

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

**‘TIME TO REMEMBER’**

**Interviewee:** Mr Edward Laurence Kermode

**Date of birth:** 1<sup>st</sup> April 1915

**Place of birth:** 62 Malew Street, Castletown, Isle of Man

**Interviewer:** David Callister

**Recorded by:** David Callister

**Date recorded:** No recording date

**Topic(s):** Early childhood memories of life in Liverpool  
Gang initiation ceremony in the Isle of Man  
Story of girl tarred and feathered  
Grandparent’s bakehouse in Castletown  
Early school days and school pals  
Apprenticeship with printers Louis Meyer  
Bridson & Horrox printers  
Working for the Isle of Man newspapers  
Introduction of Linotype  
Singing and playing musical instruments  
Acting  
Working as a Compère and Toastmaster  
Painting as a hobby

Laurence Kermode - Mr K  
David Callister - DC

**DC** Edward Laurence Kermodé, born 1<sup>st</sup> April 1915 and still a young man.

**Mr K** Ah, ha, in heart.

**DC** Laurence, we've been talking a little bit about your early days and I've been enjoying this but it would be nice to get it, now, down. Really we're confusing the Isle of Man with Liverpool in your very earliest days, when you were very young, aren't we?

**Mr K** Yes, yes, yes, I was born in the Isle of Man, in Castletown, in 62 Malew Street, actually, it was a baker's and my grandparents lived there, my maternal grandparents, my mother's grandfather and grandmother and I knew that we – my earliest recollections of anything were in Liverpool but I must have been three or four then but I remember being, in the very earliest days, but I've been thinking it over since, I wondered how I got to Liverpool and I thought that I was taken there when I was a baby, after I was born. But on reflection I think that it's possible that my parents were already living in Liverpool, at the beginning of the First World War, 1914, and that my mother had come home to her parents to have me.

**DC** So you'd be born Manx, as it were.

**Mr K** Yes, I was born at her mother's house, yes, in Castletown.

**DC** But you are telling me you remember things from when you were three or four then?

**Mr K** Well, it must have been, I can't – my very, very earliest recollections is being taken out into the street in Liverpool and to look up into the sky and to see a Zeppelin passing over, so that must have been during, or towards the end of the First World War. I certainly remember, oh, another vivid recollection I had, was when this policeman that I saw, I can see him now, I'm stood outside our house, 84 Dorset Road, we lived, Tuebrook, and this policeman was there chasing this nigger, we're not allowed to say nigger nowadays, but that's what it was, I mean it was just everyday parlance ...

**DC** In those days.

**Mr K** ... he was a black man, in those days he was a black man and we called them niggers and it was no disrespect at all. This black man was being chased by the policeman and under the black man's arm was a bunch of bananas which he'd pinched and I laugh when I think of it because it's still in my mind, I can still see him getting chased along the street with a bunch of bananas. And also during the war, or it must have been the end of the war, I also have vivid memories of a man who was demobbed, obviously, and he must have been a neighbour, friend or something, I don't know who he was, but he had his handcart with all his gear on, out in the street, outside of our house. And on that, amongst his gear there was his rifle and his tin hat, and me, being a little boy, I wanted the gun, of course, naturally, you see. But I didn't get the gun but he did give me the tin hat. And I had that tin hat for many, many years. As a matter of fact when, eventually when we came back again to the Isle of Man, I was in a little bit of a gang, and the initiation ceremony – I laugh when I think about it, the initiation ceremony, you had to wear this damn tin hat and the other – one – the leader, hit us on the head with it three times, but, you know, we had a bang on the head, oh, I tell you – but that was, he must have been friendly, but I remember the old, the tin hat and the guns and all that.

**DC** You were telling me that you remembered, although you didn't actually see it, but about a girl being tarred and feathered.

**Mr K** Oh, well that, yes, well, on a Sunday afternoon, just, at that period of time, the whole of that area, round about Queen's Drive, I think it is, Liverpool, was being rebuilt, it was after, you know, just after the First World War and we would go, Sunday afternoons we went for walks and one of the favourite walks was out to Knowlsey, or Knowsley Park, a big house there, and I remember us walking round the walls and in – set into the walls were stocks where, you know the old stock like people were put in for misdemeanours and that sort of thing. But also I remember seeing in this great big housing estate that was being built, a certain telegraph pole, or lamp post, I'm not sure which it was now, and the talk was that there had been a girl tied to this particular lamp post and she had been tarred and feathered. Now then you asked me earlier, why would she be tarred and feathered, well, of course, it was the Irish troubles. A lot of people nowadays, they talk about the troubles in Ireland, which is, at the very moment of course, we know, it's very much in the news and a lot of people think that's it a comparatively new thing. Well, it's not, at all, because it was back in the '20s and it was in, what was it, 1921, it must have been '20 because, I think it

was either '20 or '21 when the Irish Free State was created, and we came back to the Isle of Man in 1921, I know that, I started school then. But that was, this girl had been caught, so why she had been tarred and feathered, but that was one of the things that they did, you see, because either that she'd been colluding with somebody that she shouldn't have been or whatever, I don't know, but I do remember that, it was one of those terrible things.

**DC** You also retained a great deal of memorabilia of your lifetime and you've got a lot of photographs and memories and it's nice that you have, and one of them I noticed, I think you said was an uncle, was he in the Canadian Forces?

**Mr K** Ah, yes, yes, that was very interesting, that, because during all this time there were people that were in our house that I didn't know, friends, obviously of my parents, and my Uncle Wilson had turned up, very smart looking, he was in the Canadian Cavalry, you know, dressed up very, very smartly. And one of the neighbours came in, or was in with us during – it must have been while this other man that I mentioned earlier with the handcart had been in, so it may have been at that time, but this lady was introduced to – this man was my mother's brother and he was all the way over – he was with the Canadian Army for the First World War. And she said, 'Well isn't that strange,' she said, 'I've just come up from the city,' which was, you know, the town in Liverpool, the city centre and she said, 'I saw this handsome soldier on the ...' and she said, 'I wondered who he was,' she said, 'I was struck by his demeanour.' Because she would because not only was he a smart looking man but he was also a Canadian, you see, Canadian uniform. And she said, 'Here he is now, I never thought he was your, you know, relation of yours.' Talking to my mother!

**DC** What sort of memories do you have of your mother and father, indeed grandparents, do you remember grandparents?

**Mr K** Oh, grandparents, well my, yes I do remember, my maternal grandparents I do remember, but not my paternal grandparents who were the most famous, or the one of the many, who was the most famous, but we talked about him. Yes, my mother's father and her mother, they, my grandfather was the baker, for his son, actually. He'd been in business himself and he'd failed, I'm afraid he was too fond of the emulsion, the liquor, and he had failed because he had had his own business in Port Erin at one time. And then his eldest son, one of his elder – one of my mother's older brothers was R W Holmes and they had – he had, his son,

had three premises in Castletown, one was what we called the shop where the fancy cakes were made, where he did those himself, Uncle Bob. There was a place mid-way down Malew Street which we called the stores, and in there the buns and the mince, meat pies, and all that sort of thing, they were made there, what they called the smalls, and in 62 Malew Street, where I was born and my grandfather worked, that was where he made the bread. So you see they had Malew Street, the bread, half way down they had the buns and then in the shop, behind the shop there was another bakehouse where they made the cakes. And he also had, Uncle Bob, he also had a big café in Port Erin ...

**DC** Oh, right.

**Mr K** ... which is now *The Falcon's Nest*.

**DC** Oh, yes, is it?

**Mr K** *Falcon's Nest*, where, that great big room there, that was a big restaurant he had there, he had all these things. But that was mother's side but you see when we were in – I will just – if I could refer back to Liverpool there, it was interesting because – these are early memories you see, and my memories are of early days really – there used to be gospel meetings, like, you know, what's the present day man, comes over from America, there's a lot of them, but you know – Dr Billy Graham. Well, there was a great thing in Liverpool, in England, in those days, I suppose they were, well, I don't know what they were trying to do, convert everybody, but I remember being in one of these and also going to a big – taken to see a circus, which was in another place. Now then, I don't know whether it was coming home from the circus or coming home from this gospel meeting, but at the circus I do remember a big – the usual thing, I've seen it and heard of it since, but I do remember seeing it there, the big white horse telling the time by pawing the ground with – you know, it's an old trick, you know, but I know since I've been in the theatrical line meself – but on the way home from either of those two events, the heavens opened, it was torrential rain, the streets were flooded and we were – it was all tram car travel and my cousin, Nellie Holmes, she was, who lived with us, she was the daughter of one of me mother's brothers, you see. Mother had two brothers living with us there in Liverpool, during the war, and this girl, she was an orphan, that's why she lived with us, not a – she had her father, but he lived with us, but their mother had died with the 'flu epidemic, or something like that, I don't know what it was, but she'd

died. And she had a red coat, and all this torrential rain, the red coat, the dye in the red coat dyed completely.

**DC** Dropped out of it, did it?

**Mr K** It all dropped, she was dripping red, Nellie was a redskin afterwards with the dye coming out of her coat, that was that coming home there, from the – and I told you about where we – I went to school to St. John the Baptist's school, which was only just at the top of the road. And when, you'll hear, although I'm a Manxman born and more or less bred, you'll hear then when I said road, that the Liverpoolian accent comes out, it's there because my first experiences of school, for a couple of years, must have been at Liverpool, in Liverpool.

**DC** Yes, of course.

**Mr K** It was St. John the Baptist's school and it was only just a few yards up, it was the end of our road, and I remember there, I've shown you a photograph of it, great day, thing in those days was Empire Day. We all dressed up, there was dancing round the maypole and we all had red, white and blue, union jacks and all manner of things like that.

**DC** Well, I'm going to be looking out now for slight hints of Liverpool accent as we do the rest of this interview.

**Mr K** Well, I've got something about that, you see, about the Liverpool accent, which is rather ironic, because having done that and also because of my later experiences as a compère and toastmaster, I haven't got the Manx accent, but it's ironic that my fortè now if anything, is performing Manx dialect poetry ...

**DC** Yes, that's right.

**Mr K** ... which is a laugh to me, I think about it, but I work at it, it's still there to the back, but just that moment I recognise and people have said to me, you know, 'Where are you from?' Somebody said to me, the place where I get my hair cut the other day there, and this lady said to me, 'Where do you come from?' I said, 'Well, I live up in Ballabrooie.' She said, 'I didn't mean that, where were you born?' 'Oh,' I said, 'I was born in the Isle of Man,' I said, 'where do you think I come from then?' 'Oh, I don't know,' she said, 'I would have said that you were

from some of the outskirts of Liverpool way.' So, and it's just when I said that word road, that I realised why people recognise the scouse accent.

**DC** Well, you did, your early education in Liverpool, but of course you went to St. Thomas' School in Douglas as well, didn't you?

**Mr K** I did indeed, yes, in fact St. Thomas' School was the only school, that my education started, I didn't – when I started, when I came back to the Isle of Man and apparently it was in 1921, I think I've got it somewhere written down. I did make a point of going to the school and John Riley, the present headmaster there, brought out the register and there it was, we were, the three of us, my two sisters, elder sisters, I was the youngest, there was Renee was my eldest sister, she was born in Ballasalla, Edna, the middle sister, was born in Douglas and I was born in Castletown, because they moved around a bit, my father and mother. But anyway we went to, I went to St. Thomas's School, we all went to St. Thomas's School, and recently I was invited to talk to the children there to tell them about what things were like in those days. Well, I got a bit of a surprise to find out, in my day there was just the one big room, it was just – right up to the rafters. Well, now of course there are two floors there, well there weren't two floors, there was one, the big room was provided by one large – oh, the heating, the only one heating, was a big coke stove, which was in the middle of the room. The room was divided by a curtain, there were two classes at the top end and one class at the bottom, the two classes at the bottom and there was one little other room, which the Infants, that's where I started in there, because I must have been, well, '21, I'd be six years of age, was I, 15, 20, yes, that's right, I'd be six, so it was in there I was and then you had Standards 3 and 4, or 2, 3, and 4, I suppose, I don't know, but the one teacher she had to, Miss Stewartson, she was, the teacher, who took the other classes, the other side of the curtain, or when I was in it partly, the time too. And the very first time, early days, when I was there, the first headmaster was a man we used to call Joey Leece, his name was Mr Leece. Of course we never, we always used to refer to him as the Boss – it was a funny term to use, but it was the Boss, when we were talking, not the headmaster, he was the headmaster of course, and Joey Leece, and I did say he must have been – recently, I don't remember very much of him because he left shortly, you know a couple of years after I'd been there and there were two other headmasters while I was there, but Joey Leece, I've found out afterwards, we thought he was a bit of a tyrant, but he must have been a kindly man because he was 'Uncle Jack' in *The Isle of Man Examiner*, he run the Children's Club.

**DC** Oh, did he?

**Mr K** Yes, yes, and he lived up in Onchan at – the house that he lived in, it's still up there, it's just set back off the road, just past, going towards *The Manx Arms* there, it's set back off the road a little bit, with palm trees growing in it, but that was Mr Leece. And we as – I mentioned that there were – there was only the one big coke stove, that was all the heating there was and we sat in long forms, five or six to a form.

**DC** In fact used to seat – did they have a back on?

**Mr K** There was just the seat and there'd be the desk was attached to the seat.

**DC** Oh attached to it, yes.

**Mr K** Yes, but there were five or six of you in the one and the ink well, in, you know, within that, and I remember the great excitement when they had the new two to a seat forms, you know, which are old hat now. Nowadays they sit round tables and all manner of things.

**DC** So you'd be five or six in a row, when you were there then?

**Mr K** Oh, at first, yes, yes, yes, you were. The toilets were outside and they were in the open air, they're covered in now with a small extension that's been built, over the Infants' room. But we, I was there from the age of – I left school when I was fourteen because we did, in those days, and there were many scholars there at St. Thomas's School who became successful in their chosen careers, Fred Courtie because the Island fire chief, he was one, Teddy Gill and Alf Crampton because master mariners, sailing vessels all over the world. Roy Cowley, when he left school he joined the regular army and then after that he was in the Palestine police force, which is no longer available, he was also a squadron leader, there were all sorts of people, you know, have gone through St. Thomas's and the only education, you might say, really, was up to fourteen years of age, then you left school and you could go to night school.

**DC** It would be basic education, wasn't it?

**Mr K** Oh, basic education, absolutely basic.



**DC** Reading, writing, arithmetic are the three things.

**Mr K** That's right, composition and there was no – the teacher might draw an apple or something, that was the art lesson, you know, that was the only art lesson you ever got, and as for geometry and algebra and all ...

**DC** Languages out of the ...

**Mr K** And languages were, literally, foreign languages to us, double Dutch, so far as we knew, we never had anything at all in that regard. We had, I learned far more after I left school, because as I say, and another thing, you see, when I left school I went to work, I took it upon myself, actually, there were two of us were fourteen years, coming up to fourteen, ready to leave school, Edwin Crellin whom I knew later on in the musical world, Edwin and myself. Now the then headmaster, his name was George Cannell, and he lived at the bottom of Summer Hill, now then in those days the tram cars ran summer and winter, and he came in – George Cannell and another man who was a printer whose name was Marshall Bridson, who eventually was to be one of the founders of Bridson and Horrox, Marshall Bridson came in with George Cannell every day on the horse car. And he said one day to George Cannell, 'Have you got any likely lads, you know, for an apprenticeship?' So he said, 'Oh, I'll see.' So he said to Edwin and meself, you know, 'Either of you interested?' Well, Edwin wasn't because Edwin was more inclined to, he was more academic I suppose than me, I wanted to do something with my hands, you see. And so he said, 'Well, there's this job going with Louis Meyer as a printer.' Louis G. Meyer, 19 Duke Street, it was. So I went, meself, off my own bat, I didn't go home to ask my parents or anything like that, I knew that I, you know I was coming up to leave school, you wanted to get a job. So I went and I saw Mr Meyer and that was it, I was taken on. Well, of course, those days it was a five and a half day week. But what I was going to mention was we left school in short trousers and I went to work in short trousers.

**DC** Really?

**Mr K** Oh, yes, and eventually I had a pair of trousers, I think my mother, they were cut down, I wouldn't admit it, you know, but they were a pair of my father's trousers, cut down for me. Because one of the fellows that was in the works with us, he used to call me tragedy trousers, you know. You know, he said, 'The

old man's trousers you're wearing, Laurence?' I said, 'No they're not!' – you know, of course they were but I wouldn't admit it, you see, they were.

**DC** And would you get paid as an apprentice because a lot didn't?

**Mr K** Oh, yes, yes, it was a good – ten shillings a week.

**DC** Oh, right.

**Mr K** Which was very good because printers were hard – amongst the trades they were very well paid. Some apprentices in other trades only got five shillings a week.

**DC** And some actually had to pay to be apprentices, I think, didn't they?

**Mr K** Yes, but not in the trades. Some did but I didn't know of any of them that had to do, and some of them, if you go further back, like when my father was, he was a baker as well as, all the family were bakers, my mother's family, but my father, not only did you, were you an apprentice and maybe have to pay, I don't think you paid, but you slept on the premises too, as an apprentice, yes, when he was a boy, he served his time in Castletown and you slept in the bakehouse, you know, or on the – underneath or wherever, you know, so, oh, things have changed considerably. I think now, you know, they take the children, they're taking them to see – and they get career advisors, what they should do for their career, and what do you think you should do – and you see my mother – come along – and they've got parents evenings to come along and tell what they should do and what they think they're suitable for. It was a job and we went for it, you know, and you were lucky. The idea was you went for a trade, you were very lucky if you got a trade.

**DC** So when you got home and told your parents you'd got the job then they ..

**Mr K** Oh, yes, I said, 'I'm starting.'

**DC** They'd be delighted, were they?

**Mr K** Yes. I said, 'I need a black apron,' so I said, they said to tell your mother to get an apron so over the weekend she had to make a black apron. It would be black

stuff, I don't know what, like they used to use for blackouts and that sort of thing, but it was a black apron and she made the apron for me and then I started, down in the cellar.

**DC** And what were you doing first of all?

**Mr K** I was an apprentice, apprentice printer.

**DC** What did that mean in those days, I mean ...

**Mr K** Learning the trade of printing.

**DC** Getting to use all the ...

**Mr K** Oh, all type, well I started off in – down below. Oh, I mentioned Marshall Bridson travelling, well it was him that was, he was the machine room foreman in Louis Meyer's, you see.

**DC** Ah, right.

**Mr K** So I was there, now if you go down, it's a hairdresser's now, at the end of King Street, on the corner of – there's a – the front of the shop is now animal feed stuffs and – not animals, pets, but at the back side of it where we used to go into work, there's a lady's hairdressers, but if you look down on the level with the pavement you'll see a room down there ...

**DC** A cellar, yes.

**Mr K** Well, that's where we started. You wouldn't be allowed to work there now, but we worked in the cellar. And one of the most interesting things is this, when I first started to work there one of my jobs, the very first job, was to stand behind a great big machine to guide the sheets of printed matter that were coming off and they were great big sheets and it was a book and the book that was being printed was the second edition, or the second running of Sophia Morrison's 'Manx Fairy Tales.'

**DC** Oh, really.

**Mr K** And the cover was an octavo sheet, now the cover was a linen piece, and that was printed on a machine and then – with colourless ink and then he put them to one side and then they had to be dusted with gold dust, it was what we called bronzing powder, there was silver which we used for wedding cards, and there was bronze, I don't know what we used that for, and the gold, not very often, it wasn't real gold, I suppose, but anyway it was – that's another thing you wouldn't be allow to do. Because I was stood there with these sheets, with these covers of the book, coming off the machine in this colourless ink and I had to dip a piece of cotton wool into this thing, which you'd get up your nose and all sort of things, and dust them and it stuck to the thing, you see, and then you had to dust them off afterwards with another piece, a clean piece, and then of course they were sent up to the book binders and they were part of the cover that formed the thing. It has since been reproduced in a different – in the modern format, they're selling them up in the Museum.

**DC** But that's a great piece of Manx history, being there, to publish ...

**Mr K** Yes, I was there watching the big sheets come off and then I was also involved, as an apprentice, just standing there. But you see Louis Meyer, Louis G Meyer, unfortunately, he went bankrupt after I'd been there 2½ years, I think, yes, that's right. Now then, this is the foundation of Bridson & Horrox started there. Because there was Marshall Bridson, as the machine room foreman, Harry Horrox was the senior apprentice, who was 19 when they folded up, I was the junior apprentice, I would be 16½ by that time, 2½ years from 14, you see. Well, of course I didn't have any money or anything like that but Horrox and Marshall Bridson, Mr Bridson, of course he was to me, and Harry Horrox, they started up in Market Street and I had no work, I was out of work, I nearly went to work for Sam Norris, but he was seeing me and there was some business about the unions, whether there was a quota. There was a quota in those days, only so many apprentices to tradesmen, you see, and there must have been some hold up. But I do remember that I was down in Noble's Baths, on a Friday afternoon, I'd – we always used to go on a Friday from school, you see, and I'd kept it up afterwards. And I was down there swimming in there and I remember Harry Horrox came in, because they'd told him that's – he'd been looking for me because they wanted to see was I coming to work. He said, 'What are you going to do Laurence?' I was in the water and he's talking to me, leaning down, he said, 'What are you going to do Laurence, are you coming with us or are you going with Sammy Norris?' I said, 'I'll come with you because,' I said, 'I'm

being messed about.’ I said, ‘When do I start?’ He said, ‘Tomorrow.’ Well, it was Saturday, well of course in those days you worked ...

**DC** You worked, yes.

**Mr K** ... a five and a half day week. And that was in 1931, you see, so that was the beginning of Bridson & Horrox.

**DC** And you stayed with Bridson & Horrox as a printer ...

**Mr K** As a printer.

**DC** ... virtually through your whole career, did you?

**Mr K** No, no, no, half of my – I’ve been in printing all my life ...

**DC** Yes, I thought you had.

**Mr K** ... but 26 years I did with Bridson & Horrox, or so, and I did another 26 with *The Examiner* and *Times*, or *The Times* and *Examiner*. And Hopper Callister, I worked for the Nelson Press for a while too, with Hopper, when I left Bridson & Horrox.

**DC** Well, did printing change very much as you ...

**Mr K** Well, it hadn’t changed since Caxton’s day – no, it hadn’t until the linotype came into being. now, and that was the biggest change.

**DC** Now, what was linotype, what was that?

**Mr K** Now, linotype is a machine with a keyboard on it, that the printer sat down, he tapped the thing, there was a – and little matrixes formed up, they were little brass matrixes which formed up in a line, they came down a shoot from the back, they were all up at the back of this big machine. You’ll see one down in Peel Road where they are now, they don’t use them now, of course. But all these little – mats they used to call them, matrixes they were, brass mats, they came down and they were different, like you know a key design, well they were all – different letters had a different key design because when they went up they

would fall down into their different boxes, you see, all the letters of the alphabet and the figures. So when the operator tapped a key one of these things, mats, would come down and form up in a little piece, a holder, in front of them and then he would stop it and he'd look at it to see, he could read the letters and read what it said. He had a handle there, he lifted it up and ...

**DC** Went into position really?

**Mr K** ... went away into, it was a big molten lead, type lead, molten metal, and that was forced into these things which formed, what we used to call, a slug, we never thought about them, garden slugs, it was a slug of metal, type high, that's another thing, type high was the same height as a shilling in the old – if you put it on end that was type high, that's a pound coin. But it was type high was that certain height, you see, it had to be. And that was when you had a linotype, but previously to that, that was before the linotype, after the linotype was invented. Well, before that every, and what I did, was taught, you know, right through, was hand-set, everything was hand-set in what you call a setting stick and you picked the letters out of the case and it was upper and lower case.

**DC** So when linotype came along then it was a revolution almost, was it?

**Mr K** Well, it was, there were, I mean linotypes had been in for some considerable time but I mean, in my younger days they'd only been invented maybe 100 years before, which wasn't – it's only a flick of the eyelid – because hand-setting printing hadn't altered since what's his name?

**DC** Caxton.

**Mr K** ... Caxton and Wynkyn de Worde and all these other guys ...

**DC** So what was the difference, I mean after you'd done the linotype setting ...

**Mr K** Ah well, the linotype was, did I mention that, it was hand done, I told you all about the matrixes and come down, but hand-setting, you had to pick every letter out of what we called a case, because it was put up on the stand, and there was the one that was in front of you was the lower case, which was all the small letters, and up above that was all the capital letters. And you had to pick out every letter of every word singly, put it into a setting stick ...

- DC** But didn't you have to put it back to front as well.
- Mr K** Well, it is back to front but you can read it, but actually it's upside down.
- DC** Upside down, was it?
- Mr K** Yes, well you – but it was upside down but it wasn't like that upside down it was like ...
- DC** As in a mirror?
- Mr K** As in a mirror, yes, we could read that just the same as anybody could read ordinary, you know, straightforward, it didn't, I don't know why but it came naturally to you.
- DC** But then you'd have to put all those letters back to where they came from.
- Mr K** All those letters, after it had been printed, it had to be, what we called 'dist,' which was an abbreviation of the word distribution. All the type had to be distributed back into the cases.
- DC** To where, into its proper letters ...
- Mr K** Because they all had to be used again. Now those letters were a lot stronger type than the linotype, because the linotype, the metal was a softer metal. Now when the linotype, which produced these slugs of metal, they were all stuck together you see, the linotype slugs, the letters were all in one row and stuck together. Now afterwards they were just tossed aside, dumped into another big melting pot, not on the machine, not on the linotype, they were melted separately in big ingots, you see, in another melting thing and ...
- DC** So it speeded up the job then?
- Mr K** ... oh, yes, yes, considerably, linotype, you see in the – if you talk about going back to the days of Nelson, you know, and the old times, if you look at those, all those newspapers were all hand-set.
- DC** Well, our local papers were hand-set when you were working at *The Examiner*,

weren't they?

**Mr K** Well, not *The Times* and *Examiner*, some of the – and even *The Mona's Herald* had a linotype, the oldest ones, but you go over to *The Peel City Guardian*, that was hand-set, oh, yes and some of the stuff was hand-set, you might get – all the headings of, when I was working at *The Times* and *The Examiner*, the headings of stories were all hand-set, you see, or the big type.

**DC** The main type, yes.

**Mr K** Yes, the big lines were hand-set.

**DC** But people today would laugh when you talk about linotype because it's moved on immensely now to computerisation, hasn't it?

**Mr K** How it's moved, computerised, even since I, even since I left, when I finished in the printing, physically printing, they had introduced offset printing, offset, but even then it was another, a different system to what it is now. In those days we still had – they had keyboards but what they were doing, what they produced on the keyboard was a punched tape, and that tape had to go into another machine which produced the printed word, but nowadays they use the keyboard straight into their – what do they call them, VDU, visual display unit.

**DC** That's right.

**Mr K** And what they type then is then produced immediately and not only can that, by the press of a button they can alter a word from here to there, they can put borders round, they can put lines here, until – wonderful. I mean we had to do all this by hand, even with linotype you had to put rules around borders and a job to get them mitred and that sort of thing, oh, it was all – and, let me tell you it was seven years apprenticeship I had to serve before I was a journeyman printer. And the word journeyman printer, is interesting, which people will not know today. But the reason was, in any trade where you were a journeyman, it was because when you'd finished your set time, whether it was five or seven or whatever years, you then journeyed, you were kicked out of where you worked, they didn't want you there, you journeyed, then, from place to place, town to town, seeking work, of course.



**DC** Were you kicked out or not?

**Mr K** No, I wasn't kicked out, I was kicked out of Louis G Meyer's half way through, wasn't I?

**DC** Oh, yes, that's right one kicking out was enough really.

**Mr K** Yes, I left the others.

**DC** Well, when did, while you were doing this then presumably you got into the artistic side of life and into painting, which we'll talk about and particularly into singing, didn't you?

**Mr K** Yes, yes, I got into singing because, for good or evil, I was a natural, I had a natural voice. I often say to people if there's anything that I've got, any talent at all, it's in my voice. Yes, I knew that, times were changing, you see, I'd always been interested in singing, you know, dance bands, I've sung in *The Palais de Danse*, and I've sung in all sorts of things like that, you know, but I realised that when I was being asked to sing at functions, and in, like Masonic meetings and things like that, I needed to have a bit of a repertoire, you see, of straight stuff. You couldn't get up and sing the usual ...

**DC** Sort of pop?

**Mr K** ... pop stuff, no, you had to have something so I said to Harry Pickard, I was friendly with Harry, and I said, 'Could you give me a few lessons, Harry?' He said, 'Aye,' he said, 'yes, certainly.' He said, 'I'll help you if you'll help me.' So at that time he was the choirmaster of St. Ninian's Church, so he said, 'Will you come and sing?' Well, I'd been brought up a Methodist but I was married in the church, I was married in the old All Saints Church, and don't you say Tin Tab [Tin Tabernacle], my wife would turn in her grave and she belonged to there and she hated people saying the Tin Tab. It was All Saints Church to her. Anyway, so I said, 'Aye, okay,' I said, 'but I don't know the church ...' he said, 'you'll soon learn it.' So he gave me lessons, you know, and I went to sing and I was in the church choir there, and he said, 'Do you want to go in for this properly, you know, enter The Guild and that sort of thing?' I said, 'Yes, why not?' So he said, 'Okay.' So he put me in for the Open Tenor, I was a tenor, you see, Open Tenor class and the first time I was in I won the first time.

**DC** First prize?

**Mr K** First prize, yes. Now it was very, very flattering really but at the same time it wasn't because I was immediately catapulted into what we call the Special Class, I am now what you might call a Special Tenor, amongst the Special Tenor class, you see. And because of that I was then, were with the Open Tenor you just had to sing one song but with the Special, you had to sing two, and you were in a different – they were a lot harder songs you sang, although the song that I won with, the Open Tenor solo has since been used in the Special Class, it was, 'Our moon of my delight,' which was based on Omar Khayyam's 'Our moon of my delight that knows no way,' and it was, you know, it's a beautiful song but it was a difficult song to sing. But I was lucky, and as I say I won, that's all that's to it.

**DC** So did you keep on entering?

**Mr K** Yes, and then, I often say to people I started at the top and worked my way to the bottom, because the best I ever did in the Special Tenor was to tie for second place, but I did, and that was, oh, I forget, oh, it was, yes, it was singing, 'Aida,' it was, 'That's a beautiful thing,' it's right at the beginning of the opera, 'Aida.'

**DC** What titles did you enjoy singing, what songs did you like most that you, sort of, permanently put in your repertoire, really?

**Mr K** Well, in those days, of course, I used to sing, and I sang what were the usual middle of the road stuff but if you're talking to me about what my musical tastes are, I have very catholic tastes, actually, and I've said this previously, because I like the top of the sandwich and the bottom but I don't care for the middle bit. I'm not too fussy about the, what do they call them, musical comedy, the Choral Union type of stuff, you know, that kind of thing, I'm not too keen on that. I like the grand operas and beautiful arias, I like that and I like the bottom end, I love the ...

**DC** 'Give me the bus fare to Laxey,' for instance.

**Mr K** That's a different sphere on its own. I enjoyed that when I was singing but I realised, of course, that it was all very shallow stuff, really, but very, very

enjoyable and a lot of people – we must have given a lot of enjoyment to a lot of people when we – because there's still, still people asking for, 'Give me the bus fare to Laxey,' and all this carry on, and all the, you know, 'The Laxey girls are the boys,' and oh, gosh, I don't know, all these Stuart Slack songs we sang, but we sang all that.

**DC** Yes, but before you sang didn't you play an instrument, I seem to remember you played a banjo and ...

**Mr K** Oh, that was, that's another phase, yes, that was earlier, that would be, I'd only be eighteen then, roundabout eighteen. Now I mentioned earlier Edwin Crellin, who was in school with me, well, we were obviously the same age. Now there were, I was friendly with Edwin and Bobby Kelly and Freddie Ogley, we were all in the 1<sup>st</sup> Douglas scouts, but by this time we were eighteen, Bobby was a wonderful pianist, you know, Bobby Kelly and Edwin was, as I said before, he was the intellectual type, he sent away for a saxophone and he'd learned it before it came, you know, he knew how to play it, well, he'd learned it by reading the book.

**DC** By reading the book yes?

**Mr K** Yes, he was one of those type, I couldn't do it. And Freddie was a hard man, he was the drummer, you see, and I was learning the banjo. Now I was going to lessons and I remember I used to go to a man up in Onchan he was, an old feller he was, but I was already in the band, you see, I was starting – putting the cart before the horse – because I was a singer, that was why I was in with this gang, I was the singer, I actually sang, people may laugh about this but it actually did happen, before the days of microphones and radio and all that sort of thing ...

**DC** You didn't have a megaphone, did you?

**Mr K** I sang through a megaphone and I've got the photograph to prove it, I'll show it to you later on. It was there, because I've got a photograph. We were the Knights of Rhythm. Bobby Kelly, piano, Edwin Crellin, saxophone, Freddie Ogley on the drums and Laurence Kermodé was the singer holding the banjo. But I – the banjo, as a matter of fact, what – my career with the Knights of Rhythm came to an end by virtue of the fact that the banjo didn't belong to me, it belonged to my uncle. He had had it, he'd never played it or whatever, but he

lent it to me, that's when I started learning – lessons – and then he must have fallen on hard times because he wanted the banjo back and so, of course, that was the end of my career as a banjo player. I did later on, of course, when I appeared, I've been talking about – I played the guitar a little bit, I came, as a matter of fact the very first guitar I ever bought, I only bought two as a matter of fact, but the first one, I brought it to you and asked your opinion of it, and ...

**DC** And what did I say?

**Mr K** ... yes, well, you were very diplomatic about it, you said it wasn't too bad, it was all right, I think I paid £16 for it, or something. Oh, before that I'd bought one, long years before that, I think, and then I sold that, I don't know what happened, I never went any further with it, I just had ideas of playing the guitar.

**DC** But didn't you play flute and mouth organ and ...

**Mr K** Oh, yes, but oh, yes, well I got mixed up with Mike Williams you see, when, with the Mike, Laurie and Al story. How I come to be involved with Mike was, it was in the early – the end of the '60s, '69. '70s, the folk revival, it started, and *The Mannin Folk* who were, in those days, were known as *The Travelling People* but they had to change their name because somebody else was *Travelling People* and they objected to them, in England. Anyway I used to go there, down, with my wife and sometimes on my own, down to *The Lodge*, Glen Helen they were playing, they were the residents in there and a certain night they used to play there regularly, and I used to go down and listen to them. And there was young fellow used to get up, they would do a set and during their interval there was a young fellow used to get up and play a guitar and he'd do half a dozen songs, maybe, and come off. And whilst I was there and they were playing and I remember, and I was singing my guts out, you know, joining in the chorus, and I was known there, I would be in the front row and they were singing – Laurie was doing this and that – and I remembered that I could play the mouth organ when I was a boy, so I bought a mouth organ, one of these blues harp mouth organs, a vamer [sp ???] they call them, and I was joining in when they were playing, I was saying, 'What key are you in?' you know. 'Tell me,' you know and I played – whenever you're in G, you know, I'll play, you know, I'll join in with you. And then I used to do this quite often, you see, and this young fellow, Mike Williams, I found out his name was, I met him during one time, talking to him in the passageway or something, in that place where

you all meet, and he said, ‘Would you like to come along with me,’ he said, ‘I’m, you know, I’m playing.’ Anyway I got attached to him somehow and then the very first time that – he said, ‘I’m playing so-and-so.’ I used to follow him round, really, and he was playing in the cellars of the original place up on *Fort Anne*, yes, in the cellars there, on a Wednesday night I used to go there, he was playing and I used to follow him and play there with him, but he said to me then, he was getting paid but I wasn’t involved with that at all, I was just following him round and we also used to go to a place in Laxey ...

**DC** You were playing a bit on the ...

**Mr K** On the mouth organ.

**DC** They used to call it the harp in folk circles, didn’t they, a mouth harp, wasn’t it?

**Mr K** Oh, yes, it’s the harp, it is a mouth harp or the gob harp some people call it, but it’s a harp they call it, yes it is the harp, I used to always call it the harp, but it’s the mouth harp. So eventually somehow I got involved with Mike and as I say he was playing up at *The Fort Anne* and he was also playing at Laxey and he said to me one time, ‘Would you like to play?’ he was in theatricals himself doing a little bit, Service Players, I think, one of those groups, and he had a part in this play and in the interval he was, oddly enough, he was a Yankee sergeant in this with an American accent, an American accent with a Manx accent, you know what I mean, a GI. And in the interval we were to – he was performing so he said, ‘Would you like to come with me?’ I said, ‘Aye, all right,’ so that’s what we – that was my very first public performance really and the very first thing we did was, ‘Dirty old Town,’ and we also sang and did, ‘Laxey Wheel,’ I suppose and maybe – I don’t know was it only a couple – maybe it was only the two, I’m not sure, it wasn’t very much, but we certainly did that.

### **End of side 1**

**Mr K** My first performance was when I was seven years of age, in *The Villa Marina*. I know it was either *The Villa Marina* or *The Palace* because it was outside – they both had bandstands outside, and I don’t know which it was but I must have been about seven, because we were here, I was home, and I was going to Victoria Street Methodist Sunday School and it was what they – one of the classes was called the Action Songs, you see, and we were singing. Now there

were only two boys in this action song and the rest of them were all girls and of course I was, as you know, being an extrovert, I was the leading hand, I was the front singer, and for some reason or another I was dressed up in a coster's outfit, I know my parents and aunts and all that had to scour the town for all these pearly buttons to sew onto this little costume, I was a coster. I don't know why, and I also had a little wheelbarrow that I was pushing and that was, we won, we won, I think, I'm not sure whether we won or not, I think we did actually because we were taken afterwards to somewhere, but it was one of – the Sunday School teacher, it was all the children's Sunday Schools, and the boy that was – a feller called Bridson, Ron Bridson, he was born in Gelling's Foundry on the South Quay there, his father was the foreman there, the manager, his father, yes, and Ron has died since, sadly enough. But we were there and that was my very first stage appearance, you see. And then afterwards I have another photograph of my final, when I was 80, not my final because I've been, afterwards, I've been performing since, but on my 80<sup>th</sup> birthday, which was a marvellous affair, but I sang with Mike then. And then the manager of the Fort Anne was an Irish fellow and he was very interested in folk music and there was another group of people, I didn't know them then, but this manager was getting transferred from *The Fort Anne* to *The Castle Mona* and I'd met this group once out at the – I'd mentioned Mike was playing out at Laxey – well, he said there's this – you know there's a room outside, not – we used to play in the bar down below, with our backsides up against the fireplace to, you know, half a dozen people that were in the bar, that's all. Mike said, there's this other group on, I'd never met them before, but it was Triad and they played, Mike and I did the traditional stuff, or acoustic, I should say, they were electric and acoustic and we played with them that night. We didn't play with them but we did – I joined in with Mike and we did – I must have, by this time, have had a bit of a repertoire with Mike, you see, not, I had a repartee with Mike, as well as repertoire, difference, but the two things that we both enjoyed, and so he said this lot, he said, they're quite good really. Anyway the next thing was this manager who's got the transfer to Castle Mona said will we go down there. So I still wasn't getting paid, so Mike was hired, Mike Williams and Triad, there were two. Well they used – I went down with Mike, well I was a couple of nights there with Mike and Triad. You see, they would do a set, then Mike and I would go on and do a set and so that's how we split the night. So after a couple of nights one of these chaps in Triad said, 'I think you deserve paying, Laurie,' you know, 'are you not getting paid?' I said, 'No.' 'Oh well,' he said, 'why not?' So the next thing, Friday night, we were playing two nights, Friday and Saturday, I got £2 on

Friday, oh, I thought, this is great, you know, £2, you're talking about 1970, '71, 1970 it was, 1971, so I thought this was great this and then I appeared on Saturday and I got another £2 you know, and I thought, oh, this is fine. And then it went on from there. Well, we were in *The Castle Mona* playing for 3½ years, two nights in the winter, Friday and Saturday, in the summer we played Thursday, Friday and Saturday. Not only that, this was, I was only with Mike then, it was just Mike and Laurie then, that was our act. I was with Mike for seven or eight years I think, before Al joined us.

**DC** That's Al Lawrence.

**Mr K** Al Lawrence joined us, yes. Well, we, apart from singing in *The Castle Mona*, Mike and I, we were also the resident singers in *The Falcon Cliff Hotel* for the folk club that was up there.

**DC** Before we move off your show-biz career, I want to talk to you about something else and I wasn't aware of these but I am now that you've shown me the programmes for them, two shows, one called 'Raise the Roof,' and the other called 'Raise a Cheer.' Now what were these all about?

**Mr K** Well, this was, I was, I did a ... oh, a long, man and boy you might say, from the boy scout movement, I was in, as a boy from 11, right up to when I was married, actually, eventually, you know, and we put – the roof had blown off the scout hall, it had been damaged on a stormy night, and Mr Fisher, the scoutmaster, whom we all called T.O., everybody called him T.O., he was known as T.O., not to his face, of course, but he was T.O., and he had this idea of, because the scouts, the 1<sup>st</sup> Douglas Scouts, had put on a big show once before, before my time actually, it must have been after the First World War. Oh, talking about that I was also in another show in St. Andrew's before this, I did a show in St. Andrew's hall, this was when I was in my late teens these, but before this when I was twelve, or thirteen or fourteen, we were – I was in a show called, 'Of one blood,' I've got the script somewhere still, and it was about the First – after the First World War, about two scouts who meet, their parents, one was a German boy and one – I was a British scout whose father had been in the army and the other was a German boy whose father – and one of them had been shot, or they'd met, or something like that, that was what it was thing – and ...

**DC** This was serious drama really, was it?

**Mr K** It was, it was serious and I remember the one thing about it, a line in it that says, it's a biblical quotation really I think, it said, 'He shall make of one blood all the nations of the earth and peace will reign,' you know, that sort of thing. But in somewhere, it's in, I looked it up one time, I found it, a report of this written by Bert Stevens, you know, you remember Bert Stevens. Well, Bert knew about his and he did a report of this in one of the local newspapers, it would be *The Mona's Herald* and he went through the cast, bla, bla, bla, and this is the bit I wanted to – remember I said before about my voice if there's anything that I've got, he said, the part of so-and-so was played by Laurence Kermode, whose clear diction it was good to hear. So my speaking voice, you see.

**DC** So 'Raise the Roof' and 'Raise a Cheer' were Harriet Moorehouse productions, were they?

**Mr K** Yes, yes. I don't know how it started off with Harriet but the idea for this 'Raise the Roof,' which was the first one, was in 1951 and there had been ...

**DC** Was it to put a new roof on, was it?

**Mr K** I was going to say that there was a stormy night and the roof had been damaged, blown, one end had been blown off, I think. So we needed to raise money for a new roof. Of course by this time I had been in the scouts some considerable time, I joined when I was a boy of 11, that's when you had to, you couldn't join before, but the boy scout movement was a tremendous thing, I always say one of the greatest influences of my life was being in the boy scout movement. I know it's changed considerably now and it probably – in all probability they do enjoy it as much as we did in our day, but it's a different thing altogether. But it was a wonderful thing, so much so that I had occasion one – I lived, I was brought up in Hillside Avenue, which is quite close to Demesne Road, where the scout hall – still is – and my mother said to me one night, 'Where are you going tonight?' I said, 'I'm going up to the hall.' She said, 'You're always going up to the hall,' she said, 'you're like a man going out to the pub.' But it was true, because we always had something to do, we were always working or meetings, or whatever, you know, and I was very active in the scouts. And enjoyed it, wonderful times that we had. But this was raised, but when I see, when I look at this programme here of 'Raise the Roof,' the various things that



– there were all sorts of things that – I don't know, it must have gone on for hours, but I was involved with it in many things. I didn't realise, I look at it, there's down here *The Hilberry Billy Boys*.

**DC** *The Hilberry Billy Boys!*

**Mr K** *The Hilberry Billy Boys.*

**DC** Tell me about that.

**Mr K** Well that must have been, that was part of Harriet Moorehouse, Harriet Hart she was really, Harriet Moorehouse, that was part of hers. I lived in Onchan at the time and there was to be, a concert was going on, was – Jack Nivison was the compère, and he was behind it, it was for some charitable effort, and Harriet wanted, had this idea of some, a group of men singers, you see, and she asked various people in the village that – and I was involved with *Lon Dhoo Choir* and she asked me and it finished up – it started off, we had musicians with it as well, in it, you know, joined in. What was his name now, Atholl Moore, he played the guitar, Johnny Ventro played the fiddle, that's the fellow that used to be on the – and Paul Faragher, Phil Faragher his name was, was guitar. Crawford played the accordion, Dwyer played the bass, he was left over from the Marines School of Music, Tommy Gee, drums, vocalist, P. Corlett, D. Gelling, Stan Cowin and Peter Cowin, Corlett, Gelling, McKewan, E. L. Kermodé, that's me, F. McMullin, and Cyril Cain.

**DC** So you were all *The Hilberry Billy Boys*?

**Mr K** Well, that was, you see we didn't know what we were going to be called but it evolved into a Country and Western group, you see, because ...

**DC** A hillbilly group, I suppose.

**Mr K** ... a hillbilly group, it was, yes.

**DC** What sort of things did you sing?

**Mr K** Oh, we sang ...

**DC** 'Ghost Riders in the sky.'

**Mr K** 'Ghost Riders in the Sky,' yes, and I was the front man, of course, and they were all singing on either side of me, photographs of that somewhere, of me in the front, and we were all dressed up in cowboy outfits, you see, what they call – the chaps on us, you know, made out of cardboard, or paper or something.

**DC** Stetson hats?

**Mr K** Cowboy hats on us, yes. Oh, we were doing all this stuff, you see, and we sang cowboy songs and we sang other songs that weren't cowboy songs, as well, I suppose. But that must have been how we gravitated towards this – to be involved in 'Raise the Roof.' But when I see, you look at the bill here that was in this one show, the Manx Gynmastic Club, Jack Dugdale, Moods and Music, singer Marie Radcliffe, duet, Marie Corkill, Howard Rudd, he was a comedian in his own right, you know.

**DC** Well then when you went on to 'Raise a Cheer,' you've got Howard Hampton there I think, Marie Radcliffe again.

**Mr K** Oh, of course Howard was in the other lot too, because he was another man that was in the scouts with us, you see, a group of us, all in the scouts.

**DC** Dan Minay and Eileen Peters were in 'Raise a Cheer' as well.

**Mr K** Yes, and it was good stuff and the pianist, holding it all together of course, was George Broad, L.R.A.M.

**DC** And both were at *The Gaiety*, were they?

**Mr K** Both were at *The Gaiety Theatre*, and wonderful reception we had to both of them, because you'd got a captive – all the scouts' parents, and grandparents but they were good shows and they went down very well indeed. And Harriet, she had very good ideas, you know, of grouping all this together.

**DC** So you went then from this cowboy uniform into a toastmaster's get up, didn't you, now how did that all happen, the toastmaster?

**Mr K** Well, it all started, I was still doing bits of compère jobs and that sort of thing and the first toastmaster proper in the Isle of Man had been a man who was employed by a man called Perry, the manager of *The Villa Marina* and he was friendly, I think he used to drink with this man who had been a toastmaster in England, who was a Manx feller, that I knew, because I'd sang with him, he was a wonderful bass voice, Phil Corlett. Now Phil was a chorister in Liverpool Cathedral, he worked as well, but he was a chorister, beautiful, wonderful bass voice singer and I used to sing duets with him at these various functions, you see. I mean if we got a quid or two quid we were lucky, you know. And Perry knew Phil lived in Castle Mona Avenue, had a boarding house there, and he used to drink with him in *The Central*, the pub, and he needed a toastmaster, Perry, he said, so he said to Phil, you know, he said, you know, he'd been on the circuit in Liverpool, the Masonic circuit, singing, you know, round about, but employed by Rushworth and Dreaper. They used to employ these, as a matter of fact one of them that was on the same circuit was that fellow who's the comedian, the Liverpool, tickly ...

**DC** Oh, Ken Dodd.

**Mr K** Ken Dodd, he was on the circuit singing at the time that Phil was and he said that the reason why he became a comedian, because, he said, we used to laugh at him because he had such a funny face. He used to pull such funny faces, you know, his teeth and that. But anyway so he got Phil, he said, 'Well, I've seen them,' Phil said, 'I know what they do.' 'What do you want me to do? 'Just make a few announcements?' You see – it was for the Corporation for these dance things, you know. And they had, they used to have these people coming over, conferences, you see, and they needed someone to do this, so he did it and as a matter of fact the red coat belonged to the Corporation, they used to keep it hanging up. Anyway after he went back to Liverpool, or he retired, he wasn't – I think he went back to Liverpool, I'm not sure now, but anyway Phil retired from it and Dan Minay took over the job, they gave it to him because Dan, Dan of course had been ringmaster down in the circus, down where the present bus station is, there was a circus there once upon a time.

**DC** He'd been ringmaster there, had he?

**Mr K** Yes, he was a ringmaster there, and they asked Dan, you see. Well, Dan was also another man of parts, he was a plasterer by trade, all the Minays were, but –

and wonderful singers and voices, you see – but he was also a coach driver at this time and he couldn't do a performance for *The Villa*, you see, one occasion, and it was the Civil Servants English – the Local Government, LGB I think they were, but they were having a big conference over here and he couldn't do it and they asked me. I don't know was it him that approached me or *The Villa* knew me and said you know, what, just make these announcements, you had to, you know, people coming down and bla bla bla, just watch. So I went the night before to see Dan, what he was doing, and making these announcements, and I thought, well, I can do that, I'm used to making announcements, so that was that, the red coat was hanging up in the props room there, *The Villa Marina*, you know.

**DC** There was no formal training as such, then?

**Mr K** No, not at all, no, you just played it by ear, you see, and I knew and of course well then oddly enough these people said to me, 'Look,' they said, 'Mr Kermode, we've got a lunch here on so-and-so,' and they said, 'can you do that?' 'Oh,' I said, 'well,' or maybe an evening job, whatever it was, I said, 'oh, yes but,' I said, 'what about Mr Minay?' I said, 'He's ...' 'Never mind Mr Minay,' they said, 'we're asking you, can you do it?' I said, 'Well, yes, I can.' So I did it and then I got more work from the thing and Dan was a bit upset about this, as a matter of fact I was hauled up to his house, I got hauled up, yes. 'Now,' he said, 'now look here, Mr Kermode,' he said, 'I was thinking that it's rather strange,' he said, 'you getting all this work,' he said, 'and I'm not getting anything at all. I would be saying, if it was me, I'd be saying now why is it?' I thought, oh, well, nothing to do with me, I'm getting the job, you see, and thereafter, and then sadly, of course, he died. But I, how I knew the routine of toastmasters, of formal things, because of my background in freemasonry, you see, and being to all these various functions, so I knew what you needed to do and I made it up from there, more or less, you know, and I'd seen, when other people had been over from across and I'd seen them do it and I'd had people saying you're as good as they are and better, and, you know so ...

**DC** Right, but still wearing the Corporation's gear, were you?

**Mr K** I was for a while, yes, and then eventually I bought my own red coat, you see. And there was a fellow over, you remember Alex O'Brien, now Alex was out at the ...

**DC** At *The Alex Inn*.

**Mr K** ... *Alex Inn* and he knew me working at *The Palace*, because he was a bars manager there as well, he was mixed up with the two, or he was the manager of the restaurant, he was a bit of a smart worker, you know, Alex, and he knew me and he said, he rang me one time and he said, 'Laurence,' he said, 'I've got a guy coming over,' he said – it was a tailor, 'are you interested?' 'Oh, aye.' He said, 'He'll make you a red coat.' So, what was his name then, this fellow, but anyway he was from Manchester, he measured me up at *The Palace* there, I went over there, he measured me up for this red coat and came back in a fortnight's time, with, you know, for a try-on. He was making for a few local businessmen, because there weren't any tailors about, they'd died out, you see. I couldn't, I'd tried to get it – nobody seemed to know, Burton's didn't know what a red coat was for, so they were the only thing I would hope – so he came over and he made me this wonderful red coat and that year – I didn't know at the time but that year he was the top tailor of Britain and I have a photograph of him with all the various trophies he won that year.

**DC** It must have cost you a fair old packet to buy, did it?

**Mr K** Well, it was a lot of money then, it was over fifty quid, you see, for a coat, I mean that was just for the red coat.

**DC** It was a lot of money then.

**Mr K** Of course, it was a lot of money. And then I had to, the white tie, and you know, all the rest of it, black trousers and stiff white shirt and cuff links, the whole caboose, you know, and it was from there, I went on from there, you see.

**DC** As toastmaster then you saw one or two royals, didn't you?

**Mr K** Oh, yes, yes, well, you see, I did many – I was working first, mostly for the Corporation, all these conferences, so any of the top people that came over, and I've worked with all the top trade union leaders that have been over here.

**DC** Politicians?

**Mr K** Politicians and all that carry on and then I was doing work for the Government

as well, whenever – you see I was the only professional toastmaster, I mean you were a compère and lots of people – but they weren't interested in this sort of thing as I was, the formality, you see. Not only that I had – when I mentioned before about it, I also bought a book, you see, on toastmastering, written by an old professional toastmaster, so I read up all on that, you see, all the protocol, so it wasn't just my background of masonry, it was other things as well, you see, so I knew what you should have done. And then anybody that was anybody that came over and they were involved with the Government or the Corporation, I was – and they had big functions – I was there. For many, many years I always did the Tynwald Banquet which was held on the evening of July 5<sup>th</sup>, mostly down at *The Golf Links Hotel*. But at one time we did it up in the College of Further Education. I'll always remember that because the Minister of State, it was the Labour Minister of State, he was, and I've mentioned this before about toastmasters, about people that, no matter who they are, they're all nervous, the speakers, when they get up to speak, and if you're standing behind them you can watch their body language, you know. And they'll say to you, you know, this guy, this head of state, and he turned round to me after he'd said his piece and he turned round and he said, 'Was I all right?'

**DC** They would give away their nerves in one way or another, these guests, then?

**Mr K** Yes, yes, yes, but my first introduction to the royal family, you wanted to know about the royal family, was away back in 1965 when Princess Margaret and Lord Snowdon, she was married to Lord Snowdon in those days, and she came over to open some, I don't know what it was, a pier or something, something anyway, and the do in the evening was at *The Grand Island Hotel* and I was down there. And I – what I noticed about Snowdon, he was immaculately dressed, he was very, very smartly dressed, and she was lovely. What surprised me first was how small she was, of course I've realised now, since, that the Queen and all, they're all small, short in stature, like old Victoria, Queen Victoria, you see. But his suit was, the back seam down here was sort of stitched together, so it was a permanent seam, you used to do the creases in your trousers like that, some men used to do that. But afterwards, at one point in time, she was surrounded by a group of people afterwards, some of the top table you know, I don't know was it before or after she went in, she was a great smoker, you see, and I was stood off, as you might say, because you don't mix in with these people, you are part of it but you're not with them, you're not one of them. And of course you don't approach royalty ever, you never speak to

them until they speak to you. She was surrounded by these people, talking to her, and she had a cigarette and she was puffing this cigarette, and there was no ashtray there, she was in the middle of the room, no ashtray available, and she was looking round, so I realised what she wanted was an ashtray. So I went up to her, gave her the ashtray, she dumped her fag in the ashtray and said, 'Thank you.' So I rescued, and I came across it the other day and I wondered what it was, I came across – I thought it was Paul had been sneaking a quiet fag when he was younger, but anyway I realised what it was, I rescued this stump out of the ashtray, put it in my pocket and took it home. So when I got home, we were in the boarding house then and my wife and the other people, the staff, you know, oh, what was she like, and all this carry on, and what did she say to you. So I told them this story and I said, that's the sum total of the conversation I had with Princess Margaret, she just said thank you and that was it. But since then of course I've been, if you go down the line, of course, there would be the Duke of Edinburgh was over in 1969, I was with him at *The Palace* there, I'm talking about *The Palace Hotel* of course it was, 1978 Princess Anne was over and in '79 there were a lot of royalty, that was the Millennium year, the Gloucesters were over, the President of Malta, the President of Iceland, Her Majesty the Queen of course and the King of Norway, Michael of Kent, the Queen Mother, a lovely lady, the Queen Mother, I've twice been with her, Princess Anne on more than one occasion, and the last of the royals that I dealt with was Prince Edward. Now there's a story there. It wasn't the – I don't think it was a Tynwald night, I don't think it was, it may have been, whatever it was there was this do at *The Golf Links Hotel*. Now on that day, the very same day, he was only 21, Prince Edward, when he came over, and that very day I'd heard on the radio that he had passed, he'd got his degree, I don't know what, B.A. Bachelor of Arts, so I thought to myself, now should I include this in the preamble, you know, Prince Edward, Bachelor of Arts, you see, so I thought that would be – I said, no, erring on the conservative side, don't be a fool, Laurence, I said to myself, you're dealing with royalty here, don't make a mess of it. So I didn't, I just did the usual preamble, His Royal Highness, bla, bla, bla, His Royal Highness, the Prince Edward. So when he got up to speak and he said, amongst his bits and pieces, bla, bla, bla, and then he said, 'Mr Toastmaster,' he said, 'missed a wonderful opportunity,' he said, 'he could have been the very first person to announce me with my new honours,' he said, 'Bachelor of Arts,' so you see it caused a bit of a laugh. Now it was a good thing that I didn't, in two ways, it gave him the opportunity of telling people that he had – was, passed – got his Bachelor of Arts degree, and it was right for me because I've got the

story to tell afterwards and also you never upstage the principal artist, the top dog and he was the top man. Now then the story goes on, the next night, of course he was somewhere else, we used him again at *The Palace*, and I'm lined up there, it's now the casino, you see, and he's going into this special V.I.Ps room, bla, bla, bla and I'm lined up with other people, waiting for him to come in and he comes in with all his entourage, and he looks over at me, he says, he just laughs, and he said, 'You again?' And I said, 'Oh yes.' So, that was, I liked Prince Edward, I liked him very much.

**DC** Tell me this, did you introduce him as Bachelor of Arts the second time.

**Mr K** No, no, no, no, I didn't, no, I thought, well that's it. I did it my way, as I say, oh aye. It was very good that.

**DC** Did you ever get yourself into a position like the famous toastmaster of Michael Bentine who finished up rolling around on the floor, completely drunk, trying to introduce the Mr Ambassador ...

**Mr K** I'm very happy to say, 'No,' it never happened to me, that, no, no.

**DC** You'd have to be careful, wouldn't you?

**Mr K** But you've got – you had to be very careful and the great thing is this, and many people have said before me, the higher the ranking person they are in royalty or in the aristocracy or whatever, the higher they are, the more understanding they are and the kinder and civil they are. It's when you get upstarts, jumped upstarts, you know, that think they're more than they are, you know, so – but you always know your place and you always, well, you treat them with respect and they respect you, you see. And they always, these people, as I think I mentioned before and if I didn't mention I said they always look, when you're talking about their little peculiarities, they always, they know, you see, a toastmaster can make or break them, because you're in charge of the banquet and you can get – you can do something, you could if you were so minded, but there's no toastmaster fool enough to do it, to upset the whole business of while they're talking, or you could give them the wrong introduction. Because although you introduce them, it's more formal than a compère of a concert, it's much more formal, you see. Although a lot of the formality is going out of it nowadays, people don't want ...



**DC** So is the toastmaster's day numbered then, do you think?

**Mr K** Well, it's surprising, in England it's still there, but when I was – if I had been living in England I could have had a very good living ...

**DC** As a toastmaster?

**Mr K** ... as a toastmaster, yes, because there's plenty of work there, of course it's mostly down the south of England.

**DC** Well, there's one thing I must ask you about, whether you're an old hippy, because here you've got a ring in one ear, anyway, if not two, but one certainly.

**Mr K** Well, yes, I have got – there was quite a bit of a story about that. I always fancied earrings, because my grandfather, my maternal grandfather, my mother's father, he always wore what they called sleepers, both ears he wore them in, the baker, little earrings, one in each ear, I used to admire these earrings, you know. But I wouldn't dare wear them, my wife said, 'You do that,' she said, 'and I'll buy you a handbag,' she used to say this to me, you know.

**DC** I can't believe that.

**Mr K** But I always fancied the handbag – no, I didn't fancy the handbag, I fancied the earring, but I wouldn't wear them. However eventually my younger son, Nigel, had a shop in Peel, and it was a boutique, and amongst the things, he was selling jeans and all that sort of thing, he was selling jewellery as well, and he was doing earrings, piercing people's ears, a quick gun thing. Well, we were down over the Christmas holidays one time, my wife and myself, he was showing us the shop and he was showing me, he said, 'This is how you do it, Dad,' you know he was showing me the things, a little gun they use, and when my mother was a girl they used to stick a cork behind the ear and put a red hot...

**DC** Really?

**Mr K** ... yes, a needle, a hot needle through your ear, there's no feeling in your ear, it doesn't bleed at the lobe. But anyway so he said, 'This is it.' I've got an odd one here, it was a little stud, a little gold stud – I don't know where it is, gone somewhere. So my wife didn't say anything because it was Nigel, so she

wouldn't say anything about her son, and he did the treatment, you know, spirits and all that, bingo, and I had the stud in my ear and I wore it and she never said a word about that. And people did say, some people, but they knew me and they knew that I was a bit of an extrovert so they wouldn't mind. But the present ring, earring, is my wife's wedding ring, so when she died I had it made into a ring.

**DC** Oh, that's nice, isn't that nice.

**Mr K** So that's the story of the ring, of the present earring. But there's a little story about that, before this was in, because it was – my wife was alive at the time, she used to love to go up Douglas Head, we used to go up there and sit sometimes, and in those days, it's not long ago, they disappeared and I don't know where they went, but they used to have four sided shelters up Douglas Head, we'd sit in there. And I was painting at the time, my wife was in one side round the corner, I was another side looking out over the bay, and I was painting, I was painting with a palette knife, and there was some children, and they're always interested, you see, in artists. Well, the trick is, you don't say anything to them, I never used to speak to kids, children, not at first, so they're running round and then they look and they spot you, you see, and then they're going round and gradually they come nearer, you see, and nearer, and there were these two little children, one was a little boy and one was a little girl, you see, and one would be about eight, or nine or ten, round about, between that age group, you see. And eventually the little boy comes and sits alongside of me, you see, and I never spoke to him, I kept on painting, and he's talking to me and you know what children are like, and he said, I was painting with the palette knife, you see, and he said, 'Well,' he said, 'if I was going to paint,' he said, 'if I was taking up painting,' he said, 'I don't think I'd do it like that.' He meant – thank you very much for that, you see. So the mother came, she was just in the distance, she said, 'They're not bothering you, are they?' 'Oh, no,' I said, 'it's all right, they're chatting.' And then the little girl came, you see, and then all of a sudden, out of the blue, he says to me, 'Why are you wearing that earring?' 'Just,' I said – well, it knocked me off my perch a bit, you see, so he had one of these floppy hats on, so I said, 'Well, I don't know, why are you wearing that hat?' And his sister, little girl, you know, so – what little girls are, you know, so knowledgeable and so worldly, maybe a year younger than him, and she said, 'Artists always wear earrings.' Well, I laughed to myself, you know, it was so good. Eventually those people, they were a couple, they used to come over

every year, they said they were waiting for the 4 o'clock boat to go because they wanted to spend as much time as possible, they used to come over, have a – rented a cottage in the country and then come, and lose all track of time. They said they took their watches off, they ate when they wanted, they got up when they felt – you know, timed by their body clock and these two young children and anyway I sent them – they gave me their address so eventually I sent them this painting, got it framed and sent it. They were very pleased about that.

**DC** Well, you've got a lot of art in the house, of course, and some of your own work here and you've been, among other things, I think, chairman of the Isle of Man Arts Society, at one time.

**Mr K** Oh, yes, yes, well, I was in the Arts Society years and years ago, I started and I used to go to – I've always been interested in painting and pictures and art and that sort of thing.

**DC** Do you still do a bit today?

**Mr K** Well, no, since I've had my knee operation I haven't – I'm an outside painter, I'm not one of these people that can take a photograph I've tried it and it doesn't come off. I can go into and sit at home or in the school and paint. But I used to go to John Nich's [Nicholson] class, in the old School of Art, and you know, he was taking us – teach you how to paint, water colours and that and I used to go to a life drawing with Norman Sayle and that sort of thing.

**DC** You're happy with oils and water colours, are you?

**Mr K** Well, I used to paint in water colours and I never – well, water colours are lovely really, good water colours are very nice – beautiful – that painting on the wall there, it's done by Catherine James, it's a beautiful picture of Pooylvaaish. But no, I transferred to oils because it's a damn sight easier because once you make a statement with water colour, that's it, well the modern day water colours anyway. The 18<sup>th</sup> century English water colours they used to paint over but not the modern style. But with oils you can do something, you can paint light over dark, which you can't do with water colours.

**END OF INTERVIEW**