you walked up to ... what do you call it?

DC Oh yes, yes – the Processional Way there.

Mr G Processional Way – we lined that, then.

DC Yes.

Mr G And I'm surprised, you know, with all the things we did with the pipe band, it never seemed to be mentioned when anybody was writing about the history ...

DC No.

Mr G ... because it was one of the most popular things you could get. And you should have seen – we used to play 'Scotland the Brave,' you know, marching off at the end of the thing, and you'd see the WAAFs going there with the lads and it suited them, you know, and they were swinging to it – lovely.

DC Yes, that's right. Marching music, in fact, really, as well.

Mr G So then it comes to you – things that happened – let's see. Well, we also attended funerals.

DC Oh, did you?

Mr G There's a lot of gravestones of airmen buried at Jurby and at the Andreas 'drome [aerodrome] ...

DC Yes.

Mr G ... and if you look there, you'll find them then. We played the pipes, you know, the slow march ...

DC Yes.

Mr G ... and the funeral march – we played them in a lot of those. I wouldn't say all of them, but a lot of them – most of them.

DC No, no.

Mr G What happened – what happened at the 'drome [aerodrome]? Well, there's an old saying, 'If you saw a flying boat, coming into land on a 'drome, what would you do?' And the answer to the old times were, 'You'd report sick!' (*laughter*) But, believe it or not, I saw a *Sunderland* flying boat landing on Jurby airfield.

DC Really?

Mr G It was coming in – apparently it had taken off from some water place somewhere else, and it had damaged the – it was carrying a mine, I believe, and it had damaged the mechanism for getting rid of the mine, during the take-off ...

DC Yes.

Mr G ... and he was coming to land at Jurby, apparently, and the Group Captain, I think, was in charge of the things that were happening then, and it was flying round and round – the flying boat was flying round and round and round, and round and round and round and round until he'd used up all the fuel, and then he landed coming from Ballaugh, at the side of the runway – he didn't land on

the runway – about twenty or thirty yards from the runway. He landed there – came down, made a perfect landing on the keel, and God knows, he went quite a bit before he turned to the left – he’s turned left to port, when the main plane hit the ground – the wing hit the ground, and stopped him. They all got out safely and all the tiddlers and all came out from the umm – around Flying Control, got them safely out of danger. And there was a bang, there was flame – some sort of an explosion, but it didn’t kill anybody or do any damage. It damaged some of the hangers.

DC Right.

Mr G I was on duty one night and a *Wellington* bomber arriving at Jurby aerodrome, just before darkness, circled the ’drome and intended to land, coming in from the sea. Suddenly his navigation lights disappeared so something was wrong. So the Duty Crew, of which I was a member that night, were summoned, and when we got to the plane, we discovered the pilot must have underestimated the height of the cliffs, and crashed into same, a few feet from the top. The plane was on fire and the fuselage broke in two. The part containing the rear gunner had slipped down to the shore. When the Medical Officer checked the disc on the rear gunner’s body, he discovered the crew were French Canadians.

DC Hmmm.

Mr G Terrible thing – terrible thing that.

DC Yes. And did you get to the crash site?

Mr G Well, we got to the site, but you couldn’t get any vehicle to come along – ambulance or anything. They had to get – it wasn’t possible to do it.

DC Hmmm.

Mr G We had to go up the road – you know, as you go past Stella’s across the road to the shore?

DC Yes.

Mr G You know where I mean?

- DC** Yes.
- Mr G** Coming from Ballaugh, turn left instead of going right to Stella's.
- DC** Hmmm.
- Mr G** And you couldn't get any ambulances down there. But it didn't matter because they were all dead.
- DC** The crew were all dead.
- Mr G** All dead.
- DC** Yes, yes. When you were at Jurby did you get much chance to go out of the camp and go into Ramsey, for instance?
- Mr G** Oh yes. We used to go to the ballroom – *The Pool Ballroom* in Ramsey. Of course, I was a keen dancer – good dancer, so they tell me. And of course we – you wouldn't dance with yourself when you go in, (*laughter*) so I'd look around for the prettiest girl and it's like what the Liverpool say, 'Are you dancing?' and they'd say, 'Who's asking?' 'I'm asking,' 'I'm dancing.' (*laughter*) So anyway, we got to know Frances then. I never had a date with her or anything else, this little girl, but I was walking down Parliament Street one day with another lad and I was coming towards the Town Square and she was coming up from it. And I looked across and I said to my mate, 'Do you see that little girl over there?' He said, 'Yea.' I said, 'I'm going to marry that wee girl.' He said, 'Don't be a BF.' I said, 'Yea, well ...' I did!!
- DC** So this life at the camp that you had, then, must have been a pleasure – you were an entertainer more than anything else, doing all this band stuff and so on. Did you ever get – apart from that – did you get into any action at all?
- Mr G** During the war?
- DC** Hmmm.
- Mr G** No. The nearest I got to action was in May or June, I think it was May or June 1944, we were all – we got a notification from General Eisenhower that – all

about the D Day landings and so on and so forth – I wish I'd kept it, but somewhere along the line with travelling I lost it.

DC Yes.

Mr G But I went over there and we went to a place called Watchfield in Wiltshire, close to Shrivenham and Chippenham ...

DC Hmmmm.

Mr G ... and we were living – it was a change from a lovely hut in Jurby, to a Nissan hut at Watchfield.

DC Yes.

Mr G But anyway, we had to – we all had to take turns – NCOs all had to take turns on doing night duty and what have you. Time was going on, and suddenly – and I believe he was a Manx Adjutant – came over to me and said – on the 10th July 1944; he said, 'Grierson, are you still getting married on 12th July?' I said, 'Have I got any say in the matter?' He said, 'There's a plane leaving for Jurby in half an hour – can you be on it?'

DC Oh!

Mr G So I was on that plane, obviously.

DC Right. (*laughter*)

Mr G I came home, saw – caught up with my wife, and she had to see the clergyman and all then.

DC Of course.

Mr G The Bans had been read, but she had to see the clergyman and all to get all sorted and that. She had to go round all her relatives to tell them, you know, that it was on.

DC Right.

Mr G I saw a pal of mine that was in the pipe band, and been in the pipe band at Jurby, and I said, 'Will you be Best Man at my wedding?' And that was the sort of time we had.

DC Well, let's bring Frances into it here because they tell me that you're not really 'Frances' at all.

Mrs G No, Edna May, I'm afraid. (*laughter*)

DC Edna May Corkish, was it?

Mrs G Edna May Corkish, that was my ... I was christened in St Pauls, in Ramsey.

DC Right.

Mrs G My mum had me christened there. And she was only eighteen when she had me. Just picked a name at random and I never liked it. But I had a Merchant Navy seaman boyfriend and he christened me Frances 'cos he said that, with my love of animals, it suited me better.

DC (*laughter*) Right.

Mrs G So I've remained Frances.

DC Stayed at Frances.

Mrs G And when I met you it became Frances to you, didn't I?

Mr G You were introduced to me as Frances.

Mrs G Yes, indeed.

Mr G And me – I don't think he made a mistake.

Mrs G No, I don't think so.

DC What about – I mean, he was telling me that he was walking along, you were across the road, or whatever, and he was telling his mate, 'I'm going to marry

that girl,' – that's an amazing thing, isn't it?

Mrs G Yes, but we did meet at the dances in *The Pool Ballroom*.

DC Oh yes.

Mrs G He used to come up and ask me to dance, of course, and I thought he was quite a cheeky fellow, you know – being a Scot's man, and I was always sort of a but 'huffed' in those days – you know, a bit proud, and he'd say, 'Who's taking you home tonight?' and I would say, 'hmmm – not you, anyway!' (*laughter*) But I ...

DC But the RAF beat the Navy in the end, then.

Mrs G Oh, he did, yes, yea – he was heartbroken, he was heartbroken ...

DC Oh yes?

Mrs G ... we'd known each other for five years ...

DC Oh, right.

Mrs G ... right from school days – wasn't I cruel? (*laughter*) ...

DC Oh, cruel.

Mrs G ... very cruel, (*laughter*) but I couldn't resist him when I'd seen him in his kilt, you see.

DC (*laughter*) Oh, right! It was the kilt that did it.

Mrs G It was the kilt that did it!

Mr G A true Scotsman.

Mrs G I think it was the kilt that did it.

Mr G A true Scotsman, yea!

Mrs G And of course we loved *The Pool* – we were always over there dancing to Harry Cameron’s Band, and Jack Hart’s Band, the RAF band and all, yea.

Mr G Jack Hart’s Band, yea – he had a dance band, Jack Hart – good.

Mrs G And it was a great place in those days.

DC Did you get to Jurby Camp, though?

Mrs G Yes I did, yes, we – a lot of – before I met you, before I met Quentin, my husband, a lot of girls would go – we were all keen dancers, we used to go to *The Pool* and Cyril Ratcliff used to say, ‘Is there anybody who like to go to the dances,’ you know – put their name down for the coach. So, of course, my friend, Cathleen and I – she was the same name as me – Corkish – but no relative, we decided we’d go this night to the dance – we’d never been before – and we thoroughly enjoyed ourselves. But we didn’t tell our mums and dads where we’d been! (*laughter*) And we had a really excellent night dancing and brought home afterwards in the coach, you know, dropped us home. Mind you, I had to high-tail it for the bus because I lived on the Andreas Road and I’d missed my last bus and I had to run all the way home (*laughter*) so my mother wouldn’t know I’d missed the bus.

DC When you got married, then, in – what was it? – July 1944, did you have a honeymoon?

Mrs G Oh, we had four days, I think it was.

Mr G Five days.

DC Yes.

Mrs G Four or five days – better memory than me.

DC Where did you go?

Mrs G And we went to *Waterside* on Douglas Promenade.

DC Oh, right.

- Mrs G** And it was a chap called Mr Howarth – he was in the RAF, wasn't he?
- Mr G** Yes.
- Mrs G** I don't know what rank he was.
- Mr G** Corporal.
- Mrs G** But he said, 'I can let you have the room reasonable,' you know, and he said, 'you won't be going away, obviously,' because we thought he was going to have to go back to Watchfield, wasn't it?
- Mr G** That's right.
- Mrs G** Yea – go back to Watchfield, so of course I was a bit sad, thinking well, we're only going to have four or five days and that's it, you see.
- DC** Yea, yea.
- Mrs G** And then, goodness knows where he'll end up. So anyway, we had our – we were very shy – we had to go to Douglas by bus. All the confetti blowing off us onto the floor and everything, (*laughter*) so anyway, when we came down to breakfast that morning we were very shy, weren't we, because everybody kept looking at us. (*laughter*) So anyway ...
- Mr G** What was outside our door?
- Mrs G** Well, there was a toilet. We were on the end of a corridor ...
- DC** Yea.
- Mrs G** ... and everybody had to traipse down this corridor to get to the toilet, (*laughter*) and of course, well, it wasn't very romantic, I can tell you.
- DC** (*laughter*) No! Did you have a wedding cake?
- Mrs G** Oh yes – all my friends and aunts and uncles, they contributed all their rations of eggs and fruit and everything, and they baked one huge cake.

DC Right.

Mrs G It was about – oh, about a foot high and about that in circumference – what would you say that would be?

Mr G That – I'd say eighteen inches.

DC Oh, eighteen inches, right – eighteen inches and a foot high, aye, yes.

Mrs G And they brought it down to *The Imperial Hotel*.

DC Yes.

Mrs G And I can remember what we had for dinner; we had stewed lamb and mint sauce and vegetables, and we had stewed gooseberries and custard! (*laughter*) That was our sweet!

Mr G (*laughter*) It's a good job the toilet was outside the door!

Mrs G And I believe the cake had twenty-four eggs in it.

DC Twenty-four eggs!

Mrs G And I've still got a piece today.

DC Of the cake?!!

Mrs G I've still got a piece in its box.

DC Oh, that's marvellous.

Mrs G Mind you, it's not fit to eat now, no.

DC Of course not, no, no, no.

Mrs G So anyway, when the end of the time was drawing near to the end, I was getting sadder by the minute – I thought I was going to have to go away again.

- Mr G** Aye, aye, aye – hold on – we got another telegram, didn't we?
- Mrs G** That's what I say – we got a telegram to report back to Jurby. And err ...
- Mr G** Instead of going back to go to France, because they wanted the fitters all over there. The telegram said, 'When your leave is finished,' or words to that effect, 'report to Jurby.'
- DC** To do what? Play in the band again?
- Mr G** No, the band had gone.
- DC** Finished then, had it?
- Mrs G** No, you were still ... but we – the best wedding present – was the best we had, was the telegram that we had to go back to Jurby – it was marvellous.
- DC** Yes, right.
- Mr G** The band actually came back from France – not with me.
- DC** Oh!
- Mr G** But they eventually arrived back here before the err ... you know, didn't go to France.
- DC** Oh right, yes.
- Mr G** And they – oh, we had the band after the war and my ...
- Mrs G** Yes, we had celebrations down at Peel – D-Day celebrations and all.
- DC** Oh yes.
- Mrs G** We took the band down to Peel. I used to go on the bus with them then.
- DC** Yes, oh, right.

Mrs G I was married, respectable, (*laughter*) so I used to go on the bus with all the lads, didn't I?

Mr G Yes.

Mrs G And we went to various towns – Castletown, Peel – celebrating D-Day, you see.

DC Yes.

Mrs G All the villages laid on refreshments and all for the band to play in the village, in the villages.

DC When you – I mean, as a civilian, you wouldn't hear anything, I suppose, during those years of all these plane crashes and accidents, did you?

Mrs G Well, now, the only scare we had was, I was at the pictures one night, and I came home, and – we were – were you with me that night?

Mr G Yea.

Mrs G And there was a bomb dropped out at Cronk Garroo ...

DC Ah yea.

Mrs G ... and everybody got a terrible scare in Ramsey – that was the only bomb we had dropped in Ramsey. And of course everybody traipsed out the next day to see the big hole it had left.

DC Oh, of course, yes.

Mrs G And it was quite a crater, too. It had missed everything – just a field.

DC Hmm, yes.

Mr G Funnily enough I was flying in the plane, I was in charge, at that time, and the pilot flew over it to show us. He said, 'There's been one out here.'

DC Right.

- Mr G** It didn't seem an awful lot from the air.
- DC** No.
- Mrs G** No. And then another night we were at – I was at the pictures by myself, and you were in camp for this hush-hush thing.
- Mr G** Yea, I knew about it, but I wasn't allowed to tell anybody.
- Mrs G** He wasn't allowed to tell anybody.
- Mr G** It had to be a proper scare for the – a proper scare for the civilians, so they would take the – run to the air raid shelters and all.
- Mrs G** An exercise, yes.
- DC** Oh, I see, yes, yes.
- Mrs G** But we had no air raid shelters in the country, of course, we lived in the country.
- DC** No *Anderson* shelters built in the gardens, then?
- Mrs G** No, nothing. When I came home my mother had a young baby, she had my young sister. And my young sister was only about a year old, or something. And there was all these big lights in the sky, and all, and poor mum was hiding under the stairs, scared stiff!
- DC** Yea.
- Mrs G** And she said to me, 'Why on earth didn't you come home when you knew all this?' And I said, 'Well, I didn't think,' – only being a young girl.
- DC** That's right.
- Mrs G** I just dawdled home on the bus and poor mum was scared stiff.
- DC** Yes.

Mrs G And then, of course, when I met him the next day he told me all about it then – he was allowed to tell me then.

DC So what was this exercise, then, it was to simulate some attack, was it?

Mr G Sirens going and all, sirens going to tell the people, you know, run! ‘Cos if the sirens went, you were supposed to go to the air raid shelter to do – and when you get the all clear, then they came back. Then there were fire brigades, the people in charge of the fire – the aliens and all this and that – everybody had his own job to do, I mean, we were just ...

DC Yes.

Mr G ... because we knew, so didn’t take – we weren’t taking any notice of it.

DC Yes.

Mr G But they were wonderful times. I mean, all down round here – the prom – aliens.

DC Yes.

Mrs G Yes, I know.

Mr G A few of them lived down below here.

Mrs G Yes, we used to go to the dance and we were allowed to walk down the River Road at the side and they’d be ogling us through the wire, you know, and saying, ‘Hello girls, how are you?’ (*laughter*) And we’d be going to *The Pool*, and of course there were some quite handsome fellows there behind the wire – doesn’t matter whether they were Germans or Italians.

Mr G I can tell this story – I got her to confirm it. They took turns in billeting us out from the camp in case the camp was bombed, and then there would be somebody to do the work that the others were killed ...

DC Right.

Mr G ... taught to drive the bowzers and all this that – petrol bowzers and all that sort of thing. So anyway, I was put in *St Heliers* – is that how you pronounce it?

Mrs G Yes, at Brookhill, yes.

Mr G *St Heliers*, up Brookhill, and oh, it was marvellous, bacon and sausage and everything for breakfast every morning.

DC (*laughter*) Yes.

Mr G The civvies [civilians] outside weren't getting the food that we were getting ...

DC No.

Mr G ... because they had got the rations because of all the airmen being there.

DC Yes.

Mr G So, anyway, I thought it wouldn't be a bad idea if I was to bring a civvy [civilian] suit back ...

DC Yes.

Mr G ... and – did I bring a bike back at the same time?

Mrs G Yea, I think he brought a bicycle back, too.

Mr G I brought a bike back the same time.

DC Hmmm.

Mrs G We were living in Northern Ireland then, he brought it back to Northern Ireland.

DC Oh, aye.

Mr G Dad had moved from Scotland to Northern Ireland.

DC Right.

- Mr G** So anyway, I put this suit on. And – where did we used to meet you?
- Mr G** Well, it was the old Town Hall in Ramsey – I always met him there.
- DC** Yes.
- Mrs G** And err, I didn't know who he was! *(laughter)*
- Mr G** I went down there, and I was standing by the door, and who should come up at the appointed time – she stood there for five minutes and didn't know me! *(laughter)* She didn't know me!!
- Mrs G** I thought he had stood me up. *(laughter)*
- Mr G** She didn't know me.
- Mrs G** No, he looked different entirely, different entirely.
- DC** Yea, yea.
- Mrs G** Uniform, you know, can you make you more attractive, I think.
- DC** Oh really?
- Mrs G** Oh yes, indeed. *(laughter)*
- Mr G** It was a kilt!
- Mrs G** It was that kilt, it was, yes.
- DC** But you – I mean, Ramsey and the Isle of Man had a fairly easy time during the last – this war, didn't they?
- Mrs G** Yes, they did. Yes, we had quite a lot entertainment for the boys, though. There used to be St Olave's Hall, in the top end of the town, then there was St Paul's Hall in Church Street as it was then. And all the airmen used to come in there after they'd been to the pubs to get all the cups of tea and cakes and things.

DC Oh aye.

Mrs G Dance with the girls and see could they get anybody to take home. *(laughter)* And we got to know quite a lot. They were nice lads, but a lot of them didn't come back.

DC No.

Mrs G They were air gunners and things like that.

Mr G If I was away or doing something, you know, at *The Pool*, all my pals in the hut, they were saying ...

DC They saw Frances!

Mrs G Oh yes, indeed, well, I wasn't a stay at home girl. *(laughter)* Well, I always believed, no matter even if I was engaged, I was still going to the dance; I wasn't going to be a 'stay at home' girl ...

DC Yes.

Mrs G ... 'cos life's too short.

DC So Quentin, you told me at the start of this that you joined the RAF to see the world.

Mr G Yes, that's quite true, and by God, all I saw was Jurby so I've still got to see the world!

END OF INTERVIEW