

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

‘TIME TO REMEMBER’

Interviewee(s): Mrs Alice Kellett

Date of birth:

Place of birth:

Interviewer(s): Rosemary Walters

Recorded by: Rosemary Walters

Date recorded: 20th September 1996

Topic(s): *The Golf Link Hotel Port Erin*
Staff supplied via Liverpool Agency
Visitors from Northwest England and Scotland
Walking and golfing activities
Mealtimes and food served
Dinner dances and fancy dress
Collinson’s café
Swimming and diving competitions
Laundry and cooking
Typical working day
Hotel rates and deposits
Glasgow Fairs Fortnight
Hotel turned into internment camp
Decline in tourism

Alice Kellett - Mrs K

Rosemary Walters - RW

RW Good morning. Rosemary Walters. I am going off shortly to visit Mrs Alice Kellett who lives in Port Erin. Today is Friday 20th September ... right, I am sitting here with Mrs Alice Kellett in her home in Port Erin. Mrs Kellett, can you tell me how long you have been living on the Isle of Man? When did you first come to the Island?

Mrs K It would be 1911 and my parents came to start running the hotel business. They bought a hotel called *Tynwald* which had belonged to a Mr and Mrs Maddrell.

RW And how old were you then?

Mrs K I would be about six, I think.

RW And what are your earlier memories then of life in the hotel when you were a child? Can you remember very much of those days?

Mrs K I don't think it made much difference to my life as a child. I went to school of course like all the other children. I went to the local kindergarten school run by Miss Quilliam in Port Erin. This building is now run by somebody named Cannell, I think, as a second-hand furnishing place.

RW And the hotel that your father bought, that was on the front, was it? Overlooking ...?

Mrs K Oh yes, on the promenade.

RW I gather that it began to grow quite rapidly.

Mrs K Well, when my father bought it, there were 36 bedrooms, but as time went on and the business increased, the next door boarding house became available. He bought that and then as the years went on, the next door boarding house was available, they bought that. So in the end *The Golf Links* became the whole block, but of course *The Golf Links*' name was changed to *Princess*.

RW Was that after your father sold the business or after the family sold the business?

Mrs K Yes. I have forgotten which group changed the name now. Oh, I believe it was

this Port Erin group of hotels changed the name.

RW So how big was *The Golf Links Hotel* at its heyday? How many bedrooms were there after all this expansion?

Mrs K Well, I think 65.

RW And so you could cater for 100 guests?

Mrs K Yes.

RW And what were the busiest times of the year? Were you open all the year round in the hotel?

Mrs K Oh no, from May – from Whitsuntide until the end of September. Or one was at it, you might say, from 1st May. It depended when Whitsuntide was.

RW And your involvement with the hotel, when did that really begin, in terms of helping with the work in the hotel?

Mrs K Oh, when I was, I suppose, seventeen, when I left school.

RW What sort of jobs did you do to begin with, as a young girl?

Mrs K I was detailed to supervise the chambermaids and the bedrooms – see that they were cleaned – and then my mother had me in the kitchen and taught me how to make sponge cakes and I used to make these for the bases of trifles. I was given the job of making the sponge cakes. (*laughter*)

RW And whereabouts did your chambermaids come from? Were they local girls?

Mrs K No, we used to get them from Liverpool. There was an agent. I remember her name was Fergie, I think – Miss Fergie. She had an establishment and she supplied staff to the Island. The staff that we got used to be glad to come back year after year which was rather nice, if they were satisfied and so were we, and so we had the same staff returning many times.

RW Can you remember how many staff were employed at the hotel?

Mrs K Altogether it would be over twenty.

RW So about 100 guests and over twenty people to look after them?

Mrs K Yes.

RW Were there any local people who were employed?

Mrs K There were two women whom we employed, yes, in the laundry. We had our own laundry. And they also were engaged to spring-clean the hotel. The hotel was thoroughly cleaned every spring. It was a big affair. It started in February and every room was cleaned and scrubbed, so it was employment for these two women anyway. So when we opened, it was all sparkling, fresh and polished.

RW And whereabouts did your visitors come from?

Mrs K Mostly the North West [England] and Scotland.

RW And what sort of age group were the people who came here?

Mrs K Well, there were families with young children under school age and they used to come in June because there was a reduction for children – it was out of season. And they were followed by the grown-ups, who were young people, I should say aged anything from twenty to fifty, and most of these people were active and enjoyed outdoor pursuits. They would play golf and tennis, and walk and dance.

RW And all of those activities were here on the doorstep in Port Erin, were they?

Mrs K That's right. They were all here on the doorstep. They didn't need a car to go anywhere. Some people who came for holidays said, 'I never went out of Port Erin. I had everything I wanted here.' But some of the walks were a reasonable length and yet you could get up into the hills with very little trouble. Lovely walks to Bradda Head and Fleshwick Bay and the coastal path from Port Erin to the Sound. On Sunday afternoon, a very popular walk was to go via byways and highways and fields to Perwick Bay and then a lovely afternoon tea was served there on a Sunday. That was very popular.

- RW** Did ladies play golf in those days? Or was it just the gentlemen?
- Mrs K** No, ladies did play, but not so many. A few played.
- RW** Do you know when the golf course was developed here in Port Erin?
- Mrs K** I think we are going to get even beyond my time now! More like my grandfather's time! (*laughter*) Oh, I couldn't say the actual year.
- RW** And you mentioned that the Scots people liked the golf particularly?
- Mrs K** Yes. Well, it was practically a national game in Scotland. I don't think so many people can play now because it has become so expensive, but in those days it was within the reach of most sorts of white-collar workers.
- RW** So did you cater mainly for white-collar workers rather than the factory workers of the North West?
- Mrs K** Did we?
- RW** Yes, in the hotel?
- Mrs K** Oh, we didn't have factory workers in Port Erin. I think they were more interested in Douglas. We used to get young typists, secretaries and shop girls and families – a good mixture really – a lot of very nice families.
- RW** And did your guests return year after year as well? You mentioned ...
- Mrs K** The visitors came year after year.
- RW** The same ones?
- Mrs K** The same ones. I remember a family who had a first floor front room and we used to have to keep it for them from one year to another (*laughter*) – that was their room!
- RW** Did you enjoy working in the hotel?

Mrs K Oh yes, it was very interesting because it was so varied, you see, meeting different people. And being a family hotel, we used to help with the serving of the meals, so we all had to take our places behind the hot plates!

RW Can you remember what time the meals were served?

Mrs K Breakfast was at nine, lunch at one and dinner at seven and there was also afternoon tea at four o'clock. People ate a lot in those days!

RW It kept them going on all their long walks ...

Mrs K Yes.

RW ... and golfing expeditions. What sort of food did you serve? Can you remember a typical lunch-time?

Mrs K Well, today we would say they were overfed! The breakfast would begin with orange juice or prunes, followed by porridge or cereal, then there would be perhaps kippers – Manx kippers, very popular – and bacon with the accompaniment of egg or sausage or tomato, then toast and marmalade, tea and coffee. An enormous meal, but they would go through it all. And luncheon, there would always be soup provided and an entrée – a hot meal you see, in case the weather was cold. But there was always the choice of a hot meal or cold meats – cold lamb or beef or ham and tongue – with salad and sauté potatoes and boiled potatoes. And then a choice of puddings. The old-fashioned puddings were very popular, those steamed golden syrup puddings and those lovely fruit puddings with apple or any fruit in season. Boiled apple pudding – gorgeous! Or bread-and-butter pudding, and sometimes it was stewed fruit and custard. But apart from this, every day there was a milk pudding, either rice or tapioca or sago, and biscuits and cheese. That was lunch. And dinner – they would all be hungry again by then! Soup again and then a choice of joint, either lamb or beef or pork, and of course green vegetables, followed by a hot sweet, possibly apple pie or whatever fruit was in – cherry pie or blackcurrant pie or raspberry pie – and then there would be a cold sweet, a trifle or a mousse of some kind or maybe peach melba ice-cream, with peach, or coupe Jacques – more ice-cream with fruit. And there was poultry. I remember there was poultry always as a choice on a Sunday. There was always roast chicken of course, old Manx style, with all the etcetera's. Then there would be a choice of roast loin of

Manx lamb and there was no argument – if people wanted some of each they could have it! We never refused. So some people were very greedy – they would have the chicken and then they would have the lamb as well!

RW You mentioned chicken in the Manx style. What was that exactly?

Mrs K Oh, stuffed. The chicken would be stuffed with parsley stuffing and then it would be served with of course bread sauce and a little chipolata sausage and of course gravy. That is how Manx chicken was served.

RW And was the hotel licensed in those days?

Mrs K No, no hotels were – no private hotels. The only licensed hotels would be *The Bellevue, The Eagle and The Station* and *The Falcon*.

RW Were they regarded as public houses rather than hotels?

Mrs K Yes.

RW When did guest houses get licences for alcohol? Can you remember?

Mrs K Let me think ... about 1960 I think, thereabouts.

RW As late as that? So the years that you are talking about now are really in the thirties, were they, before the war?

Mrs K Oh yes.

RW What were the other activities that the guests got up to? What did people enjoy doing in those days? You have mentioned that there were lovely walks. We are right next to the sea. Were there any water activities?

Mrs K No, there was nothing like today where we have the surfboarding. They weren't even thought of. No, there were just the rowing boats and fishing.

RW Where were the rowing boats?

Mrs K The fishermen had the rowing boats on the shore, all tied up in the harbour.

- RW** And visitors could hire a boat from them?
- Mrs K** I think at a reasonable price of a shilling an hour you could hire a rowing boat.
- RW** So what was your recollection of Port Erin then on a typical summer's day? If you looked across the bay, what would it look like? What would that scene be like? Could you describe it?
- Mrs K** Well, I can't think that looking at the bay would be much different than from today, really.
- RW** Would there be more people about?
- Mrs K** In those days? Oh well, yes, there would be of course, because nowadays not very many visitors come and the local residents are all busy doing their own thing, aren't they? Just like anywhere else.
- RW** So if you looked across the bay, would there be people out in rowing boats – in those days, when the holidaymakers were here?
- Mrs K** There would be rowing boats in the bay, yes.
- RW** And I think you mentioned earlier that they tried their hand at fishing?
- Mrs K** Oh yes, they used to love having a line out, especially on a summer evening, after dinner. If it was calm, you would see lots and lots of rowing boats on the bay with people hanging onto the end of a fishing line and hoping for a bit and being able to haul in a nice juicy fat mackerel.
- RW** What did they do with the mackerel after they had caught it? Did they bring it back and ask if the hotel would cook it for them?
- Mrs K** Yes! *(laughter)*
- RW** Whereabouts did you get all the supplies of food for the hotel?
- Mrs K** Well, we didn't own a deep-freeze – no such thing. All the food was bought locally. It was all fresh.

- RW** Whereabouts? From shops in town or from farms?
- Mrs K** No, from Port Erin shops; a good grocer's and greengrocer's and butcher's. There was Attica's Supply [sp ???] in the port.
- RW** And what about bread?
- Mrs K** Bread? Well, a baker used to deliver bread daily. It was all brought to the house.
- RW** And milk and butter and eggs and things like that?
- Mrs K** Well, a local farmer used to supply us with the milk because it was bought in gallons, you know, and cream.
- RW** Straight from the farm, from the dairy?
- Mrs K** Yes.
- RW** And what do you remember about Port Erin in those days then? Were there completely different shops to the ones that you see now in the High Street?
- Mrs K** Well, yes, a lot of the old shops have changed hands. It has been so gradual really, it is hard to say what difference there is.
- RW** Your visitors – was the average holiday a week or a fortnight?
- Mrs K** A fortnight.
- RW** And did the guests change for dinner in the evening?
- Mrs K** It depended on what they were doing. They could even be playing golf, have a round of golf, on the light evenings after dinner or go fishing. If they were giving up the evening for dancing, they would change. The girls would have long dresses and the men, even if they didn't have a dinner jacket, they would wear a lounge suit. They would change definitely on the hotel dance night. We used to have an orchestra twice a week for the dances and then they would change definitely, but other nights it was always very informal.

- RW** Can you remember the name of the orchestra or dance band that played?
- Mrs K** It was actually a friend of mine who ran a dance band – Vicky Levis.
- RW** What sort of instruments did they play? Can you remember what the musicians were?
- Mrs K** Violin, piano, sax – I think.
- RW** And what sort of dancing was it?
- Mrs K** It was before the days of jive of course. Just ordinary ballroom dancing and eightsome reels – which the Scots used to enjoy – yes, barn dance, valetta, waltz, one-step, foxtrot.
- RW** What time did the dances end?
- Mrs K** Eleven o'clock. But of course there was always dancing every night at Collinson's cafe. There was a beautiful sprung floor there and a resident orchestra. But people used to change mostly into evening dress if they were going to Collinson's for the night to dance. You would see them trailing up the promenade in long dresses! (*laughter*)
- RW** Did they have electric lights along the promenade in those days?
- Mrs K** No, they didn't.
- RW** What was the street lighting? Was it electric light or were there gas lamps? Or perhaps on a summer's night they didn't need lights?
- Mrs K** I can't remember anything about the lighting. I am sure they would be electric.
- RW** So Collinson's was a very popular venue?
- Mrs K** Yes.
- RW** And what were the tea dances that were held in various places? I have heard people speak of tea dances.

- Mrs K** Oh, afternoon tea, yes. Well, Collinson's used to have those.
- RW** And what were they? Can you explain to me?
- Mrs K** Well, it is just that the orchestra played and you could dance and there were tables round the ballroom and you could have afternoon tea.
- RW** Was it mainly ladies that went to tea dances or did gentlemen go as well?
- Mrs K** I can't answer that. You see, I was busy so I don't know what was going on!
(laughter)
- RW** Can you tell me how the guests actually arrived here in Port Erin? How did they reach the Isle of Man?
- Mrs K** By boat and train. Our resident porter used to meet always the boat-train with his luggage cart to collect their luggage at the station and bring it up.
- RW** And that was a horse-drawn?
- Mrs K** Yes, a horse-drawn cart.
- RW** And did the visitors walk up then?
- Mrs K** They they'd walk up, yes.
- RW** Did many people go riding in those days?
- Mrs K** No, they didn't.
- RW** And what about swimming?
- Mrs K** Swimming? You mean at Port Erin swimming bath pool?
- RW** There was a pool here in Port Erin?
- Mrs K** Oh, a wonderful large open-air pool with diving platforms and that was very popular – a lot of seating accommodation up the grassy banks. The banks had

been formed into tiers of seats and it was very cheap to sit in one of those. Oh yes, and there were a lot of competitions, swimming and diving competitions, plate diving competitions were very popular.

RW What was a plate diving competition?

Mrs K Well, there would be plates and things flung in the pool and you had to dive down to the bottom and fish them up.

RW Like china plate?

Mrs K Yes. And they had greasy pole competitions! *(laughter)*

RW Those were seawater pools were they? The swimming pool was seawater?

Mrs K The seawater came into the swimming pool, yes. It was situated in a cleft in the rocks by Spaldrick Bay and the sea just came up through a pipe and filled it and it was emptied again.

RW Who owned the swimming pool?

Mrs K Who owned it? Well, I really don't know. It might have been the local commissioners, I should think.

RW Yes, and they sponsored competitions and prizes, did they? You mentioned this diving for plates – who ...?

Mrs K Oh yes, well, there would be an organiser, yes. Somebody appointed by the commissioners to run the things.

RW And I think you mentioned earlier that the children had a lot of fun on the beautiful sandy beach here in Port Erin.

Mrs K Oh yes. The commissioners used to organise sandcastle competitions for them.

RW And did the parents help or did they have to sit back and let the children?

Mrs K Oh no, the children were supposed to do all this themselves.

- RW** Were they happy days for you, working in the hotel?
- Mrs K** Oh yes.
- RW** What did you enjoy about it?
- Mrs K** I can't imagine I ever thought about, 'What do I enjoy?' or what. It was just something I was doing, getting on with. It wouldn't have occurred to me to say to myself, 'Are you happy doing this? Are you enjoying it?' I would accept it as a matter of course that I was, and what I would be hoping to do, would be to do it properly.
- RW** Yes, and did you miss the visitors when the season ended? What did you do through the winter months?
- Mrs K** Vegetated! (*laughter*)
- RW** I am sure you didn't!
- Mrs K** No, we always had a nice holiday and then there would be Christmas and like any other family, there was always lots to do at Christmas time, and before you knew where you were, it was February and February 1st was the start of spring-cleaning.
- RW** Were there any jobs that you didn't like doing?
- Mrs K** No, I can't think of anything particularly. I just took them all in my stride.
- RW** And were there any things about living in a hotel that you didn't like?
- Mrs K** No. As I say, I can't imagine that I ever thought to myself, 'Do I like it or don't I?' I think I just accepted it. It was my life, you see. But surly that is what most people do?
- RW** Yes. Can you tell me anything about the domestic arrangements in the hotel? You said there were about 65 rooms and you could cater for 100 people. Now, what about bathrooms and washbasins and toilets and all those sort of ...?

Mrs K Well, every bedroom had its washbasin.

RW And I think it was your grandfather who initiated that?

Mrs K My father.

RW Your father introduced washbasins?

Mrs K Yes, and electric light. Previous to that it was candles.

RW Where did the electricity come from? Was it generated?

Mrs K Well, we had to make our own because it wasn't available from a public supply, so we had engines and batteries and the engine used to run all day and store the batteries.

[End of side 1]

RW What about the other facilities in the hotel? Nowadays people expect to have their own bathroom, but they didn't, did they in ...?

Mrs K Oh no, there was a shortage of bathrooms, always. I think people must have been expected to go into the sea! (*laughter*) But of course they did have hot and cold water in the bedroom, in the washbasin. So after all, they could get washed.

RW And did many people want to take a bath?

Mrs K No, there never seemed to be any problem with a shortage of bathrooms, really.

RW And you mentioned that the hotel had its own laundry.

Mrs K Oh yes, we had two laundresses who worked in the hotel and other positions.

RW And they were local people?

Mrs K Local, yes.

- RW** And did they have to iron all the sheets, all the bed linen and the tablecloths?
- Mrs K** Yes, well, we had a machine, an ironing machine and of course a washing machine. But before we had the washing machine, going back to earlier times, it all had to be done by hand.
- RW** And did they have big boilers then to put things in?
- Mrs K** Yes, a big boiler.
- RW** And what about the cooking? Who was in charge of the cooking?
- Mrs K** Going back to the beginning, my mother and an assistant cook did the cooking.
- RW** And did you yourself ever progress beyond the sponge cakes for the trifles? Did you ever have to take that job on – the cooking?
- Mrs K** Well yes, I was then helping in the office and I was writing the correspondence and making out accounts and whatever else was necessary – booking the accommodation.
- RW** You mentioned as well that sometimes you actually booked rooms for people outside of the hotel. Can you explain that?
- Mrs K** Oh yes, because you see at that time we could seat more people in the dining room than we could sleep and local householders often had a spare bedroom or so and they were quite willing to let for a sleeper-out. They just had their bedroom outside. Everything else of course was taken in the hotel as with any other guest.
- RW** So all their meals?
- Mrs K** Oh yes.
- RW** And did you pay the guest house where they slept or did they pay the guesthouse?
- Mrs K** No, we paid the guest house for the use of the room.

RW And one of the places in Port Erin that is still regarded as a beauty spot, you mentioned earlier, is Bradda Glen. Can you describe to me what it was like in the years either between the wars or through the 1950s when there were a lot of visitors? What sort of things were there there? Was it just a scenic walk or were there any attractions?

Mrs K No, it was mostly the situation and the walks and refreshments could be served. I don't remember anything special.

RW And you mentioned that people loved to walk. They seem to have been a very energetic crowd.

Mrs K Yes.

RW Was there always a good spirit amongst people then in those days? People were cheerful and ...

Mrs K Oh yes, they were always in a very happy mood because this is their holiday and they were going to enjoy it, so they did!

RW Did they go to Douglas at all? Did they go to a theatre? That must have been in Douglas – there weren't any theatres in Port Erin, were there?

Mrs K No, the local garage proprietors would organise coach trips twice a week to the theatres when anybody wanted to go. On those nights, if people wanted to go, we used to give them dinner half an hour earlier.

RW Can you remember any of the great names?

Mrs K No I can't.

RW You were too busy working. How long did your family run the hotel? You mentioned 1911 was when it began. How long did your association last?

Mrs K Well, my parents were running it from 1911 to 1930 and then they retired and my sister and I ran it.

RW Right through until?

- Mrs K** 1967.
- RW** My goodness! So your family were running the hotel there on that site for over 50 years?
- Mrs K** Yes. It didn't change hands from the family until 1967.
- RW** And you did mention to me earlier, the price that it was sold for in 1967.
- Mrs K** Yes, it was sold for £15,250 I think.
- RW** And was that with everything in the hotel?
- Mrs K** Yes.
- RW** What was in it?
- Mrs K** What was in it? Well, that is hard to say. Everything was in it. The furniture was always first-class and the cutlery and silver and the linen, the bedroom furnishings. Everything was really first-class. Carpets ...
- RW** Were the bookings good at that time? Were people still coming for holidays at that time?
- Mrs K** When it was sold?
- RW** Yes.
- Mrs K** Oh well, there were still people, but of course the business had declined a lot.
- RW** And were you disappointed over the price that you got for it?
- Mrs K** We were indeed, because it was just given away, but there was nothing else we could do because my husband and I were over sixty and we didn't feel like coping forever with the arduousness of running a hotel so we decided to call it a day.
- RW** What was a typical working day then, when you were running the hotel? What

time did you normally get up in the morning?

Mrs K Well, in the days when the visitors were using public transport, boat and train, those leaving left at seven o'clock in the morning on the first train and one of the family was always expected to speed the parting guests and to see that they got their breakfasts in order and that the staff were up to serve them and we used to alternate these duties, my sister and I. We used to take turns in getting up at six to say goodbye to the visitors. They always had to be shaken hands with, said goodbye to, and to see that they got their breakfasts properly – it wasn't left entirely to the staff. So that would go on until ... all through the day of course, and once again we used to take turns to have an hour or two off in the afternoon and the office was closed at about eleven – or wasn't even closed then, if anybody wanted it – and my father would be about there until midnight before he would lock up.

RW A long day.

Mrs K Oh yes, so when the end of the season came, we were pleased to vegetate!

RW Did you ever have any problems with staff or were you always happy? You mentioned that many of them worked for you year after year, but were there ever any disasters or any terrible people that you had to get rid of?

Mrs K No.

RW And what about your guests?

Mrs K No, we are just thinking about a certain period, you see. We mustn't get too modern.

RW No. And what about your guests? Were your guests ever any trouble? Were these Scotsmen out there causing mayhem?

Mrs K *(laughter)* No, I can't think of any trouble.

RW Can you remember how they paid for their holidays? Did they have to pay a deposit when they booked? Did they pay by cheque in those days or ...?

Mrs K There was a very small deposit made when they booked. It was only £1 I think, just to secure the room.

RW And when would they pay the balance?

Mrs K Then they would pay the bill on the day of departure.

RW And would they pay in cash normally?

Mrs K Oh well, cash or cheque.

RW Can you remember the sort of charges for a week or a fortnight full board? What sort of prices?

Mrs K Well, you could get a first floor, front single room at *The Golf Links* for fifteen shillings a day. That included all those meals I have told you about and everything else. Fifteen shillings a day! A double room would vary from 12s 6d to 13s 6d. A shilling was a lot of money to make an increase in those days. If you said you were putting your terms up from twelve shillings to thirteen, there would be consternation!

RW Would that be as much as someone would earn in a week? What were weekly wages in those days?

Mrs K Of the staff, you mean, in the hotel?

RW Yes, or the visitors, even.

Mrs K Oh, I have no idea.

RW I just wondered if we could make a correlation between the cost of a holiday and how much people earned?

Mrs K I don't know.

RW Can you remember what the staff were paid then? Like your waitresses or your chambermaids?

Mrs K I can't remember exactly, but I am sure it would be not more than about fifteen shillings. Of course they used to get tips – the visitors all gave them – it was considered the thing. So however they pleased the visitors, so would their tip be greater.

RW You mentioned that the weather always seemed to be fine in those days.

Mrs K Because on looking up some old photographs, I noticed we always seemed to be wearing just a cotton dress and I thought, well, that is an indication really.

RW But were there any things that people could do during bad weather if it was rainy or stormy?

Mrs K Yes. They would plague the life out of us! They would say, 'We are going to organise a fancy dress dance tonight. Have you got an old sheet? Have you got an old broom?' (*laughter*) So they would be making paper dresses. They would be busy all day, making these fancy dresses and they were really very good. Hilarious, some of the things!

RW Can you remember any outrageous costumes or amazing things?

Mrs K Nothing in particular, but I know there were a lot of them very good. And then they would all parade outside in their fancy dresses!

RW And when the young people came, did you actually see that there were romances? Were there holiday romances?

Mrs K Well, I used to have the charge of seating the visitors in the dining-room, you see, and of course there were tables for four and tables for six and tables for eight. So of course the family tables for four were obvious and then I would be faced with the young people and I used to try and find out a couple of nice boys and a couple of nice girls and put them together. And sometimes I didn't know whether they were boys or girls or old ladies or old gentlemen that I put together and so when the guests arrived, I would be very anxious to see whom I had put together on the seats, you see. If I hadn't happened to be the one who received the guests, I would say to the girl who had, 'What are so and so? Are they this, that and the other?' and she would tell me. 'Oh,' I would say, 'that won't do,' and I would rush down and change the tickets! And then, after the first meal, I

would be anxiously consulting the waitresses and saying, ‘How did your new guests get on?’ ‘Oh, rotten!’ so that wasn’t a good choice – or else it might be, ‘Oh, fine, they were all laughter together and they made great friends,’ so that was all right! (*laughter*)

RW What did you do if people didn’t get on?

Mrs K Well, it was very difficult to move them then, but it was just a bit of a disappointment really. But I will say that most times it did work. I used to think about the letters that people had written. Now, could this one who applied, is she a young girl or who is she or what is she? Because it makes such a difference to a holiday, doesn’t it?

RW I am sure it does, yes. Were you busy in TT week particularly? Were there great motorbike fans who came to stay in this part of the Island?

Mrs K No, we didn’t have much interest in the TT. There would be coach trips organised to certain spots on the course for people who wanted to go and we would make up a picnic basket and they had to give in the order the night before, I remember, and we made all the sandwiches or we would know how many we had to make for the people who were going to the races.

RW Why do you think Port Erin was so popular with Scottish people? You mentioned earlier that a lot of Scots came here. Why was that?

Mrs K Well, I think that the Isle of Man was popular with the Scottish people anyway. I think Douglas probably had a big number of people from Scotland in the Fair fortnight. I think it was just quite accessible really.

RW Do you know which port they sailed from?

Mrs K Ardrossan.

RW It was Ardrossan. And what was the Fairs fortnight?

Mrs K The Fair, the Glasgow Fair fortnight, was always in July from about, say, 14th to 31st or something like that.

- RW** And was that a holiday for everybody in Glasgow? What happened?
- Mrs K** Oh, I don't know about that. I know that the Fair fortnight was very popular. I don't know why it was organised or not – something to do with Glasgow.
- RW** And when you had time to take a holiday, it was long after the summer and the nice weather, so where did you choose to go on holiday as a family?
- Mrs K** Well, we used to visit my aunt in Torquay, but we had a car in 1921 and we went touring.
- RW** In England?
- Mrs K** In England, yes, and I remember this first tour after we had bought this car. We went first to the Lake District and then up as far as the border and down through Yorkshire and all the counties to London. We stayed in London for a week. I remember my father took us to all the places we should go to. *(laughter)* Educational! And we also enjoyed going to the theatre every night. We went on from there to Torquay and my grandparents were living there then as well. We stayed with them for about a week and then we came back through the English counties from Staffordshire up to of course Liverpool again.
- RW** Can you remember how long it took on the boat? How long was the crossing?
- Mrs K** I think it was four hours.
- RW** So it was about the same as ...
- Mrs K** About the same today.
- RW** And what happened to the hotel here during the war years? Did anything happen to it or was it just closed down?
- Mrs K** Oh dear, no. The Home Office decided to make us into an internment camp for women aliens, so barbed wire was flung all around us and a representative from the Home Office came in the first week in June to say that the government were going to send all these people to us, we hoteliers, and she wanted to know how many bedrooms we had, how many we could accommodate. And she said,

‘Well, in 48 hours we’ll be sending you these people.’ So we had 48 hours to get ready for them. Fortunately, that spring was very unpredictable – it was the early stages of the war and nothing terrible had happened – so we didn’t know what was going to happen in the Island and we had to spring-clean the hotel as usual, so it was all ready for the occupation. So we had to rush round. We had no staff of course, you see, and kind friends came in and helped us. People were dishing out the blankets from the chests and the sheets and making up the beds to prepare for all these alien visitors. But that’s another story!

RW How long were they with you, then, when they arrived?

Mrs K Until 1944.

RW And whatever did they do with themselves all the time?

Mrs K Well, the government would find as much occupation as possible and there were classes for secretarial work and typing and lots of handwork. Lots of knitting was done – beautiful cardigans they knitted – and embroidery and linen work with tatting and broderie anglaise – all sorts of needlework. They could also work on the farms with escorts. A policewoman would take them up to a farm, you see, and they would work there for the day, and also, if any of them were keen on gardening, they could have an allotment in Port Erin and work it themselves.

RW And how did you manage with the actual work of feeding that number of people then? Did you have to make a rota and did everybody have a job?

Mrs K For the internees? We had forms to fill in to give to the butcher to say how much meat we wanted and how many people, and also with other rationed food like butter and marmalade. Whatever was rationed – I have forgotten now. So we had to fill in these forms to make application for them.

RW And who did the actual cooking for that number of people?

Mrs K Well, we had to organise all these women into a kind of rota for doing the housework and I asked for volunteers for cooking and kitchen work and so we had half a dozen people on the list for cooks and they would work one week in three. They were paid five shillings. This was the sum allowed by the Home

Office. And then the people who washed up the pots and pans were paid five shillings and the woman who did the stoking for the hot water. The rest of the work of course was all ordinary household work which they used to look after themselves. They had to keep the lounges clean and light the fires in the winter and they had to keep the bathrooms clean and their own bedrooms. And of course the dining room, they had to be fed, so we had so many girls each week on a rota as waitresses and these would look after all the others, you see, carrying their plates in and out. There were so many of them that when they first came, they only had to work one week in six because there were so many of them to go round, but as the numbers became reduced of course, they had to work more often.

RW And then, after the war the hotel opened its doors again for normal business?

Mrs K Yes.

RW Was there any change that you were aware of, comparing that time to the years before the war? Were the holidaymakers different? Was the level of business any different?

Mrs K For the first year or two it was much the same, but then what started the decline, I think, was the fact that the airways were supplying planes to Mediterranean countries which had not been available before. So I think the numbers started to decline then and also I suppose perhaps the clientele became older. It's hard to remember now.

RW Have you got any photographs at all, anywhere? Do you have photographs of those days? You have mentioned looking at photographs and seeing people in cotton dresses.

Mrs K Oh dear – it would take a week to go through those! (*laughter*)

RW Well, it has been lovely talking to you. You have got some marvellous memories over such a long time here in the hotel industry. Is there anything else you would like to tell me? Any other things that you wanted to mention?

Mrs K Well, we went through these, didn't we? We have talked about the dress. People of course didn't have jeans and sweaters. They were deprived of those!

So in those days we used to wear a tweed skirt and a woolly jumper, but we did have what, I suppose, could be called a two or three-piece suit now, which would be made of – not heavy, I don't know what it could be made of really, but ... something with a wool mixture that was warm. Lightweight woollens, you see, was the vogue, if it was too cold for a cotton dress, but of course the cardigan was always used greatly as extra warmth.

RW And people didn't have an enormous number of clothes, did they?

Mrs K They didn't, no. They didn't bother about wearing something different every day! If what they had was suitable and it was clean, it would last all week! *(laughter)* There weren't so many problems in that way!

END OF INTERVIEW