ORAL HISTORY

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Interviewee:	**Dr Brian Stowell**
Date of Birth:	**6 September 1936**
Interviewed & recorded by:	**Elizabeth Flynn**
Date recorded:	**24 June 2011**
Topic:	**Family matters – early memories**

EF: I'm Elizabeth Flynn.

BS: I'm Brian Stowell.

EF: It's the 24 June 2011 and I'm at the home of Dr Stowell in Douglas. Could you tell me your full name, where you were born, and when you were born, please?

BS: Well, my full name is Thomas Brian Stowell, I was born in Thorny Road in Douglas on the 6 September 1936.

EF: And has your family always lived in Douglas?

BS: Well, it depends on what you mean by 'my family'. My mother was originally from Andreas and Ramsey, and my father was very much from Douglas – the Stowells very much Douglas, involved...his father was very much involved with fishing and with boats and my mother's people, her father was George Pearson Stothard, who originally came to the Isle of Man. He was from Lincolnshire – originally came to help bridge – build, rather, the Queen's Pier in Ramsey. So this was in the 19th Century. In fact, both my parents were born in the 19th century, believe it or not *(laughs).*

EF: What early memories do you have of your grandparents?

BS: Well, in fact, very little, practically zero, because I was the youngest of five children, and there was a huge age range, in my particular family. The eldest sister was considerably older than me. And in fact, I'm the only surviving member of the five. And the...in the case of my mother, she was born in 1899, my father was born in 1886, believe it or not, and this meant that both my father's parents were dead...I can't remember, possibly when I was born, you know, so that err...and certainly my mother's father was dead when I was born, and I can just about remember my grandmother – actually going to the funeral in...from Andreas, and in the snow, actually – that's an early memory of mine. And umm...but the earliest memories are of...well, in my personal case, are of the war, obviously, of going down, being brought out – must have been about five, I suppose, in the middle of the night, onto the prom in Douglas, to see the red sky where Liverpool was being bombed. So that was one of my earliest memories - and to actually see all the windows shaking in Clarence Terrace from the bombing. I don't know how this happened – people have said since, 'Oh, it couldn't have happened, it was too far away...', but I might have made that up. But certainly you could see the fires from the bombing of Liverpool from Douglas.

EF: That must have been quite frightening for a young child.

BS: Err...I can't remember whether I was frightened or not; because it's...since I was brought up in that environment, they were expecting the war, almost when I was born, and it was certainly very much imminent in 1938-39, and it was...I can't remember, actually, ever being frightened, because we were in the middle of the internment camps in Douglas, with barbed wire all over the place – I was brought up in Castle Mona Avenue, and the cafe that my mother...essentially that my mother ran, it was changed into a forces canteen, so we were surrounded by army and air force people, sometimes of different nations, and my sister and I – the earliest, the one next to me, five years older than me – used to go down and watch army exercises of fellows in little tanks throwing smoke bombs at each other *(laughing)* on Douglas beach! And we, as children, just regarded this as completely normal, so....*(laughing)*...so quite surprised that people would think this was abnormal.

And just after the war, memories of the war, there were war surplus parachutes available, that they'd used for dropping cargo and things – not for people. And I was the proud owner of one of these, and we used to use it on the shore, when there was a strong wind, to drag trolleys around, you know, sort of sand-yachting, so umm....

EF: An early version of para-gliding, or sand-buggying....

BS: Yes, it was...

EF: Yes

BS: So the early memories, certainly of the war, and of the forces canteen.

EF: Tell me about your parents, what were their names, and do you know where they met?

BS: Well, Caroline was my mother's name, and in fact, in my second family our elder daughter is named after her - Caroline. And my father was Thomas, Thomas William, 'cos in the Stowell family there's a great tradition of naming the babies alternately Thomas and William, but he had the double whammy of Thomas William. And I think...I don't know where they met, actually, because she was, as I say, brought up in the North of the Island, and to her dying day, she never got sort of settled with dealing with Douglas, which is amazing *(laughs)* when you...most of her life here in Douglas. And so possibly...I don't know, I'm guessing here, they would have met in Ramsey, 'cos she did work, as a girl, in one of the

grocers' shops in Ramsey. I don't whether they met there – I honestly don't know, but it would have definitely been in the Isle of Man.

EF: And what about brothers and sisters that your parents had – your aunts and uncles, what memories do you have of them?

BS: Well, very strong memories, particularly of my mother's side. In fact, my father's side, to some extent, was...has been absent, really, strange, 'cos there's people, virtually to this day, come up to us in the street, and say, 'Hello,'...so and so, and 'Hello Brian,' and I say, well, 'Hello,' and I don't know who they are, and my wife, Julie, will say, 'Who was that?' And I say, 'Sorry, I don't know.' And it turns out to be some cousin of mine *(laughs)*. In fact, here in Hilary Road, this is a cousin on my mother's side, I didn't realise one of the ladies living next door to us is a cousin of mine – for years, for a long time, and umm... So the memories are really on my mother's side - certainly very strong memories of the Stoddart family in Andreas, because that's where most of them ended up. But of course there's a big off shoot in Ramsey, so the big memories, really, of my...the eldest brother, my mother had, George Stoddart, and Jack Stoddart, they were both...well, certainly in latter times, carpenters – very good with wood. Jack used to make his own violins, and I had one of them and, unfortunately, somehow or other lost it. I don't know how this happened – when I was a student. And going down the line, I've got to admit, I'd have to have a list in front of me here, about the exact people *(laughs)*, you got down eventually to Harry, who was the next to my mother. My mother was – no, I've got this the wrong way round - my mother was the youngest – was next to the youngest, rather, Harry was the youngest, but there was a couple in between, and I think one of them died at an early age. But the strong memories are certainly of George, who was...lived in Sidney Cottage, opposite The Grosvenor in Andreas, and my sister Margaret and I used to go a trek every...virtually every Sunday, on two lots of buses – very difficult in those days – this was during the war and just after the war, up until the...into the...I suppose until about 1955, and go and visit the people in Andreas. So you had George in Sidney Cottage, living on his own; and across the road, you had Orry, and his wife, May, and they, of course, had children. And the biggest character I remember, of course though, was Orry, who was a really spritely character. He was the village tailor there, and there are a huge number of stories about him. But George, and umm...my wife has just said a few minutes ago, in a very gruesome way, it's a good job Barbara is not around – that was my eldest sister who died a couple of years ago – because she couldn't stand me blabbing about the family *(laughs)*, because she thought it was too outrageous, you see?

So...and I think this is very much a thing with any family – very much the case of Manx people, think it's something reprehensible about this, but certainly got some reprehensible anecdotes about them, but they were completely normal people. And when everyone says it's a pity those characters are gone, I mean, there are characters now, of course, in a different manner.

George, it's rumoured, was actually a deserter from the British Army before the 1914 war started. I can't verify that, but that was the sort of commonly told story – you can imagine it's very sort of forceful character – mysterious character in lots of ways. And he was devoted to, like they all were, going out shooting rabbits. There were guns all over the place in those days – shotguns on the walls and everything. And to his birds – he had little birds in cages all over the place. And when the war came there was an amnesty and he joined up and survived the entire war. And umm...I've forgotten...yea, he was in the Scots Guards.

And the next one down, Jack, who was a very sort of completely different character, very polite and very abstemious – he was a forerunner of people who were worried about what they ate all the time, and whether the food was pure and so on, and a complete hypochondriac – lived 'til his nineties, of course, and he was, to some extent, in the background, because he was, I suppose, bullied, you could say, in a way, according to my mother's stories, by his brothers – one above him, one below him. But the really mischievous character was Orry, who was ummm....

So Jack was in the forerunner of the RAF - and Orry the next one down he was the tailor in Ramsey, and he was actually conscripted in 1916 'cos there wasn't conscription in the British Isles until 1916 when they were running out of men to be go and killed on the front. He, of course, never had any intention of volunteering, and umm...but he was called up, and the famous story about him was; that....well, just jumping ahead a bit, one of my sisters – two of my sister, actually, had research on some of this stuff, and Orry started...appeared in one of the papers here, as having been in front of this commission which decided whether they should go into the army or not, and in it, it said, Orry Stothard said that he had a young family, and had to help with the harvest. 'Course, this wouldn't be much of a defence, but he was turned...his application to be let – allowed to stay in the Isle of Man was turned down, he was sent off to France. But he said, when he heard this, he said, 'That's completely wrong. That's not wrong at all; what happened was, I was in front of this board, and I told them, 'You 'blanks' are only sending us off to be

killed, so you can carry on with our wives!' And err...which he would have said, actually, because he used to...he's very sort of humorous character – mischievous, as I said, he used to like to irritate my mother very much, who, although she wasn't in an orthodox religious group or anything, like I never was either, or none of us were, in fact, very much a believer, and Orry used to irritate her to death by saying, 'Carrie' – that was her nickname - Caroline, 'Well look, Carrie, if there is a God, he must be a bad bugger.' And she'd say to him, 'You'll repent that on your deathbed', in a very ominous way *(laughing)*, which he just laughed off, of course. So, there were loads of stories about him, and umm...in fact, I – it's conceivable, I was called 'Brian' because of him. Because he was in the Irish Guards, and he very much admired the Irish people, and he was...*(laughing)* what happened when I was born was, I was going to be called Thomas, on its own, and my mother said, 'I don't want another Tommy Stowell.', and she stuck the name Brian down on the form *(laughing)* and I was called Thomas Brian, and Orry, when I was little, used to call me, 'Well, how are you doing, Brian Boru?' You see, he was very much keen on this. And the...although I wasn't there at the time, my mother had lots of stories about...they made a lot of music together; they used to play the melodeon, which by chance, I play as well, as well as the mouthorgan....

EF: Would they have played in the home, or gone out or something?

BS: In the home, yea. But of course there was the...the folk music here had been essentially killed off, really, so they did play, the only one I heard was just a brief mention, my mother, she remembered Jack breaking the strap on his melodeon by playing...what was it now...Father O'Flynn too violently *(laughing)*! So they obviously had a good time, and they may...I think both George, possibly, certainly Jack, as I said, made their own fiddles and played them, each played and ummm. And I remember also David Collister, the politician, was on Manx Radio, was saying confidently, possibly even on the radio, he couldn't imagine people here made their own fiddles. I said, 'Look, you must be joking, a lot of people did. My own uncles made them.'

But another story my brother had, among many stories about Orry was that Arch Deacon Kewley, he was the Arch Deacon at the time, there's photographs of him, he used to read the laws out – the summaries of the laws out in Manx on Tynwald Day – he was there for a long time, and this fellow had the huge beard; and the stories were that some of the food got lodged in the beard and he could feed – eat it again. Anyway, there was this scurrilous story, *(laughs)* he was Arch Deacon –

the proper name is 'Kewley' actually, the Manx names have largely escaped Anglicization, but the correct pronunciation for that is *'Key-or-lia'*, but we'll stick with the English version, 'Kewley'. And he was, again, a larger than life character and he used to have his suits made by Orry. He was very well known throughout the Island for making suits. And he went – used to go to The Grosvenor Pub, and Orry would go and measure up him for a new suit and in between measurements, they'd have a nip of whiskey, and eventually, on one occasion, Arch Deacon Kewley was so taken up with the whiskey that he fell asleep and they had to put him to bed in The Grosvenor for the night and come back and resume measuring the next day *(laughing)*!

So there were loads and loads of stories like this.

EF: Did all these people live actually in Andreas village or where they without?

BS: Yes, they lived in the village. Well, again, that's an amazing thing, actually, Phil Gawne pointed it this out a while ago, that even somebody as young as Phil Gawne, still found it strange that the word 'village' is used here. Nobody used the word 'village' here. Because, as I discovered when I started doing this programme for Manx Radio on Sundays, it was a foreign concept here. So people...people...and I still have a double take when I see stuff like Cregneish village – it's just Cregneish, you see, so...a 'village', what's that *(laughs)*?! So you see, you might not believe this – this is true, nobody ever talked about Andreas village – it was just Andreas.

And so...the...Orry, as I said, was just across the road from George, and he was in a cottage right next – opposite The Grosvenor pub, and I've forgotten the details here, but umm...my mother's people at one time ran The Grosvenor pub, and so they were very much...they were big institutions there.

EF: What about schooling? You went to school in Douglas, didn't you...?

BS: Yes I did, yea...

EF: But your mother's family....

BS: My mother's....well, I don't know about the....well, they went to school at Ramsey, yea, of course I do. I obviously know about my mother, she went to Albert Road school, and of course they only went to primary school, so nobody of that generation, as far as I know, went onto any secondary schooling. And again, a lot of stories about George and Jack

and Orry in particular, 'cos the naughty ones were George and Orry, and according to my mother, they used to go and play truant a lot. And went up the hill towards Ballure, and there was a cottage there, with an old man living in it, and they used to hang around with him, instead of being at school, and again, there's a funny story about this: My mother's – one of her grandfathers, was Jacky Corkish, and that was her mother's father, and there's a terrific picture – I've got a copy of a photograph of him, he was a real old fisherman type. And it's got – he's in this fisherman's jacket with the cap and everything, and a slight beard, and looks really...gazing out to sea, and when my mother saw the picture, she said...she said, 'That was about the only day's work he did in his life, was have that photo taken!' *(Laughs)* So that's a typical Manx comment. So it's...and...but err...she wanted to get a copy of the photograph, so I saw the people in the museum, 'cos for a time, the photograph was in the fisherman's hut (and this chair's creaking here) in the...downstairs in the folk part of the museum. And the fisherman's hut was – maybe still there – but after a while they took it out – the photograph was taken out. I said, 'Why?' They said, 'Well, it doesn't fit with the realism of the thing - to be realistic it's got to be just as it was, and they wouldn't have had a photograph of somebody on the wall.' They say, so, fair enough. Anyway, I got a copy of the photograph, which...and I wasn't quite sure at the time, 'cos I hadn't seen the original photograph, believe it or not, and I showed the photograph I'd got of this old man, sitting outside an old cottage, with old dried fish laid outside on string outside the cottage. And she said, 'That's not Jacky Corkish, that's Jacky Hooden...' And she said, 'That's the old fellow that used to look after George and Orry when they were playing truant!' *(Laughing)* And it was the cottage at Ballure, this was.

And even more outrageously, the...Jacky Hooden is a corrupt version of "Thoyn", and it's Jacky...Thoyn would have been the original thing, which means Jacky Backside *(laughing).* So it was a sort of scurrilous rude name – but that was his nickname.

But this old character used to make a bit of money by pretending he was one of the characters in one of Hall Caine's novels – I've forgotten the actual name of the character. Because Hall Caine was the biggest selling novelist in English up until the First World War – people have never heard of him these days. But he was...his novels were popular with the British Royal Family, he knew...he mixed in very elevated company – he knew all these artists and royalty and God knows what. And people have more or less completely forgotten him these days. But he wrote these novels and umm...all the...the tourists who came here were definitely not

literary characters, and the ones that managed to get as far as Ballure would go and see him and take – well, if they had cameras at the time, which is unlikely, talk to him at least, and he would put on this act, presumably, that he was one of Hall Caine's characters. So this was....this was really one of the stories about one of the uncles.

EF: Did they go on to get married and have children themselves?

BS: Umm...George didn't. There were some stories about some break-up with a woman, but we don't know what was happening there. And certainly Orry...Orry did, and Harry, unfortunately, the youngest one, was killed shortly before the...a few days before the end of the First World War. And my – I can understand this – my grandmother, my mother's mother, my mother always said that she never really recovered from it. You know, was very depressed by it, 'cos it was an amazing tragedy, that umm...it was just a few days before the...the war ended.

So the three of them that were in the British army, they were all in these elite units, actually; the Scots Guards, the Irish Guards and the Grenadier Guards. So my mother was always proud of this, that they were in these elite units, but this didn't wash very well with Orry, who was completely *(laughs)* dismissive of the whole thing.

So I like to think that I've got some of his spirit, actually, because of being a rebel. So he was very much a rebel, really.

EF: Just talking about it; was it Orry that got married and had children?

BS: Yes it was, yes… and some of these children....

EF: So they would have been your first cousins, then?

BS: Yes, yea...

EF: And you remember growing up with them?

BS: Not really, no, no, because we just made these forays to Andreas, and of course, I, as a student, left the Island, and never lived here – back here – until 1992. So effectively I had left the Isle of Man in 1955, really, going to university in Liverpool, and although I was back an awful lot, I pitched myself into – as a...as a pupil – a child, really, almost, at the age of 16 into Manx language stuff; which they were not against, but nobody else was interested in this, you see, so I was on my own to a large extent. My mother was sympathetic,

everyone was sympathetic, but it didn't really...not interested at all, really.

But I was amazed to find out years later that Orry was a great friend of John Kneen, who was the last known native speaker of Manx in the North of the Island. He was from Ballaugh, and 'Gaaue' he's called in Manx, the smith – the blacksmith. And he's...he was a similar character to...to Orry, but he was completely unlike Ned Maddrell, who's the last known native speaker of Manx, in that Ned Maddrell was very modest, holy character, and John Kneen, was very sort of forceful – well, even at the age of 101 or something, and blind, would say - certainly in his 90s – stuff like, 'I was the strongest man in the Island, I was the fastest runner in the Island....', and boasted all the time about what he could do, and had all sorts of, again, scurrilous stories which we won't repeat here, but in Manx as well. So it's...so they were sort of two birds of a feather, really – I could just imagine it.

EF: You mentioned earlier about the difficulty your mother had settling in Douglas.

BS: Hmm

EF: Do you...do you know if she made regular trips back up to Andreas?

BS: Oh yes, she did, I went...we, well, later on, I and Margaret, my sister, went with her virtually every Sunday for years, and to us, or certainly me, it was a sort of penance, you know, 'cos I was bored stiff at all these people...I didn't know who they were, and who was dying, and who was about to die, and....and it was all very depressing *(laughs)*. And of course, I think, oh, if only I'd listened to more of this stuff, you see, because my...my...aunt – not an aunt – May, my...who the hell was she now – Orry's wife, and she had the most fantastic original Manx accent. And my mother had a trace of this as well, actually, in May's English, there were no 'z' sounds whatsoever. So my mother, it's only, the state of my mother, she talked about people going to the 'soo' instead of 'zoo' and so on. And then, what...and May would say, 'What is that, what's that..? You know....and umm.... My first wife, I remember, I took her to see May – this was a cultural shock, because my first wife was...was English. The family had set up here – they were from Wolverhampton originally, and we were sitting there – it was before we had any children – and we both...married pretty young, actually, and May suddenly said to Pat, my wife, 'Get up there, girl, and let's have a look at your hips!' *(Laughing)* And Pat was so taken aback, she stood up and she said – May said, 'And there's good fine hips at you;

and why are there no children at you yet *(spoken in a Manx accent)*?!' *(Laughing)* So she was quite...she was quite serious, it wasn't a joke, or a leg-pull, it was quite serious. So Pat had never experienced anything like this, and was quite taken aback, although Pat was not a shy, retiring person, but it did sort of make a deep impression on her, so that... *(laughing)* it was from...it was from another world, literally, you know, so umm....but.... And of course, their speech was full of Manx Gaelic words, and...but they didn't speak any Manx formally, no.

EF: They sound an amazing family *(laughing/laughter)*.

BS: Well, I think, I think there were plenty like that, really, 'cos I daren't go on to speak about some of the other stuff, which, again, Barbara, my sister, would be deeply shocked that I'd talk about this to anyone else. Orry used to...once a year, put a notice in the tailor's shop; it was a big glass window, and he used to sit crossed legged – traditional style – right in front of the window making clothes, you know. And he put up a sign, 'Back in a fortnight', and he'd get crates of Guinness in, and have a binge for a fortnight – not totally drunk, but he'd have people in from the farms round there, and had a great big celebration, and shut after a fortnight and went back to normal work. So umm....

EF: Is the shop still...the premises still there...?

BS: They're still there, yes, totally changed, but they're still there, interestingly, whereas the cottage was demolished years ago, and there's some fairly posh house in its place, but the original garden's there. And the trees that my uncles planted as boys are there, you know, so the whole garden – it's quite a big garden, with opposite The Grosvenor pub in Andreas, yea, still there.

EF: And what relatives have you got there still today?

BS: I don't think there's any at all in Andreas. The relatives are cousins of mine in...Eric Storr – Eric Stothard, rather, and so on, his family in Ramsey – they're all in Ramsey – and one of them's next door *(laughs)*!

EF: Have any heirlooms been passed down in the family – I know you mentioned the violin that your uncle made – is there anything else that's come down, that's been passed down from your great – from your grandparents and parents?

BS: Err...not really, no, no...

EF: Just the stories of course...

BS: The stories, yes, desperately trying to think now.... Oh, God, there was some plates, but umm...amazingly, I think, believe it or not again, these were...these were stolen when we moved from England to here in....well, I was initially here at the end of '91 on my own. And working for the Education Department, and then my wife and children came over in July – June/July '92, and when we ransacked through the stuff a couple of years later we found some stuff was missing, and these were plates...what'd did they – God, it's terrible, I can't even remember this – plates that were from my mother, quite nice things, and somebody stole them, we don't know...can't accuse the removal people, but somebody obviously stole them in transit. So... No, there wasn't much, but... And, in many ways, you see, my upbringing was unusual, because the... my mother didn't get on with the Stowell family at all. And there was always this rift, and I was used to an unorthodox background all the time *(laughs)*. So that's...being brought up in a cafe, essentially. And while eating very well indeed, but not having sort of orthodox times of eating quite often, certainly in the summer, because it was mayhem here during the summer if you were relying on the visitors here.

EF: Tell me a little bit about the cafe that your mother ran in Douglas.

BS: Before that, my father and my mother had run a fish shop in the esplanade, but this gradually changed into a cafe, and then into a chip shop. And of course, the only recollection I've got is when it re-opened after the war. Well I've recollection as a forces canteen, where it was really rudimentary tea – nobody drank coffee then, and bacon and egg, and beans on toast *(laughs)* and stuff like that. Like a sort of tea shop, really, and then it was a full-blown chip shop in...when the season opened up again in 1946. And this again was quite an experience, again, I thought this was completely normal life, you see, that, certainly with double summer time, it was quite an experience, which they had very light nights, up to eleven o'clock at night, really, and I was again in a situation where other kids – I never talk – I didn't keep it secret or anything, because I just assumed that it was normal, you see, that I could have as much pop – fizzy drink as I liked, 'cos I could just go in the shop and just pick it off the shelves. And we never had any arrangement fixed pocket money, and it was just absolutely casual, and the meal times were flexible, also I was never forced to go to bed at a fixed time, which, certainly in the summer, would have been ludicrous, you see, 'cos we were living in...based at 24 Castle Mona Avenue, which is about 100 yards away from the chip shop, and this would have been....my mother was heavily

engaged in running the chip shop, which was like slave labour, really, but she was very keen on the business, it was her thing, you see, and my father, to some extent, was in the background with this, but helping to some extent, but not really, you know. So it's...so it was a different situation and so it was very, very hard work.

I mean, when I was older I did help to some extent, in that there was a machine for peeling the spuds, which you just tipped the things in. On one drastic occasion I let the thing go too far, and there were virtually no potatoes left *(laughs)*. But you see, other people would have been very angry, but it was...my mother was completely...it was really...sort of a star, you know, it was completely – not laid-back, it was very sort of focused, but... Well, all sorts of things with her, as well, I mean, there was...during the winter, once, there were some painters in there, and a fellow noticed something like a coin on the floor – two shillings in the old money – and she said...the fellow said, 'There's money on the floor here.' And my mother said, 'Alright, take it, you're welcome to take it, it's only money.' *(laughing)* – that was her attitude, you see, which I sort of picked up. We were never rolling in money, and I thought, if that shop hadn't made enough money to keep us, you know, what the hell would have happened? So...'cos the welfare state was coming in, but I mean, my mother was very much a natural Tory, you know, it was very much, you know, you had to fight for yourself, and do everything for yourself, and support yourself, and so... so this was a real experience of...of people in the chip shop – well, certainly her – working from...not very early in the morning, but right through 'til something like one o'clock in the morning, you know, 'cos the place was open 'til about midnight.

And also I've got strong memories, obviously, it was the heyday after the Second World War, it was another sort of heyday after really the big heyday of tourism here which was just before the First World War. Of all of the big band here, Joe Loss and the rest – The Squadronaires, and later on, Ivy Benson's Girl Band *(laughs)*, somebody tried...somebody tried...this was a great thing, the double bass player, a real Lancashire girl, her mother was very uneasy about the girl going round with the Japanese fellow – it was pure racism – and she was trying to get her off with me *(laughing)*, well, I was a student, but... And also the amazing things after the war, at the Gaiety – these are all, obviously, my memories straight now – there was a show that went for several years at the Gaiety called 'Soldiers in Skirts', and it was interesting, actually, because I've just been in Liverpool, and there's the Maritime Museum there, and it's obviously been re-jigged recently – it's fantastic! And there's a whole section there, just

devoted to gay men, in ships – certainly during the Second World War, there's a whole section there devoted to it. Now these – the characters in this show, which is a musical of singing and dancing, were all men, but they were dressed up as women. It was called 'Soldiers in Skirts', and at the time, nobody batted an eyelid about it.

And later on, not now, I suppose, but in the period in between 1949, or whatever it was, '50, and 19..., well, 2011, there'd been all sorts of mutterings about how disgraceful it was, and it was unhealthy and all this sort of...but at the time, nobody mentioned...they weren't worried about it at all, because it was so common, evidently. As a kid, I knew nothing about this. But, what was amusing about this was, I actually had an aunt called Aunt Nellie. She was my father's twin – twin sister – they weren't identical twins, but Nellie, she was in 24 Castle Mona Avenue as well – in fact it was her house, really, that was part of the trouble with my mother – but the...she would come back from this show – she went a couple of times, she was so impressed with it – she said, 'The dancers, the clothes are lovely!' She didn't realise they were men dressed as women. And...but there were all sorts of things like this during the period after the war, 'cos a lot of the entertainers sort of came to the Isle of Man for the summer shows, and some of them stayed here, but there were some terrific shows on, because it had...the Island had more than its fair share of top entertainers here, by accident, because of the war, really.

But err...yea, the chip shop was something else, 'cos they were going – it was going strong 'til quite late on, and of course there was the usual prejudice against it, of people complaining about the...the mess from it, but... But in terms of any riotous stuff, and again, the people don't realise it was quite a riotous thing to have thousands of people here for the summer season, and there was a lot of trouble in pubs here, really. The Empress pub, that used to be at the bottom of Broadway, were regular trouble – there was regular trouble there with fellow fighting. Police would come in and...and *(laughing)* beat up really everyone inside! It was like a Mack Sennett Comedy, some of this stuff.

EF: And we...we think it's a new problem, don't we, it's a modern issue?

BS: Oh yes, that's right. Well, I can say a lot about that in the old times, but the thing about the...the chip shop was, that my mother had a very typical...you could even say Gaelic or Celtic flow of language, and was able to put down somebody straight off, with just a few sentences, you see. So somebody might come in and say, something like, 'We've waited a long time...'

– ‘cos she always believed in cooking the stuff properly, and said these are the best chips in the Isle of Man – best fish and chips in the Isle of Man, and somebody would complain once and said, ‘It’s far quicker at the Marina Cafe – that was the great rival in Broadway *(laughing)*, and she’d say, ‘Well, go there, if you like, you get the chips which aren’t anything like as good as these ones, if you wait.’ *(Laughing)* And if there were some drunks in the queue outside the shop, she’d just go out and sort of look at them and say, ‘Now stop that!’ and they just would, you know *(laughing)*.

EF: She sounds an amazing lady *(laughing)*.

BS: Yes, she certainly was, sure.

EF: Did any of your children inherit her entrepreneurial spirit?

BS: No *(laughing)*! Well, I think...I think, honestly, you...it’s unfair to say that, I mean, I’m err...I’d say, completely un-entrepreneurial, but, if I put my mind to it, I could do it, you see. And it’s a question of what you put your mind to. ‘Cos she was in a situation where she had to, really, and she would have done it anyway. But umm...so that was it.

EF: And what about your own children, can you see any personality traits that have come through from these amazing uncles that you had?

BS: Umm...yes, there’s certainly one of the daughters, maybe, but very..I could say, persuasive in speech and very determined character, you know *(laughing)*...it’s difficult to say, ‘cos I’m forgetting the huge side – my father’s side, as well, you see, because of the really family – the split, with my...between my mother and the family, which really neutralised my father – I felt very sorry for him, really, and in fact, I was the only one, really, of the five, with – well, the four others with me, who stuck up for him. And err...when I was in my teens, precipitated quite violent arguments over this *(laughing)*, because, you know, I said, he’d been sort of neutralised – negated, you know, he just wasn’t strong enough to put up with this, really. So it’s sad – a sad background, really, for him – very much so.

EF: Is there anything else you’d like to add – that I haven’t asked you about?

BS: Well, I’ve just thought of another one concerning my mother. As I said, she was never totally reconciled with being in Douglas. But when she died, obviously I came back for the funeral, the...she was buried in Bride, which she particularly

admired, and the cars were driving along the coast road to go through Ramsey to go to Bride, and it was raining, and very gloomy, but as soon as we came to the Rest and Be Thankful hill, to go down to Ramsey, there was the whole of Ramsey, and the whole of the rest of the Island in bright sunshine. And the people in the car with me, and me, all broke out laughing, because my mother had this thing all the time, which is actually physically true, it's always sunny in Ramsey. And it reminded everyone about this saying, and they didn't have to...nobody had to say anything, you see. And it was an amazing event, and it was the realisation that it actually was sunny. So that was one of her catch-phrases. But it's true, as I said, if you look at the statistics.

EF: Thank you very much for sharing all those wonderful memories with us.

BS: It's a pleasure.