

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

**‘TIME TO REMEMBER’**

**Interviewee:** Mr Sam Knight

**Date of birth:**

**Place of birth:**

**Interviewer:** David Callister

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**Topic(s):** Peel Heritage Trust  
The river Neb  
The Steam Railway  
*The Glen Helen Hotel*  
Scandinavian Gorse Mill  
Suspension bridge to Glen Helen  
Flax mill  
Bernie Mylcraine the last miller in the Isle of Man  
Glen Mooar Mill  
Ballig Mill  
Tynwald Mills  
Glenfaba Mill and bridge

**Sam Knight** - Mr K

**David Callister** - DC

**DC** The sound of running water and for a rather different programme today, we take a look at the importance of water for power in the Isle of Man and I'll be talking to Sam Knight of the Peel Heritage Trust, as I clamber up the river bank to meet him at the top. Well, it's a bit steep, that little chap there, but we're looking at a river that is very familiar to you, Sam.

**Mr K** It is, the river Neb, I don't know whether many people know exactly where it rises, everybody knows where rivers come into the sea but not many people know exactly where it rises but it must rise somewhere near Sartfield, somewhere in the hills around Little London, somewhere in that direction, but it's very difficult to actually say it does start here.

**DC** If you look up the history books it was named the Neb some time, long before 350 years ago, but nobody quite knows how the name came about either, do they?

**Mr K** I don't know, it's just the name that's it's been given and it's been kept, thank goodness. So, it's a pleasant river, it's interesting in that all the rivers on the Isle of Man are obviously short because it's only a small place, but, you know, you haven't got huge long rivers like the Severn or the Dee or any of those big ones, so they are very short, but my word they used the water for power very, very effectively, especially on the river Neb here.

**DC** Well, that, of course, is what we're here for today, to talk mainly about the old mills that are on, line this river bank. How did you become interested in them first of all then?

**Mr K** Well, a long time ago the late Robert Forster did some study on this and he went into the Manx Museum and he studied the mills on the river Neb. He was a historian and a very thorough one and he had done this and then we decided that as Oxford Brookes University come over each year and want to do a project for the Heritage Trust, they've done it for other agencies as well, we thought that the power of the Neb may make an interesting topic for them and to produce a booklet so that that booklet could be either sold or given away to visitors, so that anybody interested in industrial archaeology, could follow it. And that's how it's, that's really how it happened and the Heritage Trust has done a couple of walks, this walk, but it was only from Ballig up to here, because it is quite a long way really, but we did that one and it was very good,

very popular too.

**DC** Well, we're talking here at Glen Helen, of course it starts further up, as you say, in the hills and for people who don't know the Neb, it actually finishes up in your city of Peel.

**Mr K** In my back yard, yes, it does. Well, I'll tell you where – we'd better describe to the listeners where we are, we in fact have just walked down from the car park in Glen Helen, across a wooden footbridge, and have turned round and looked back up towards the car park, the Glen Helen itself, *The Swiss Cottage*, is on our right, and the river is flowing, obviously, downhill from right to left, that's where we are. And if you go up the TT course from Glen Helen you will notice, if you can manage to take your eyes off the road, on the left hand side is a stone wall. Now behind that wall is a stream which is not surprising, because it's quite a steep valley, and that stream goes under the TT course, round by the car park, and at one time the stream went right underneath a building called *The Glen Helen Hotel ...*

**DC** Oh, really?

**Mr K** ... right underneath it, and what happened, certainly, is that the cellars in this particular hotel, now demolished, now fallen down, the cellars in there have got a trap door and all the kitchen waste and ...

**DC** Ah, whatever else.

**Mr K** ... whatever else used to happen, went down the trap door and into the Neb. And, no, that is absolutely true, I mean there weren't any mains sewage or whatever, but I don't know quite, I wasn't around then, David, so – but anyway, that's, the remnants of that – oh, a few years ago when the car park, part of it disappeared into the cellars because – and you could see door architraves and a bit of wallpaper and all sorts, yes, but we didn't see anything else, but we're looking now, we're looking now up towards Creg Willey's Hill, we're looking back and we can see a round culvert that is quite new ...

**DC** A very large pipe, we'd call it.

**Mr K** That's right, that's right, it's only a trickle coming through it and that is the

stream that comes down Creg Willey's Hill, under *The Glen Helen Hotel* which is now no longer there.

**DC** Somewhat cleaner water now.

**Mr K** And it comes out here, so that is the position we are on. Glen Helen itself was, in Victorian times, incredibly popular. The railway came to St. Johns in 1873, fine, we all know that, but before then people used to come by horse and trap from Douglas to here. The trees were getting established here in Glen Helen, fine, that was nice, and there was a big tearooms, etc., rumour has it that at one – at busy times, they would sell a thousand meals a day in Glen Helen.

**DC** Really, yes.

**Mr K** Yes, in those days. And then when the railway came of course you've got a train load of people coming through, and it was only, what, 20 minutes to Douglas, so they came down. And then by the station were rows of horses and traps to bring the people here. In fact there was so much business, so much traffic, that at one time there was a study, a feasibility study, to build a railway from St. Johns to Glen Helen.

**DC** Is that so?

**Mr K** Absolutely, and the plans are in the Manx Museum.

**DC** Oh, and it would have been nice too, but of course today ...

**Mr K** Well, it would have been closed now, wouldn't it?

**DC** ... of little use, that's right.

**Mr K** Of little use.

**DC** Of course the great attraction then would have been not only these lovely meals they were serving, but to go into a glen alongside a stream, because most of these people who came over from the cotton towns and so on won't have seen much countryside.

**Mr K** That's right, no, this was the escape, wasn't it? This was the escape because people came on a steamer to come to the Isle of Man and people thought that this was abroad, didn't they, you know what I mean ...

**DC** It was, come abroad to the Isle of Man.

**Mr K** ... it was in a way, wasn't it?

**DC** It was a slogan, yes.

**Mr K** That's right, come abroad to the Isle of Man. And that's what they did. But I mean it was incredibly busy and incredibly popular, but now, of course, personally I think, I mean I wasn't – neither of us were around in those days but I think the glen is, in fact, more beautiful today than it was then, because the trees weren't established.

**DC** That's right. Well, let's – we'll move up ...

**Mr K** And the trees are magnificent, aren't they, really?

**DC** ... we'll move on a little bit further, we'll talk about the trees because there's a story there as well, isn't here?

**DC** Well, it's a busy place, of course, here at *The Glen Helen Hotel* but outside we find a sign that should be helpful to people, I think, Sam?

**Mr K** Yes, it says, 'Manx National Glen,' which means of course it's owned and maintained by the Manx Government, which is fine, because of course at one time all the glens on the Island were privately owned, and in fact it's only recently that the turnstiles at Glen Maye have been removed. The little recess is still there, but I have a feeling that it's gone, but they were privately owned. I don't suppose it cost much to go in the glens but this was privately owned and now it's been taken over.

**DC** And the Helen is important as well, of course.

**Mr K** Well, either you or I could read this little bit here, it says: 'Welcome to Glen Helen, romantically named after the daughter of its founder, a Mr Marsden, who

in the 1850s planted thousands of trees, including sequoia, thuria, [sp ???] western hemlock, spruce, Douglas fir, oak, sycamore and beech. Mr Marsden erected a private residence called the Swiss Cottage, which stood on the site of the former Swiss Chalet restaurant until it burned down in 1983. In the 1870s the property was acquired by the Glen Helen Hotel and Estate Company who converted it into pleasure grounds. Entrance could be obtained for 4d per person ...'

**DC** That's four old pennies.

**Mr K** Four old pennies yes, we both remember those, don't we? ... 'and croquet, swings and skittles could be enjoyed as well as admission to the vicinity of the waterfall.' That's the Rhenass waterfall. 'Facilities were expanded with the increase in tourism and in its heyday Glen Helen boasted a ballroom, a deer park, a monkey house and an aviary housed in Mr Marsden's former residence.'

**DC** Yes, then in the 1950s the Forestry Department took the glen over, I think, didn't it, really.

**Mr K** Yes and now it's free to the public and it really is tremendous and it's beautifully maintained, it – the Government seem to manage to leave it wild and yet it's cared for, which is great.

**DC** Well, that's the glen, but let's get onto the meat of this little programme today and see what we can find out about the way in which the river water was used for power, because it was very important in this whole area, wasn't it?

**Mr K** Absolutely. And the first mill is in fact way upstream. The first very small mill was what's called a Scandinavian mill, which is a normal waterwheel with the axle horizontal, it was only about 18 inches to 2 feet wide and that was used to grind gorse so that that gorse could be fed to animals, and that is about, I suppose, two, three hundred yards upstream of Rhenass Waterfall.

**DC** There's still bits of it to be seen in fact.

**Mr K** Well, the actual stone lining of the mill is still there, the wheel is long gone, but you can still see the little half circle grooves where the axle went, whether it ran in metal bearings or whether it ran in the stone I don't know, of course, but it's

long gone. But that was what Bob Forster called a Scandinavian gorse mill.

**DC** And that, of course, would be I suppose an economic way of feeding animals as well, wouldn't it, really?

**Mr K** Well, it would, and of course the power's free.

**DC** Well, I'm now crossing a wooden footbridge and I'm in a spot that I haven't ever actually been in before, but you know all about this place then, do you?

**Mr K** Well, it's a wooden bridge, it's wide enough for a vehicle and it could well be that at one time this was the main entrance to Glen Helen, it could have been that, I don't really know to be honest, but it is the suspension bridge which goes over the Neb, which goes from the TT course, which you can hear, into the southern part of the glen. It is, it was a suspension bridge, and I say was, because the suspension arms, the long chains with the vertical rods which held the road, suspended the road, that's why it's called a suspension bridge, of course, they have long gone and recently a British army regiment came and changed it to a girder bridge and now when you jump it doesn't move, but presumably it did at one time. Now there were four main pillars, over which the main chains went.

**DC** Yes, the pillars are still here, of course.

**Mr K** The pillars are still here.

**DC** They've all been repointed and repaired.

**Mr K** Well, otherwise I think they would have just fallen down, it's Manx slate.

**DC** But those holes, then, at the top of the pillars, they would be, would they be holding the ...

**Mr K** Those are the – yes, the holes, the rectangular sort of portrait type rectangular holes, that's where the big chains went through and of course they went across the river but the other end of them were anchored underneath those other two pillars at the far end.

**DC** The further pillars beyond those, on the inside of the road here, what about on the outside, was there further pillars there.

**Mr K** Well, there were two, it was absolutely symmetrical about the middle, but what they thought was coming across here and getting out onto the TT course, this is before the TT was ever thought of, of course, it was difficult, so they were demolished, the two nearest to the course were, in fact, demolished. But ...

**DC** Yes, as you say, it may well have been the entrance to Glen Helen then?

**Mr K** It could well have been, I mean if anybody does know, for goodness sake let us know, because it's important this. There was, just looking down stream here, there was, underneath the undergrowth, there's no evidence now, but according to Bernie Mylcraine, there was a flax mill down there, but nobody knows where it is, and you can hear the water merrily going on its way to St. Johns and out to Peel.

**DC** Yes, there's not quite as much flow on it as you would see in the winter, but I think we must tell our listeners that it's a glorious summer day, today, in fact we've chosen a good one. But, we mentioned the gorse mill, but now we want to think in terms of the main mill on this road, on the Glen Helen road here, which is no longer in use but in fact I think – was it the last mill to be used on the Island really?

**Mr K** Yes, the Mylcraines were in there, yes, they were, and Bernie Mylcraine sold out about six years ago, about 1995, something like that he sold out, because – well there was no particular call for milling as such, but he has got a remarkable story to tell. That mill was completely self-sufficient, it had its own water supply, it had, it generated its own electricity all the year round, and it, absolutely truly magnificent and the wheel is still there, it won't work, but it's still there so perhaps we could go there and have a look.

**DC** Well, that's water power, or it was in the past, Sam, wasn't it?

**Mr K** Well, if you go back 100 years that water wouldn't be flowing down there, it would be flowing behind us into a water mill, which was, perhaps, one of the biggest water mills on the Island at one time.



**DC** Well, just along here, of course, is that mill stream, what were they called, lades, were they?

**Mr K** Well, I think, well, they were called races. What it was, was the water was taken out of the river in a controlled way into a very gently sloping man-made culvert, if you like, this one was called the head race. When the water went through the wheel to turn the wheel to generate the power, the water was released into the tail race and that went out into the river, so its head and tail, but this head race is very picturesque now, and in fact it is only about, what, 150 yards long.

**DC** Oh, I should think about that, yes.

**Mr K** Is it 150 – it's 150 yards long.

**DC** And it's much, much higher than the river so that's very deceptive, presumably the river drops quite steeply here, does it?

**Mr K** Well, it's all waterfalls, I mean we've just looked at the salmon leaps, haven't we, which were done – constructed some time ago, but a tremendous difference in height. But of course what you can't do is put a water wheel in a river and hope that you'll always have the same amount of water going, because it's different in the winter than it is in the summer, of course.

**DC** Well, as you say, it would have been going into a water wheel, and if we just step down just a few feet further, towards the St. Johns' direction, we can see what's left of the wheel.

**Mr K** It might be better to go down these steps here, David.

**DC** Well, let's take the steps and I shall follow you down, because all this is carefully and intricately built for the miller of those days, and the name of this mill we're looking at here is what?

**Mr K** This is Glen Mooar.

**DC** Glen Mooar Mill.

**Mr K** Glen Mooar and we're looking at the wheel, it's a big 'un, isn't it?

**DC** A very, very large wheel, that.

**Mr K** It's a big 'un.

**DC** Unfortunately in a state of decay now.

**Mr K** Well, it is, yes, whether ...

**DC** It will never be used again, let's put it that way.

**Mr K** Well, yes, it's a shame that it's gone this far, really, isn't it, I mean there's no reason really why this couldn't have been restored in the past, with the will and the determination it could have happened, but I don't know whether it's too late now. The actual rim of the wheel is cast iron and you can see that part of it is cracked ...

**DC** Oh, yes, yes.

**Mr K** ... along there, so that would have to be welded up, but there's an awful lot of work there. You can see the cog wheels at the back, which this big wheel used to drive the smaller cog wheel which used to go right inside the building and do the grinding of the corn.

**DC** And to get some idea, I mean this wheel is quite massive, you'll not see ...

**Mr K** What are we talking about?

**DC** ... I mean we're not talking Laxey wheel but we're talking ...

**Mr K** We're talking 18, 20 feet diameter?

**DC** Probably, yes.

**Mr K** Yes, would that be about right.

**DC** Yes.

**Mr K** And indeed about, what, six feet wide, wouldn't it, you know, the actual

paddles would be six feet wide so this – according to Bernie, this mill alone generated 60 horse power.

**DC** Really?

**Mr K** Yes, 60 horse power, that would go, day and night, all the time.

**DC** And Bernie Mylcraine was really the last miller on the Isle of Man – he's still around of course, but he was the last miller, wasn't he?

**Mr K** Yes, he lives in Peel, and a mine of information, and what a water power enthusiast, because, of course, all right, you had to maintain things, you had to keep your eye on things, and all, seizing up and all this business, but – and you had to do the maintenance on it, but the power was free. Apart from the work, which is a negative thing, the actual – the power was free. You got the power to grind the corn, you got the power to generate electricity, and he was completely self-sufficient here, wonderful, it's so sad to see it at the moment.

**DC** Of course there was also the garage developed at the front and the pumps and so on and you can buy a car here now and there's a power of a different kind, but if you turn round and look at this river here, surely – I know it's summer time but there's hardly any water flowing now.

**Mr K** Hardly any water. Well, Bernie was saying that, in the time when he was a boy, there was fewer, far fewer trees around the river Neb and probably nowadays the water is used by the trees ...

**DC** Afforestation, yes. I mean, you can just, I mean directly across the river and all the way up the bank opposite, it's crammed with trees.

**Mr K** Crammed with trees, absolutely crammed with trees, yes, yes, and they use water.

**DC** They're soaking the water up.

**Mr K** They use water, so in fact if those trees weren't there at one time, well, that's – the water would come down the river.

- DC** So there would be a much greater flow on here.
- Mr K** Yes, there would, a much greater, oh, yes, I would have thought so, even at this time of the year. And further down from this stream, of course, there you can see the tail race here.
- DC** Now what's a tail race then?
- Mr K** Well, the tail race is where the water, when it's finished its work in the wheel, there's nothing in it now, of course, is there? Just let's have a look.
- DC** There's something called a pump room below us there.
- Mr K** Ah, well, this is the tail race here, this is where the water went after it had gone through that big wheel ...
- DC** Through the wheel itself.
- Mr K** ... and done it's work, and then it was pushed back into the river, downhill, back into the river, you see.
- DC** So nothing was – the water wasn't lost, in fact.
- Mr K** Oh no, no, oh, no, no, it was used again. In fact just down round the corner there's the start of another tail race, so it's got some other work to do, the water, so there's no peace for the water in the Neb. No, this is a pump room here, and what was installed in there is a turbine, so the water came through the pipe, this pipe, cast iron pipe, into the turbine, to generate electricity.
- DC** Oh right, so, yes, you did say they were self-sufficient here, yes.
- Mr K** Oh, absolutely self-sufficient yes, there was no electricity up here in Bernie's days, and his father, and in fact his grandfather was born here as well.
- DC** So really, what we've got left are the mill buildings. Now there are other restored mills in the Isle of Man, so nothing – I mean we haven't lost mills altogether?

- Mr K** No.
- DC** But this one, of course, is never going to see any corn ground here again, I guess.
- Mr K** No, I think that's unrealistic, isn't it, I don't think – is, do Laxey do the grinding now, don't they, Laxey, but I mean this was the last one in the west of the Island, and in fact the Mylcraines were the last privately-owned mill that used to do their own thing, as it were.
- DC** Now, this looks like the domain of the cave men or something, where are you taking me?
- Mr K** Well, I'm taking you – I'm not taking you any further, we're just about a few feet inside a tunnel and it's, believe it or not, it's a railway tunnel.
- DC** Oh, that's what it is. I've been in this tunnel before for a previous programme a long time ago, where's the railway track then?
- Mr K** Well, it's long gone, you can see right at the far end of the tunnel, you can just see light glinting and that's the other end.
- DC** But inside and at the far end there is a quarry, isn't there, Sam, or there was?
- Mr K** A huge quarry, a huge quarry, it's still there, the stones are still there and water leaks out of the quarry, comes down through the tunnel here and just goes into the grid by the TT course, which I'm sure listeners can hear.
- DC** Now, hold on, if this was a railway going across here, presumably then it crossed this road somewhere?
- Mr K** It crossed the TT course, yes, before it was the TT, of course.
- DC** Ah, directly opposite there's a bridge there, isn't there?
- Mr K** If we go up the track we should see something else.
- DC** 'Time to Remember' today, I'm with Sam Knight from the Peel Heritage Trust

and we're looking at the industry which, at one time, worked alongside the river Neb. Now we're apparently not very close to the Neb here because I'm in deep countryside and now trying to work my way through some bushes and struggling to get to Sam who's brought me into an area which is just covered with nettles, but, ah – in the distance there a little tunnel.

**Mr K** That is a little brick built tunnel which in fact, well, I suppose you could get along it if you crawled along it, but it is in fact an underground race, an underground head race.

**DC** So this is a mill race here, or was?

**Mr K** This was a mill race, the water was taken off the river Neb, you can see the river Neb behind you, how low it is, from here, but it was taken off by Glen Mooar, that we just looked at, and came along here and presumably, to get under the road or little track, they used to build – they built a little tunnel which is obvious when you think about it, isn't it?

**DC** So that's where the water went, because directly opposite us, of course, is that quarry we were talking about.

**Mr K** That's right, the quarry, there's – the slate was pre-cambrian slate and it was slate which is not very straight grained so it was no good for roofing tiles so what they did was, they quarried it, put it into tubs on this little railway that I talked about, the railway came across under the tunnel, came across the TT course, straight, perpendicular to the TT course, and into, swung right, and into a brickworks where water power pulverised the slate, made it into – and then it was made – mixed with red clay and made into bricks. And these bricks apparently were reddish in colour and they'd got the three legs of man stamped on the side. I've never seen one, apparently they are very hard and very difficult to drill into and cut, but it would be interesting to know if anybody has still got one of these bricks.

**DC** Did this brickworks have a name here?

**Mr K** I don't think so, not that I have found out, no, but it was a brickworks, and it seems difficult to believe now in this idyllic setting, doesn't it, really?

**DC** Well, I'm on a gravel path, as you've probably gathered, with Sam, and we're looking at another mill or what was a mill, of course, because they're all things of the past, aren't they, now?

**Mr K** They are. This is Ballig Mill, and you can hear the traffic behind us, I hope you can hear our voices above the traffic, but we're looking at two sandstone, or slate, Manx slate buildings, one on the right hand side says Ballig Mill, and on the left hand side, it says A.K. AD1848, so at least we know when this left hand one was built. Behind Ballig Mill there was a wheel, and the brackets apparently are still there, the wheel is long gone, and the mill race, the actual head race, came from Glen Mooar, where we've just been, and the water was channelled behind the wheel. Now what they ground here, whether it was oats or whether it was corn, we just don't know, but this was Ballig Mill. We're very close to Ballig bridge which, that's where the tail race went underneath the road at Ballig bridge and in the early days of the TT Ballig bridge was quite a bit like Ballaugh, really, they used to take off, but now it's all straightened out and not near anywhere near as much fun, I wouldn't have thought. And anyway that's where it is, and of course the water was returned to the Neb to do some more work a little bit later.

**DC** All about the power of the Neb, isn't it?

**Mr K** The power of the Neb.

**DC** And that, of course, was a booklet that, in fact, you sent to me some long time ago, and I think I still have, because it was really part of the Peel Heritage Trust and part of the work that you were doing at that time.

**Mr K** Well, it was a walk and we thought that, well, if you've done some research, you might as well let everybody in on it, so that's what we did and it was very successful. In fact we did it twice, one was for the Heritage Trust where we started at St. Johns Mill and the other one was one that – the following day, where we started at St. Johns railway station, because this was once a rail enthusiasts, and we wanted to follow the course of the proposed railway, so that was – so it was slightly different but ...

**DC** Well, you mentioned St. Johns Mill, now that, of course, we still think of St. Johns and the mill area there and ...

**Mr K** Tynwald Mills.

**DC** ... Tynwald Mills, so can we have a look at the mill there then.

**Mr K** We can, we can, we'll go there now.

**DC** Just a trickle of water at St. Johns, a reminder that you're listening to 'Time to Remember,' and today, for a change, we are looking at some of the old mills on the river Neb, my guide for today is Sam Knight, from the Peel Heritage Trust. Well, Sam, we can't get into the mill today but I just noticed outside here there are some sort of wooden things that look like rather broken down goal posts, what on earth are they?

**Mr K** Well, apparently each, you can see that the top piece has got little hooks on them and they were called tenterhooks, a little bit like the hooks that they used to hang herring on, to be smoked, they were, you know, to be on tenterhooks. And this was where, I presume, where the cloth was stretched and dried in Tynwald Mills. And of course just on our left, just by the side of this row of tenterhooks and tenter framing is the mill itself. A wonderful piece of architecture, all Manx slate, you'll notice the lintels over the top of the windows are just huge slabs of slate, and it is in a pretty grim condition but, apparently, it is going to be restored, not to work as a mill, but as a meeting room, but you can see that the building from the road elevation is sort of very symmetrical. You can see the things sticking out of the wall at the top, where they used to load the things into the mill. But the interesting thing about this particular mill is the fact that the mill wheel is not outside the building, it's inside it, so the water was, from the head race came inside the building, went through the wheel and turned the wheel and then went out through the tail race and back into the river again, so it's an inside wheel.

**DC** That's a unique feature, isn't it?

**Mr K** Well, yes, I can't think of any other one. And of course if it's inside it means you can maintain it a little bit easier, really.

**DC** Oh, of course.

**Mr K** And, at the moment, I've seen it once, the wheel turns and it does trip hammers



and the hammers are supposedly to beat the cloth, or beat the fibres in order to sort of break them, to make them stronger. Now I can't understand the logic of that but that – the hammers are still there, the wooden hammers, the pounding hammers are still there.

**DC** Yes, I mean apart from the fact that the windows are rotting a bit on the sills and they would have to be replaced, the walls, the building itself, the structure itself seems to be in very good shape, looking at it on the outside anyway.

**Mr K** It looks much – it's wonderful, isn't it? And this sort of Manx slate is so beautifully weathered, isn't it? And you can see, also, where are we, yes, there's another – you can see where the other buildings were added on, you see up there was a window at one time.

**DC** That's right, you can see where a window has been taken out and the stone, slate, built back in.

**Mr K** If you move even further back across the road you can get a better elevation of it, actually. Let's just walk across the road ...

**DC** Yes, and just to remind listeners, we're not very far away from the shopping centre here at St. Johns, it's just a little further up the road, does this road actually have a name?

**Mr K** I don't know, I don't know, let's call it Tynwald Mills road, shall we – it's a lane really, isn't it?

**DC** It's a tall mill building too, isn't it?

**Mr K** It's a tall – the middle part of it – from the road elevation is very tall, with a chimney at the top and then on either side of it, which clearly were added on later, because you can see the join, as it were, and in fact the middle one has still got the roof – can you see the roof line there?

**DC** Yes, the old roof in fact.

**Mr K** So presumably it may well have been three of the same sort of one.

**DC** It's been extended at some time.

**Mr K** Yes, it has, yes it has.

**DC** But they've managed to get all this same sort of dark brown or light brown stone.

**Mr K** Beautifully weathered stone.

**DC** Very nice stone, isn't it?

**Mr K** Yes, yes, and you can actually see where the windows were, there was a window there, there's a big window there, above where the hoist was, so if only walls could speak and tell us what it was like a hundred years ago, that would be good, wouldn't it?

**DC** Yes, now what I'm intrigued by then, is this little trickle of water, in fact there's a stream here on the other side of the road, as we come across, which goes underneath – I mean it's in a sort of covered area there with old bits of slate and so on, now what is this, I mean it's not a mill race, is it?

**Mr K** It's not a mill race, but the only thing I can think of, the water still comes down the mill race from the river, comes out of the river, comes down the mill race, now if the water wheel stops, where does the water go, so presumably this was a bit of an overflow pipe, that's only a surmise. And it just sort of wells, seems to be welling up under the road there, doesn't it, under the pavement, as it were, and it just disappears and of course it will eventually find its way back into the river.

**DC** If it's a spring, it's a very big spring.

**Mr K** I don't think it's a spring, no, no.

**DC** Well, we've come to a lovely shaded area now, in fact we're looking at a very, very still stream which is the river Neb, isn't it, Sam?

**Mr K** It's still the river Neb, it seems to be following us all this afternoon, doesn't it, really. But we're looking at Glenfaba Mill. We're by the side of the river and

we are looking straight at the wheel which is just the other side of the former railway line.

**DC** A pretty big wheel.

**Mr K** It's an enormous wheel, I ... ooh ... David, 20 feet?

**DC** Yes, it must be.

**Mr K** I think it's probably bigger than Glen Mooar wheel, and certainly in better condition, I would have thought, at just a glance. But we're looking at the arches, there are three arches in front of us, the one in the middle has got a semi-circular top, like a Norman arch, and the other two larger ones, one on either side, have got a semi-elliptical sort of arch, beautifully constructed, absolutely superb ...

**DC** Peel sandstone?

**Mr K** Well, yes, it is, it's obviously slate at the top, but it was built soundly because of course it had got to carry the railway.

**DC** Oh, of course, yes.

**Mr K** You know, which when you've 12½ tons of ...

**DC** Which ran right alongside the mill wheel.

**Mr K** Absolutely, absolutely, right alongside the mill, and in fact the track must have been, what, 18 inches, below the top of the arch, sort of thing, above the top of the arch, so I mean it had to be built extremely strong, and of course it's survived, and I'm sure it will survive for a long, long time to come.

**DC** Now the river itself is hardly moving here at all, in fact it's rather like a pond, isn't it?

**Mr K** It is, it's moving slowly, of course it isn't, the gradient isn't very big here, but of course if you're thinking about the mill, we are standing, we're about, what, six feet above the water level in the river, but of course we are, the water that

powers the mill would have come from the head race further upstream and be taken out ...

**DC** Quite a long way upstream?

**Mr K** Oh, yes, oh, yes, a long way, a long way up there. And in fact just a little bit further down underneath the railway bridge there is a sluice there which is the take-off for Peel Mill.

**DC** Really?

**Mr K** Oh, yes, and it goes right ...

**DC** Oh, there's another mill in Peel as well.

**Mr K** There's another one, oh, yes, that's right. It's not as recognisable as the ones that we've seen but it is still there and it needs referring to.

**DC** Well, if we just make our way up the bank here, just to look at the stonework of this particular mill, we look at, again, something that was pretty well constructed initially.

**Mr K** Yes, indeed, and again it's a little like the other mills that we've seen in that the lovely sort of sandstone has weathered so beautifully, done in a total random way, except most of the stones are, of course, being slate, horizontal, and that tends to keep the water out.

**DC** And it's been extended, somebody's built a brick top to it, I think, as well.

**Mr K** Well, I think architecturally and aesthetically that's a bit of a disaster there – Peel brick.

**DC** But actually it means that somebody's using the old building for a purpose and that ...

**Mr K** Well, I mean ...

**DC** ... in itself is laudable, isn't it?

**Mr K** Yes, I mean it's built, it's an industrial building to be used, isn't it, I mean that's what it is, that's what it is.

**DC** Yes, and it's got new drain piping around it by the look of it.

**Mr K** That's right, I mean people are trying, aren't they? I think we can – just look at the mill.

**DC** Looking at the wheel itself and that wheel, as you say, is a very large one, it was painted in a sort of black tar or some such I think perhaps it was.

**Mr K** It has and round the boss of the wheel at the bottom, they've got one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, they've got eight spokes going out and they really look to be in pretty good nick, don't they?

**DC** It almost looks as if it was, well, some restoration work done on it in relatively recent times?

**Mr K** Yes, it has, and the actual iron rim round the outside of the wheel, the ones that we can see, seem to be perfectly sound.

**DC** Just imagine trying to put that wheel into position.

**Mr K** Well, I think it would probably be done in sections and bolted together, you know.

**DC** Well, of course, yes, but I mean if you look at the central axle and the outer rims there ...

**Mr K** Well, it's all horse power.

**DC** It's a colossal weight.

**Mr K** Well, it's horses and pulleys and things, isn't it, you know. The ingenuity of these people, the people who built these sort of things had got no petrol engines, they hadn't got *JCBs* and diggers and things, they'd just got buckets and picks and shovels, hadn't they?

**DC** And muscles in their arms?

**Mr K** Absolutely, and they were fit and healthy too, weren't they?

**DC** Well, this is of course a footpath here and we've just seen some people, in fact, walking along as we were talking, and as we walk along now, in front of us is the railway bridge here, the Glenfaba bridge.

**Mr K** That's right, we're walking on the Douglas to Peel line, so we must make sure there are no trains coming behind us or in front, but look at the standard of the stonework in this bridge, it is, in fact quite – because it's on an angle, it is, in fact, quite a long bridge, as far as the trains are concerned, what would it be, thirty feet long, something like that, perhaps more. It's almost a tunnel, but not quite, but it's sort of got a semi-circular arch and the stonework is really tremendous in that it's built to last. I don't know how long it's going to last but I tell you what, they'd have a heck of a job knocking it down.

**DC** It's part of heritage, I mean that's what your Heritage Trust is all about. Now your Heritage Trust is at least a decade old now, isn't it? I've enjoyed a couple of walks that you've had, I mean you organised all these wonderful garden visits in Peel as well, didn't you and you're always organising something for the members.

**Mr K** Well, we try and do things differently, I think it's a mistake to keep doing the same things, year by year, because if you do that you go stale, and I think if you do something different and interest people in different things, not only is it interesting for them it's interesting for us organising it, as well. But yes, we try and do it differently. We don't do the same, I think we were the first ones to do the secret garden, but it seemed to be a very simple idea and we take no credit for being first, it just so happened.

**DC** It really caught the imagination, I think.

**Mr K** Well, it did, and because it is such a simple idea, it means ...

**DC** Take a bit of organising, did it?

**Mr K** Well, it takes organising in that you've got to be fairly diplomatic in how you

ask people if they'd have their gardens open, because you don't know how many people are going to come there, but getting the brochure ready is, you know, you've got to be – I feel that it's nice to have a good brochure, so that people will think of it as a really classy effort, and so it was, in the year 2000 it was good, yes.

**DC** I think, from my impression anyway, the people who open their gardens for view, were surprised by the interest that was taken by the public.

**Mr K** Well, I think it was, Maughold have done it, Ballaugh, all sorts of – and church organisations have done it now, because they raise money for the churches, which is fine. But yes, I think they are, I am so grateful to the gardeners, because I don't go around weeding everybody's garden, you get other people to do that, but, no, if you've got a decent brochure and you put the signs out and make it so that people are welcome, they do – because there's a very high *skeet* value in it, you know, as well, you know.

**DC** They like that in the Isle of Man, don't they, yes?

**Mr K** Oh, aye, yes, going through a garden gate and hear it creaking and looking at somewhere that you've never been before, is so intriguing, it really is.

**DC** Your membership, of course, isn't restricted to people from Peel, anybody from the Island can come and join you.

**Mr K** Oh, well, we've got a membership... there's a couple who live in the Czech Republic that ...

**DC** Frequent visitors, are they?

**Mr K** No, I'm afraid, not, no, but no, no, it's all over the Island.

**DC** But this whole business of the heritage of the Isle of Man and people caring for its heritage is vitally important, isn't it?

**Mr K** Well, I think it's – yes, I know it's important because it isn't a question of teaching people about what is there, it's just showing them what is already there. I mean how many of us would have bothered to study the mills of the Neb

if it hadn't have been put in front of them, really.

**DC** Well, you've shown me things today that I hadn't seen before and I greatly appreciate that and I do hope that listeners appreciate that we've been around to see some of these things, perhaps on their behalf, because not everybody can get to these sites, they're not always easy to get to. Some of them are a bit private as well ...

**Mr K** That's right.

**DC** ... and the public can't always get into them. But you've mentioned, I think, to me, that there's another mill yet, and that's down at Peel.

**Mr K** It is, and really people could be forgiven for thinking that it was, was it ever a mill because it's just a sandstone building that's sand and cement rendered and you can't see any wheel, you can't see anything, but it was the mill.

**DC** Well, we'll look at that as the last piece of the programme and we'll clamber up the wooden steps now and go down. The river Neb, and you might have just heard it, it's in full flow, whatever water's left in it at this stage, and if I look out beyond the river here, in the distance is Peel City and the sea and there's a few boats down there and we've come down to what will be the final mill in our programme, Sam, but this is the end of the Neb, isn't it?

**Mr K** This is the end of the Neb, and I'll show you the mill which, if you stand with our backs to the Neb, there it is.

**DC** Where?

**Mr K** There, it's – that's the building there, with the roof on, it's got the *Velux* window in the roof at the far end, with the sliding door, that is it.

**DC** Oh. Well this was, I used to know this as West Marine across the river here, didn't I?

**Mr K** This is West Marine, this is where – it is nothing to do with mills as such but Cyril Cannell designed and made the *P50*, the car, a wonderful little motor car, and he's still living in there and I can see him there by his front door, so – a



wonderful man.

**DC** But looking across then at the other side, there it is, a sort of grey concrete building ...

**Mr K** Sand and cement, rendered.

**DC** Totally, nothing like a mill whatsoever.

**Mr K** Nothing like a mill, so people could be forgiven for thinking well, it isn't, or it wasn't, it's been the store for the Manx Operatic scenery, it's been a boxing booth, it's had all sorts of things in there, but if we just go along we can have a look at the actual mill race.

**DC** Oh, the mill race is still around then.

**Mr K** Well, the water, the water used to come and go through the old, the former power station, the old Peel power station and ...

**DC** We mustn't get run over by this forklift truck, by the way, let's keep over.

**Mr K** Now, if you put your microphone down there you might hear some water.

**DC** There we are, and that was the mill race then.

**Mr K** Well, if we go up this grassy bank now.

**DC** Now we're climbing a grassy bank, we've done a fair bit of that during the course of this programme. Now there's the other side of this stream, ah, now there's some water coming out of a rusty old pipe there.

**Mr K** That's right, that's right, well this is where the water came in from, do you remember we were at the Glenfaba bridge, now just by there, just below Glenfaba bridge, there's a sluice, and that is where the water is coming from.

**DC** Well, it's been a great pleasure looking at these old mills and looking at the power of water which was what it was all about for our ancestors here in the Isle of Man, because they depended on them, didn't they, really?

**Mr K** Well, it was the only source of power, it was the only way you could do it, except by hand, and if you've got a source of power on your doorstep, why not use it. It's a small river, it would be interesting to try and guess how much horse power the river Neb generated, because one, just Glen Mooar, Bernie Mylcraine said that generated 60 horse power, and when you consider it's only a short river, it's remarkable really, isn't it?

**DC** Amazing, really.

**Mr K** And yet we don't bother nowadays, we just import gas and oil, don't we? We import a finite material.

**DC** And here's the power under our feet.

**END OF INTERVIEW**