

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

**'TIME TO REMEMBER'**

**Interviewee(s): Mr Alec Quirk Karran**

**Date of birth: 25<sup>th</sup> August 1924.**

**Place of birth:**

**Interviewer(s): David Callister**

**Recorded by: David Callister**

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**Topic(s):**

- Childhood days**
- Local characters**
- Poverty and food**
- Milk round**
- Sunday School**
- Radar Towers at Dalby**
- WWII**
- The Dalby 'Spook'**
- Farming**
- Weather**

**Alec Karran - Mr K**

**David Callister - DC**

**DC** So it's Alec Karran, there's more to it than that, is it Alexander?

**Mr K** Alec Quirk Karran.

**DC** Alec Quirk Karran.

**Mr K** Right you are.

**DC** Quirk part of the family is it?

**Mr K** My mother's name was Quirk and a relation to Willie Quirk, top of the hill up here, Ballachrink, and my mother's name was Annie Quirk. There was quite ... there was seven of them in the family, Tom Quirk, her brother, was chief fireman out in Manitoba, Winnipeg, for years. When he went out first of all he went farmin', of course he was of farmin' stock here in the Isle of Man, and they were livin' undergon [underground] when they were there first of all.

**DC** Underground?

**Mr K** In a shack undergon [underground] and then he married a Scotch woman, what was her name?

**Mrs K** Mackintosh's toffees.

**Mr K** Aye, Mackintosh's toffee, that's right, go on ... anyway, he was home here in the Isle of Man, oh, quite some time ago, because Mother's sister, Mrs Lucas, I would think that Mr Callister you'll know Betty Lucas from Douglas, the MHK, well, that was Betty Lucas's mother, she was ...

**DC** I've heard of her, yes, Hanson now?

**Mr K** Hanson now, that's right. Anyway there was quite a big family of them in, Mrs Tom Faragher, Mrs Lucas, Mrs Wattleworth, they were there to Ballawattleworth. Then Tom come home here to Southampton, sailed into Southampton and he was very surprised that they were, there was no drink concerned with them. Well Margaret, Tom's wife, she was fond of a good drop of whisky, and he was ready to go back, ready to go back in a week, because I think he got a bit of a surprise that they weren't socialisin' as well as himself

and the wife were, and they came here to stop with us at *Homelea*, Margaret was very fond of the drop of whisky but Tom used to say to me that goddam son of a bitch, that was the American slang ...

**DC** That's right.

**Mr K** Goddam son of a bitch, and I, I take a drink with anybody, I'm not particular who they are, but the rest of Mother's family, they were rather horrified that Tom and Margaret were leadin' such a hectic life. But it's one of these things – 'You can stop with us' – how long did he stop with us?

**Mrs K** Well, they moved round the family, a week here, a week there. Is this going on air?

**Mr K** Yes, never matter about that.

**DC** We'll watch that.

**Mr K** Well Tom anyway, he were a great character, a great character was Tom and I remember one Saturday night in Douglas we'd been to the pictures, the four of us, meself, the wife, four of us, and we were comin' up Lord Street, we had had a drink or two, comin' up Lord Street, and the old Gents was in Lord Street. Tom said, 'I just want to go in here for a minute,' so Margaret turned to me and she said, 'Are you goin' in there?' 'Yes,' I said. 'Well,' she said, 'two shakes more' she said, 'and you're playin' with it!' (*laughter*)

**Mr K** But she was a hard case.

**DC** Obviously.

**Mr K** A hard case, there's no doubt about that, Tom too.

**DC** Well let me take you back to your childhood now, what's the first sort of things, I mean you were brought up in Glen Maye all your life?

**Mr K** All me life, brought up in Glen Maye all of me life and there are a lot of characters in Glen Maye,

**Mrs K** Well you were born at *The Creglea*, weren't you?

**Mr K** I was born at *The Creglea* but I would only be very young when we came to *Creggan Ashen*.

**DC** That was a farm, hillside farm.

**Mr K** Yes, well it's right opposite Glen Maye chapel there, you just go down to it, it's more or less derelict now, But however ... I was brought up in *Creggan Ashen* more or less all me life and there was a lot of characters in Glen Maye in them days and they were more or less livin' in poverty. There was a fella livin' on the Glen Rushen road there, Harry Quilliam, livin' in a li'l, li'l stone place with a slopin' roof on it and in the middle of it was a cast iron stove, and a pipe goin' up through the roof, and me bein' a young fella, and Eddie Kneen, the baker, used to come round here with bread from Peel and I'd be goin' with Eddie, runnin' into houses with the loaves. And Harry, he was more or less paralysed down on one side, livin' on his own, just the one room and a bit of a division for the bed, whatever the bed was, and you'd be goin' into Harry and the way he was cuttin' the loaf was, he'd a lump o' wood with four six inch nails driven in it, and a lump o' string and he used to wedge the loaf down between the six inch nails, put the loop of string over it and put his foot on it to houl' it still and cut the loaf with the knife and to me it was just the way of livin' the man had.

**DC** Yes, yes.

**Mr K** But people talk about poverty today, they have no idea what poverty was like.

**DC** What was it like?

**Mr K** Well ... there was no pleasures in life, none at all, you see Harry used to go out and be walkin' with his stick, he was stroothin' his foot along and latterly he kept a dog. Well the dog wasn't gettin' fair justice at all but anyway I went in one day and I said to Harry, 'Where's the dog Harry?' 'Oh I shot him,' he said. So I said, 'How's that?' 'Well,' he said 'I got Tommy Clarke next door,' he said 'to dig a birrova [bit of a] hole in the garden,' he said, 'and I got a birrova bone,' he said, 'and I threw it alongside the hole,' he said, 'and I up with the gun,' he said, 'and give it to him and he fell in the hole.' Now that was it, but the characters that was livin' in Glen Maye, there was Chum Quilliam, there

was Elsie Quilliam, there was Emma Quilliam. Chum Quilliam could neither read nor write and he couldn't talk very much, he was only mumbling,' you couldn't tell what Chum was sayin' and he was the striker that was in the smithy with Arthur Corkill.

**DC** There was a smithy here as well was there?

**Mr K** Top of the hill there, it's all gone, all demolished now. The smithy up there and me bein' full of the devil as a young fella, used to go up the odd night time when all the farmers round about would be comin' there to get their harrers [harrows] sharpened, shoes for the hosses, [horses] pointin' the steel bass on the plough, and that was a hive that we used to go ... Corkill would have a good fire on and we'd be sittin' down at the fire and that would be passin' the evenin' away. Anawther character here livin' in Glen Maye was Charlie the tailor. Used to live at the li'l house right at the top of Glen Maye hill, joinin' the Glen Rushen Road. Charlie moved from there, he was a bit of a cripple in one leg, he moved from there to a li'l wooden hut up the Mullagh Vedden [sp ???] Road and that was another haunt that people were goin' to.

**DC** There was enough work for a tailor out here then?

**Mr K** Oh, no, no, no, no, no, no, there'd be no work for a tailor at all but that's what he went by, Charlie the tailor, aye. What his occupation was, he might have been a tailor, I wouldn't know, but that's where he went to live. Well t'was a haunt for us young fellas and there was any amount of old men they'd be goin' up there and there was a round stone in the middle of the floor, only a wooden hut, and Charlie would be sittin' on a bit of an oul' table in the corner, and all the topics of the village would be discussed, right or wrong. Phil Collister, the joiner, was here, and Annie, livin' in the archway alongside the chapel, Siddy Cowley [sp ???], was livin' down the middle of the hill, Stockton was livin' at the top of the hill, married to Mrs Kelly that used to come from Arrasy ... Corris – she was supposed to be half man, half woman, which half of was which I don't know. But she used to go round with a cadger's cart, sellin' herrin'.

**DC** Aye, well this is a time where everybody knew everybody else, is that right?

**Mr K** Well everybody knew everybody else and not like today, I mean to say I had a milk round ...

**DC** You had a milk round?

**Mr K** I had a milk round.

**DC** Because having been brought up on the farm you had to become a farmer really did you?

**Mr K** Well, that was the way things went, you see, mother and father were farmin' and they packed it up and I had a milk round, six o'clock in the mornin', out to milk the cows, all by hand and you filled the kegs, pint measure, quart measure, went from house to house, every door would be open, the jug would be on the table, put it in, shouted, 'Hello,' you'd be gone again and I knew everybody that lived, aye, in Glen Maye and Dalby.

**DC** What would milk be costing them in those days then?

**Mr K** Milk, tuppence a pint.

**DC** Tuppence a pint.

**Mr K** Aye, tuppence a pint.

**DC** This would be milk before tubercular testing came in then?

**Mr K** Oh, yes, yes, yes, yes, TB, there was no TB, they weren't talkin' about TB in those days man, no, no, no, and there was no hygiene, you milked the cows, put it through the stile, and you were righted, put it out. Nobody, nobody, nobody queried it, anythin' like that. And as for the young child goin' to Sunday School, half past ten on a Sunday mornin', half past two a Sunday afternoon, mother and father and me brother and meself, Sunday night at 6 o'clock, that was the routine. And Sunday dinner, perhaps in the week too, there'd be a pot of broth, big lump of a pot, there'd be a lump of beef in it, and all sorts of stuff in it, jinny nettles chopped up in it, all and a suet puddin' wrapped up in a cloth and spuds and stuff. You sat down for dinner, and mother would take the puddin' out of the pot, scutch it in the coul' water, then you'd have broth, meat and spuds, the puddin' would be took out of the cloth, cut a lump off, sometimes there was white sauce other times there wasn't. But we didn't know nawthin' else, boy.

**DC** You were telling me about a camp that was up here, you call it a camp; it was a set of houses up on the hill at Glen Maye here.

**Mr K** Yes, the top of Glen Maye hill there was a camp.

**DC** What was it for then, Alec?

**Mr K** Well it was, it was all WAAFs that was mannin' it, and those women were mannin' the station over in Dalby down at *The Creglea*.

**DC** During the Second World War?

**Mr K** That's right and a Cryer built the camp and he built all the concrete bunkers which are, some of them are in place today if you go down the Niarbyl road, you'll find them, and then I think it was radar they were connected with in the first instance, but then anyway, when they closed it all down, the Local Government took the camp over as it was, and there was seventeen families housed there. Joe Bridson was in charge of collectin' the rents and stuff like that and lookin' after the sewerage and all like that down at the bottom and obviously they were only single brick skin, steel trusses and steel windows and of course everythin' and it was very very cold in them. But then again the housin' shortage in the Isle of Man then was great and anybody that got one thought they were privileged. Later on in years they closed the camp down, felled the lot, now there's one, two, three, four, four luxury bungalows built in it but it's just one of these things that I've seen happenin' in Glen Maye after they fell them, Hosker, John Hosker from Jurby, he put the present houses up for the Local Government Board. Hosker also put sewerage in Glen Maye.

**DC** So these service women who were living in these bungalows, what were they actually doing during the war then, they were working on these Radar towers were they?

**Mr K** Right, right, they were workin' on these Radar towers in these bunkers, these concrete bunkers over at Dalby, in *Creglea*.

**DC** What were the towers like, I don't remember them?

**Mr K** Well the towers, the towers, they were, there was two big wooden towers, the

first, the two wooden towers, about 250 foot high.

**DC** Two hundred and fifty feet high?

**Mr K** That's right, yes, 250 foot high. Down on *Ballahutchin*, there was four steel masts, just ordinary steel masts, with guy ropes and all like that and they took all them down, but they were on a ball, there was a big ball set in a slab of concrete, they was sittin' on a ball.

**DC** So that they could be lowered?

**Mr K** Well they could be lowered if they wanted them, but all the guy masts and all the rest of it, they were on *Ballahutchin* Farm in Dalby. But the wooden towers were down at *The Creglea*.

**DC** Well what happened to them then?

**Mr K** Well, Wilson Costain took on the job of fallin' the towers and the legs of the towers were, oh I suppose a block of concrete, about oh eight or nine foot square and a steel plate and then they started to put the woodwork up, the woodwork was goin' up like that, it wasn't goin' straight up it was goin' up chamfered and there was a ladder at every stage and you could climb to the top. I was at the top once but I didn't favour goin' up the second time. But anyway when the war more or less came to an end Wilson Costain took on the contract of fallin' these towers, these wooden pylons, and he dug a hole in each leg, put a charge of dynamite in them, stood back, pressed the buttons and down she went and I believe there was millions of pieces of timber. Millions of pieces of timber, but however they were gone and he also took a lot of the camp down here at the brickworks and stuff like that.

**DC** Was that the sensible way to bring them down then, was it?

**Mr K** Well, what else could you do, I mean to say you see you're talkin' about 250 foot high, you see, of course there was ladders goin' up at every section admitted, but that was the cheapest way that Wilson could get them down. One clout and they were down.

**DC** Living in Glen Maye you've got to know something about the Dalby spook

story haven't you?

**Mr K** Well, yes.

**DC** We're talking about *Doarlish Cashen*.

**Mr K** *Doarlish Cashen*.

**DC** A house way up, away out of everywhere out in Dalby really?

**Mr K** Right. The first recollection I've got of Mr & Mrs Irvin' [Irving] was comin' in to see Mother in the l'il café in the middle of the hill. Mrs Irvin' was a tall woman, good lookin' woman, Mr Irvin' wasn't quite so good lookin', somethin' like myself, but anyway Voirrey, the daughter, Voirrey, now, will be eighty years, but however in her younger days they were all livin' at Doarlish Cashen but Mr & Mrs Irvin' used to come in to the café and she was known as Mrs D'yefollerme because she'd be tellin' you a yarn and she used to say, 'Well, do you follow me?' so they christened her Mrs D'yefollerme. When the Dalby spook broke out ...

**DC** How did it come about that, how did the story get around?

**Mr K** Well, y'see ... I suppose that in the first instance that Mr & Mrs Irvin' would be pushin' this thing and the media got a houl' [hold] of it, but as the thing progressed there was a lot of influential people, there was a fella by the name of Lambert was put in prison in London for it, for defamation of character. And they used to stop, all these respected people, used to come over here and stop in *Homelea House*, here, that I've got now, that I have now, with Mr & Mrs Bridson and they used to trek up there at night time.

**DC** And what were they supposed to see when they got there?

**Mr K** Well they didn't see anythin', only the talkin' mongoose, there was nawthin', there was nawthin' that they were lookin' for ...

**Mrs K** That they were lookin' for.

**Mr K** ... it was only Voirrey throwin' her voice, that's all it was.

**DC** A lot of people say that's all it was.

**Mr K** It was – I guarantee that's all it was, I mean to say my guarantee may not be much, but it was, that's all it was.

**DC** Did you ever get to know Voirrey yourself?

**Mr K** Voirrey, I went to school with Voirrey, and she was just an ordinary girl, but ...

**DC** Was there any evidence of her throwing her voice at school or anything?

**Mr K** No, none what so ever, just an ordinary girl goin' to school, but you see Mr & Mrs Irvin' struck on the idea, that's only my knowledge of it, struck on an idea that they could make a poun' or two out of it, you see. And Geff, the Dalby spook, the talking mongoose ...

**DC** The talking mongoose yes

**Mr K** ... he was bringin' rabbits to the door, this was all comin' out when they were, Mr & Mrs Irvin', were talkin' to my mother in the café so it was a, struck on as a money makin' proposition, I would think.

**DC** An old farmer once told me that Mr Irving had come back from, I think America, or somewhere, a foreign location, and brought several mongeese with him.

**Mr K** Not to my knowledge, not to my knowledge.

**DC** So there has never been – there's been no evidence you know, of a mongoose being about then?

**Mr K** Oh, no, no, no, no, no. None whatsoever, none whatsoever. Has there ever been a talkin' mongoose?

**DC** I've never heard one, have you?

**Mr K** No, nor not likely to, but however it was one of the situations that it got very much media publication and as I say there was influential people used to come

and stop with Mr & Mrs Bridson here and trek up at night time about a couple of mile up the rugged road and sit in the house and listen to Voirrey throwin' her voice and when Mr & Mrs Irvin' died, I don't know exactly where they died now, and Voirrey, she went to Douglas to live, but Voirrey, if she's still alive, which I think she is, she'd be eighty years of age now.

**DC** They had, as you say, the media interest then, but the media interest has continued with this story right through all these years even up to now people are still interested in this story.

**Mr K** Oh yes, yes, we had a ... we had a book here, I don't know who the publisher was, but it was interestin' readin' about the Dalby spook but it's only the media that was blowin' it up.

**DC** What could the Irvings have got out of it all though?

**Mr K** Publicity.

**DC** Why, did they need it, why did they want publicity?

**Mr K** Well, I wouldn't know, I wouldn't know their motive for creatin' this type of thing because ... unless it was for beneficial means I wouldn't know, I don't know, I don't know, it was only publicity, like that, anyway, that it, it influenced them I would think

**DC** Do you think Voirrey was fooling her mother and father as well?

**Mr K** Oh no, no, no, because Mr & Mrs Irvin' would come and as I say talkin' to mother in the café that Geff had brought two rabbits and lef' them at the door and Geff had brought somethin' else and lef' it at the door.

**DC** And has anybody that you have ever come across, ever set eyes on Geff, this mongoose?

**Mr K** Not to my knowledge.

**DC** Well that was *Doarlish Cashen*, a stone built house, presumably?

**Mr K** Oh yes.

**DC** Is there anything of it left now?

**Mr K** Nawthin' at all lef' now, nawthin' at all lef' now. When this, I can't think of his name now, moved out of it, Donal' Watterson, *The Creglea*, bought it and has ranch beef cattle on it now, there's nawthin' left of the house, well I haven' been up for some years, but there's nawthin' to tell me there's nawthin' left of the house whatsoever, you'd hardly know there's a house there.

**DC** And down here in the village then the whole story was regarded as something of a joke, was it?

**Mr K** Yes, definitely, somethin' as a joke.

**DC** The earliest memory of the farm then, you would be only a young kid I suppose?

**Mr K** Well I was brought up on the farm more or less for oh I don' know, twenty years, and farmin' in them days was very, very hard. Ploughin' with horses and stuff like that, oul' digger plough, and you were walkin' miles durin' the day but then again you knew nawthin' else and you were goin' to the midden with a grip at ya, fillin' the cart with dung, goin' to the fiel', pullin' it out with pollags with a griplin, I've got a griplin here still.

**DC** What's a griplin?

**Mr K** Well it's a two pronged, or three pronged with a long handle on it.

**DC** Curved?

**Mr K** Curved down like that you see, it's a thing you stuck in the dung and pulled it out in the pollag to the cart. Well that was goin' on, even cleanin' loose boxes out with a grip at ya, 'cos the buildin's them days are not as today, you see. As today they'd put a digger to them and they would fall all the li'l tholtans we had and life was hard. Settin' spuds in ridges, spreadin' the dung in ridges, settin' spuds with a brat in the ridges and then coverin' them over and I've carted scores of loads of wrack off Glen Maye shore with an oul' tractor and trailer

that I had.

**DC** Good as manure?

**Mr K** Every bit as good as manure, every bit. And I've seen down on Glen Maye shore four or five tractors at 7 o'clock in the mornin' and there was a special way of loadin' wrack because wrack is a very slippery thing and there was big long fans with heads and tails on them and you had to pack the trailer roun'about and leave the middle empty 'cos if not when you'd come off the shore to come onto the road the lot would be on the road lyin' because it was so slippery, you see.

**DC** Yes, yes.

**Mr K** Bring it up onto *Creggan Ashen*, put it in pollags ...

**DC** Straight on the fields?

**Mr K** Straight on the fiel's, put it in pollags, go and spread it then, and I'd a tractor and a plough, an oul' *Fordson* tractor and a trail plough and when you were goin' to plough the wrack in it was usually put in a stubble fiel'. When you were goin' to plough the wrack in, you had to take a grip with you, because the farns [ferns] were gettin' caught under the colters and you had to stop every so often, drop the ferns in the furrers [furrows] to bury them.

**DC** When you say the ferns that's the wrack, strips of wrack.

**Mr K** Aye, the wrack, you've seen it, it was big strips, big leaves on it and the things that was stuck to the rock – that was the fern.

**DC** But you got other wrack, orkam [sp ???] wrack, orkam [sp ???], and that was the fine stuff, full of bubbles and stuff, was that, but it wasn't long after it come out of the sea, we had to go down there when it was dead low water to get it, and after it come out of the sea it deteriorates very quickly so you had to get it, put it out on the fiel', spread it and plough it in, if not the good would be gone out of it.

**DC** Yes. Did you do that every year really?

**Mr K** Well, I dun it for quite some time, to tell yer the truth.

**DC** You were getting it for free, of course, were you?

**Mr K** Oh, yes, yes, yes, yes, gettin' it free off Glen Maye shore.

**DC** Helping to clear up the shore a bit.

**Mr K** Well I've seen some queer old heaves of wrack on Glen Maye shore, I have that. And also I've seen some queer heavy snowfalls in Glen Maye.

**DC** Have you?

**Mr K** Oh my gawd, yes, some queer oul' heavy snowfalls in Glen Maye. The road, the Mullagh Vedder, goin' up by the shop, it's fairly deep and you could walk over that right over the hedges, you wouldn't see nawthin'.

**DC** Yes, well that put a stop to you working on the fields then?

**Mr K** Oh yes, I remember six weeks, six weeks that with that hard frost, I don't remember what year it was but, six weeks, there wasn't a horse out of the stable.

**DC** What would you do on the farm when you were snowed up then?

**Mr K** Well, I mean to say you could clean calves' houses out and stuff like that, and the cows were goin' out for water, there was no water in front of them, the cows were goin' out for water every day, either that or you had to drag water to them

...

**DC** Yes, yes.

**Mr K** ... and when a cow was done calvin', you had to get warm, lukewarm water to give to the cow for the first three days and I've seen me in the hard frost takin' a hack and goin' to the fiel' to get a load of turnips and a hack, and you'd be hakin' the turnips out of the groun' and you'd be bringin' them home, an oul' cutter, turn it by handle, and you were puttin' hot water on the turnips to give to the cows to keep the frost out of them.

**DC** They were still freezing in the sheds really?

**Mr K** Yes, yes. And in *Creggan Ashen* there was no water in the house, every drop of water was from a cooler down on the yard and you had to go, to get a bucket of water you had to go to the cooler in the yard. Times hard, you don't understand them, Callister. Times were hard, there's no doubt about it, you see my mother was churnin', whatever milk there was lef' after the milk round was put in the crock and bithag and they were churnin' and what churnin' [I] remember first of all, was a square box churn and fliers on it, a handle round about it and a lid on the top of it. Well we progressed from there to a barrel churn and many a score of time I helped to turn the churn. The butter would be taken off, put in the mhelliah, [sp ???] washed and salted and then she had a wooden shape, round wooden shape and there was a Scottish thistle crest put in the piece in the bottom, she used to fill that with butter, turn it upside down onto a slab of slate, pushed the thing outa [out of] the shape and that was the pound of butter.

**DC** With a thistle on?

**Mr K** With a thistle, with a Scotch thistle on, it's here still at me, to tell you the truth.

**DC** Really, yes?

**Mr K** I believe it is.

**Mrs K** It's gone now.

**Mr K** It's gone, has it? But you see butter makin', she used to go to Douglas with the pony called Dolly and the trap, used to house Dolly at the Central Marts were it is now, get the train into Douglas, eggs and butter, perhaps a chicken or two, come home to St. Johns, get off the train, harness the pony up and I've heard her sayin' when the pony would come out of the yard at the Mart that she would never want to touch her rein till Dolly would get back to *Creggan Ashen*.

**DC** Knew the way?

**Mr K** Knew the way. Them days were hard, eggs were twelve for a shillin' and when they were plentiful they were sixteen for a shillin'.

**DC** Yes, yes.

**Mr K** Butter was a shillin' a pound and the labour that was goin' in to makin' the butter, well people today they don't seem to realise, but they had to make a livin' somehow.

**DC** But only a living, I suppose.

**Mr K** Survival, scratchin', all their lives.

**END OF INTERVIEW**