



Oral History

Kathleen Faragher Project

Interviewee: Ann Poole
Interviewed & recorded by: James Franklin
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Topic: The Manx dialect poet, Kathleen Faragher; the Maughold W.I. in the 1950s; Kathleen Faragher's *Song for the Women's Institute*; performances at W.I. meetings; Kathleen Faragher's plays; other writers in the Maughold W.I.; Kathleen Faragher's role as press officer for the Maughold W.I.

This is transcription of the interview has been lightly edited for ease of reading.

AP: My name is Ann Poole, and my date of birth is the 5th of the 3rd 1939. I was born in Wilmslow in Cheshire, but I was brought over to the Isle of Man when I was eight, and I've lived in Jacks Lane ever since, practically, except for ten years when I was away, in the '60s.

JF: And what was your maiden name?

AP: James, my mother's name is James.

JF: James. And so you knew Kathleen Faragher through...?

AP: My mother; she used to take me along sometimes. Like that picture you had of them in the garden. That picture there was taken in Mrs Elvey's garden, and I was only young then, it was before I went to the Grammar School.

JF: So you can put a date on that? So what sort of date for that would we say?

AP: Well it would be early 1950s - 50/51 - something like that; very early 50s. And she used to have a garden party in her garden; that's definitely Mrs Elvey's garden.

JF: That's amazing recognition from what looks like a bush; to recognise that as her garden.

AP: Yes [laughter]. I just happened to remember it. But when you're young like that, sometimes you take it in more, don't you? As I say, I went away when I was 19. I stayed away for ten years.

JF: So what dates were you away?

AP: Well I went away when I was 19, so that would be 1950 something, wouldn't it?

JF: 1958.

AP: 1958, yes. And I came back at the very end of 1967, it was November, so it were just going into '68. I know that because my last child was born in '68. So that's why I'm not so hot on those.

JF: In a way it's quite good, because it must solidify your memories from before that time.

AP: Yes.

JF: And so were you a member of the W.I. only after you came back?

AP: Yes, and I wasn't a member until my daughter went to the Grammar School, the youngest. So she was born in '68, so it had to be late 70s.

JF: So in effect you didn't go to the W.I. in Maughold after 1958?

AP: No. Not until the late 70s.

JF: After Kathleen Faragher's period.

AP: Yes. Because I used to go with my mother on various things, if she was going to the W.I. I'd go with her sometimes, you see. So that's why, but I was mainly younger when I went. Yes, when I was about twelve.

JF: Oh right? And you were allowed in?

AP: Oh yes, I was, just went with her [laughter].

JF: As long as you had to sit quietly down the back?

AP: I wasn't pleased [laughter]. It was probably during the school holidays, I don't know, or possibly it was just for special occasions, like garden parties and things like that, and outings. You see we all liked our outings because there was not much petrol, nobody had cars much. So you went on your outings. Sunday school always had a good outing, you know, and that was why you were a member of the Sunday School, because you went on an outing [laughter].

JF: And it makes sense, because, having done a bit of work on Kathleen Faragher now, the only places she ever crops up are between, certainly, Ramsey and Maughold.

AP: Yes.

JF: And she got as far as Laxey, and maybe as far as Bride.

AP: Yes.

JF: That would be about it.

AP: Yes, because you had to rely on the bus. We had a bus bringing people up from Ramsey to church every Sunday.

JF: Was Kathleen Faragher one of those?

AP: No, I never remember her going actually to Maughold. She would go to the Dhoon because that was the nearest for her, wasn't it?

JF: In the '50s I think she was living in Ramsey.

AP: Oh? Was she not up there yet? Oh.

JF: Yes, I believe she moved there just about the time you came back in '67.

AP: Right. So that's why I'd remember her up at there, wasn't it? So she could have come before then, couldn't she? If I was away for ten years she could have been coming to Maughold church just before. Because I mean there's a memorial, you know, a small tablet to her, isn't there, up at Maughold.

JF: Yes.

AP: You know, it just says Kathleen Faragher 197-something, 3, 4?

JF: '74, yes.

AP: '74.

JF: And just so what did you do at meetings? For those who don't know the W.I., what would they do, in this earlier period in the '50s?

AP: Well they always had the Agricultural Show, and the Agricultural Show of Maughold. They had a lot of skilled people, and they used to get lots of prizes and things. And it was, well that was quite hard work. They'd have plays; they'd have mannequin parades, showing off clothes; we'd have various people coming, always had a speaker doing all sorts of stuff, you know, it could be anything from decorating cakes to, I'm just trying to think of some others. I mean Constance Curphey used to do talks as well. You know Constance?

JF: That was to me Constance Radcliffe?

AP: Yes. Things like that. I'm just trying to wrack my brains about that.

JF: Maybe it would come out in the question of what the structure of the meeting would be. Would it be a talker...?

AP: Well it would be a meeting, to start with you'd have the minutes and any news that was going on from National Headquarters and things like that. I ought to remember all this, I was the President [laughter]. And then you'd have the speaker. You'd have a competition. And

also birthday posies, and everybody who'd have a birthday that month, they would have a posy given to them and sung Happy Birthday to.

JF: That's very lovely.

AP: But of course we started off all the meetings with Kathleen Faragher's song.

JF: That's really quite amazing, the idea of singing her song in meetings.

AP: And you know that hymn was sang to Jerusalem, it was in a beautiful illustrated copy, and it was very carefully wrapped up and left at the Archive.

JF: Oh really?

AP: You see if, I've only got a small house, but if I'd had a bigger house I would have probably kept more of the stuff. But it was beautifully illustrated. It was printed out and it had patterns on it.

JF: And so was that the Jerusalem?

AP: Yes, the one we sang to Jerusalem, the one that she did the words of.

JF: I imagine you remember the words?

AP: I have seen it recently, yes.

JF: Ah good, yes. And they feel very traditional.

AP: Yes.

JF: They must have struck a chord with the W.I. in Maughold in those days?

AP: Yes, it must have done, yes. And we sang them right to the end. I always used to think it was a lovely thing to do. And it was always so special, you know, for us to do our own thing. And we always had a pianist to do it. That was always the main thing. The "Home and Country" is the name of the magazine, by the way. It's always called the Home and Country magazine.

JF: This is the W.I. magazine?

AP: Yes. It's been revamped now, so I don't know, but that's what it was called in those days, "Home and Country," that's what the magazine was. So she brought that word in, you see.

JF: I think it says an awful lot about the aspirations of the W.I., doesn't it?

AP: Well as I say, the, 'To strive, to learn, to teach, to lead, to open up fresh fields of thought, broaden the narrow way, to give and find true fellowship enriching life from day to day.'

JF: It's certainly not an organisation to be patronised.

AP: No. That's right. No they were very forward thinking. And they do put stuff before the Government, and it nearly always becomes law, because they're quite powerful.

JF: And it is a definite voice of half the nation, isn't it?

AP: Yes, and it's definitely grown. I had, I remember, I was given a magazine not so long ago, and it was saying how much it had grown and people were joining week by week. There was quite a vast number of people that were joining each week. I was amazed [laughter].

JF: So were they still singing Kathleen's song? I'm interested to know when it petered out.

AP: It never petered out, we sang it right to the end.

JF: In 2000?

AP: Yes.

JF: Wow! I did not know that. And it was only in the Maughold W.I. they were singing it?

AP: It was only Maughold that sang it.

JF: I saw in the paper that it was through a competition, and other people wrote words to the tune.

AP: Oh right, I didn't know that.

JF: And she was the winner. You wonder if it was just a Maughold initiative to write their own version of the song.

AP: Well probably, because you see you've got people like Nancy Gaffikin and she was a writer. And she put on plays and that, Nancy Gaffikin. So, it was a treat when we'd have an afternoon of Kathleen doing, I can remember them saying what a treat it was for her to do her little rhymes and readings and stories. They thought they were great. I can remember my mother saying that. And I've seen her a few times, but it was a regular thing there, you know, she'd stand up and do her little...

JF: So tell me about that. I've read about the social half hour.

AP: Oh yes, that would be part of it, yes. Social half hour would be when you'd have your cup of tea and chat to other people and things like that. As it got on I think the meeting got shorter, because they always were picked up in the bus, it was probably at two o'clock, and I can remember coming back from school and my mother not being home until about five. So it was a big, long meeting, because, you know, they all have chats. And that's what you did in those days. You find that people get in a car now and they don't chat at all. I mean you used to know all your people, all your neighbours. I don't, we've had three different new neighbours, I don't know any of them. You say hello, but you don't know any of them, not really, because you used to go to the tram stop and chat, you see, and they'd be W.I. members, and you'd chat up there, and things like that. It broke the ice and got people meeting each other. It was very good for Maughold, and the whole Island, when they did the W.I., when you think about it. You're making me think, you are [laughter].

JF: That's a good thing, I think [laughter].

AP: It would be done up in sections, you see, the whole meeting would be done up in sections. There would be the Jerusalem, as they say, but the Maughold one. And then they'd

have the minutes and they'd have a meeting, and that meeting could go on for half an hour or more. And then there'd be discussions about various things, and what they should be doing. And then there'd be social half hour, there'd be a talk, in which, whichever order, you know, they'd be in some order, and the birthday posies, and they nearly always had a stall as well. So, you know, it was quite involved.

JF: And so the social half hour, was that someone on the stage for 30 minutes? Or was that a chat?

AP: That was a chat.

JF: Ok. And maybe as a part of that someone might be on the stage?

AP: Yes, it could be, yes. But that would be sort of lengthened down to a talk perhaps, or something. As I say, it was longer than what we had later on. Ours would be about an hour and a half tops, because people would be rushing off [laughter].

JF: Yes.

AP: These would be, you know, a good couple, two and a half hours even. They made the most of it, and they all looked forward to it. And of course there'd be knitting and things like that, and learning, you know, all sorts of things [laughter].

JF: It was monthly, of course, wasn't it?

AP: It was monthly.

JF: If you were going to have a get together once a month, you make the most of it, don't you?

AP: Yes, that's right.

JF: I'm intrigued by these performances. Do you remember other sorts of performances which were going on, plays or readings or...?

AP: They did do plays, they did, they often did plays, got dressed up and that, yes [laughter]. They did short plays and long plays. That sort of thing sort of died out a bit, but they used to do that sort of thing. And you see not only did Kathleen Faragher, but Nancy Gaffikin would be writing bits of plays and that and they'd probably perform them. So you see there was a lot of members, so they had a lot of different things they could do.

JF: And so do you remember Kathleen's performances?

AP: Only some, vaguely, yes, and she used to stand up on the stage and she was very good, you know, she'd get you thinking. I can hear her. I used to love her, I've got a couple of her books, because I can hear her; she's one of these people you can hear, you know. Some people you can, can't you. That bloke that used to do Letter From America, you could always hear him when, if you were reading anything in a newspaper that he'd written, you could hear his voice. Yes, yes. I do remember vaguely some of her performances, but, as I say, they made you think, and I was always pleased to have known her, even for such a short time.

JF: And the performances, were they very informal?

AP: It would be informal. Well it was informal, it was on the stage, but informally really, yes.

JF: It wasn't as if there was a curtain drawn or that sort of thing?

AP: No, no, no, nothing like that, no, she'd just do her little sketches and things like that, yes.

JF: And do you remember, how did your mother react to it?

AP: Oh she was a very good member, yes. Oh yes, she thought she was wonderful, yes, she thought she was wonderful.

JF: Because it was that sort of thing which we don't have now, because reading her poetry it's quite clear how good her poetry is, and her characters in there are so strong.

AP: Yes, she can, yes, they are.

JF: And it must have been amazing for these people of the time to see themselves.

AP: That's right, to listen, yes.

JF: But of course, we don't have that record of how people felt about it at the time.

AP: No, of course not, no. No, but she was so popular, so they must have always been wanting her to do something. And she didn't mind, as far as I can gather [laughter].

JF: Looking at the dates, she began writing poetry in about 1949, or her first published was just before she came back to the Isle of Man. Which, of course, was shortly before she joined the Maughold W.I., in January 1950.

AP: Yes.

JF: And then it was then about another year until the first dialect poems began to appear. And so it seems possible, or reasonable to believe that she was doing the dialect stuff to entertain on the W.I. stage.

AP: Yes, I would think so, yes, because then, looking back, there was a lot of dialect. If you went to these evenings out anywhere in the country, you know, if you managed to get out for an evening, if there was a bus on, you used to have something like a dialect of some sort. Yes, it was definitely very Manx really. Yes.

JF: It's quite nice to think of Kathleen almost stumbling into this because of the W.I. events.

AP: Yes. I would think so, yes. Because didn't she have stuff printed in the Courier? So I suppose they thought oh, you know, they tacked on to everybody that could do something.

JF: As I understand it, if we look around today there aren't many strong dialect terms which can be used, in Parliament Street, Ramsey.

AP: No [laughter].

JF: You'd have to find the right person. And I imagine it was almost the same back then?

AP: Yes, I would think so, yes. Mind you, there wasn't so many English people over here then, and her roots were in the Isle of Man, weren't they? She must have been brought up here, mustn't she? I mean there wasn't many people on the Island, so it was mainly Manx. [People who were born on the Isle of Man] were a rare commodity [laughter]. There was just a few at the Dhoon, because I went to the Dhoon school, there was a few of us, about three, I think, up from England. But I suppose that was quite a number in a small school, when you think about it, wasn't it? I've not thought about it before [laughter].

JF: But I guess the W.I. could have been quite a Manx alcove?

AP: Yes, yes, but there'd always had the ladies from the lighthouse, and they were always very Scottish, but then they would have dialect too, wouldn't they?

JF: What Kathleen Faragher's remembered for today, of course, is her poems, but she did a lot of plays.

AP: Yes.

JF: Do you remember any of those?

AP: Well I do remember she did have plays, they did put on her plays, definitely. Because, as I say, they had quite a lot of people there, that were very skilled. I mean like Nancy Gaffikin, and there was Peggy Warpden, she used to teach people, I don't know, was it sewing, or something like that? And things like that, so she came from across. So there was a lot of skill, is what I'm trying to say; there was a lot of skill, and there was a lot of people that didn't mind getting up and doing a performance, because it was a big W.I. then.

JF: It's very impressive. I wouldn't want to get up on stage.

AP: No, but they did.

JF: Yes. Maybe it's such a close-knit community.

AP: Well, yes, thinking on it, it was close-knit, because there wasn't many, but then you had these people like Peggy and Nancy and that, all coming over here, and even Mona Buckley, she was Manx born, but she came back from abroad, you see. So they'd all been away and had come back, like Kathleen herself. And they came back at the right time, so they all were wanting to do something like that, if you see what I mean. It's a pity they've all gone [laughter]. Because those were the days, when you'd have home entertainment, wasn't it? It was not like the television and that, it was home entertainment.

JF: A lot of the plays which I've read of Kathleen Faragher's, which I know are W.I. ones, were fun dialect plays.

AP: Oh yes, they would be.

JF: It wouldn't be the sort of environment to put on a serious play, I imagine.

AP: No, I wouldn't think so. No I can vaguely remember seeing one or two, but just vaguely, it's just in the background. But I definitely did, I know they did the plays, and they were very good, because, as I say, there was a lot of talent there for the asking.

JF: And so a lot, a lot of her performances I've read about were with Constance Radcliffe.

AP: Oh yes, they would be, yes, because she was just as good.

JF: Kathleen Faragher wanted to be a school teacher, and of course Constance was a school teacher.

AP: School teacher, she taught Latin at the Buchan.

JF: And she was, as I understand, rather a sharp cookie.

AP: Very.

JF: And, of course, the Maughold historian.

AP: Yes, oh yes.

JF: And I wonder if there was a special friendship between them because through their Maughold interests.

AP: Oh I would think so, yes. Because Constance was very keen on her histories and that. I mean she was Secretary when I was President, and then her husband died.

JF: There are a few poems of Kathleen's about the W.I. Do you know the poems? Do you know if she ever wrote poems about real people?

AP: Oh yes she wrote poems about real people, oh you can always hear that in her. Yes, you can hear it, yes.

JF: I imagine therefore that the only way to possibly do it is to hide it a lot...

AP: Oh yes.

JF: ...or to have fun with it, and to name people in the audience, maybe.

AP: Yes, well they do that in those things in the Young Farmers people at the Gaiety, they always poke fun at all the members [laughter]. You've got to have your dig at the government, the MHKs haven't you? [laughter]

JF: But you don't know any particular people who were...?

AP: No, no I'm sorry I don't know, no. It's just that, you know, I knew that she did it and she was very clever at it, and I always admired the W.I. song.

JF: And she was a press officer from 1950, for the Maughold W.I.

AP: Yes, she would be, they always had a press officer, and one that kept up all the books, you know, the photos and all that. They always had somebody doing that.

JF: They were separate roles?

AP: I think there might have been two of them doing it, but I don't know, I've no idea.

JF: And the press officer...

AP: Oh there was always a write up about the Maughold W.I. Everybody's write up was in the Courier, from all over the Island, oh yes; what Maughold W.I. had done, or Bride W.I. had done.

JF: And so that would be Kathleen's uncredited hand, of course.

AP: Yes. So it would be worth looking at those, wouldn't it? [laughter]

JF: Yes, and I kind of shake my fist at her through history, because a lot of the references to her plays and her poems and what not, are of course un-named. It just will say 'social half hour - a play by Kathleen Faragher performed'. And, of course, what I want is for it to be named, and to say who's in it, but that's exactly what's missing.

AP: No, I'm sorry [laughter]. Well I suppose, you see, they hadn't got the printers and things like that, you know, it wasn't an easy matter. It all cost money, didn't it?

JF: And, so do you remember what was Kathleen like, if that's not too open a question?

AP: Well she was fine, she was. I always thought there was a lot going on behind her glasses [laughter]. She used to look at you, and I used to think, I wonder what she's thinking. And, you know, because you knew she wrote stuff. It was a bit like that with Constance, as well, because you didn't quite know, you know, what they were thinking, nor did they let everything out, you know. Nancy Gaffikin was a bit similar, too. They were all sort of similar people, really

JF: There was no sort of competition between them?

AP: No, no. No, they were, it was just getting together, fellowship; it was, fellowship.

JF: It sounds almost like you were intimidated by them.

AP: Well I was only young [laughter]. Yes, well I would call them a bit steely eyed; steely eyed really. She took a lot in, but, you know, she'd never let anything out. Yes, like a lot of people, they want to know all your business, but they're not prepared to tell you anything [laughter].

JF: Which makes it difficult now to say.

AP: Yes, well it is, I mean I've got a friend, she always wants to know what I'm doing and what's going on, when we meet, but getting anything out of her... typical Manx! Typical Manx! [laughter].

AP: And, well, certainly she was like that, and so was Constance. Yes, they wanted to know everything, but they weren't prepared to quite give out everything.

JF: And so was Kathleen jolly? Because this picture shows a lot of jolly, smiling people.

AP: Oh yes, it does.

JF: Whereas Kathleen's smile looks...

AP: A bit forced?

JF: Yes, it looks like she's giving you as much as she's willing to give you.

AP: She's going to give you, exactly. You're right there, you hit it on the head.

JF: Which is very funny, because her poems are a riot of fun.

AP: Aren't they, aren't they just, yes.

JF: I guess that's the way, isn't it?

AP: Yes, well, yes, a lot of people take everything in. I don't know other writers but, only Nancy Gaffikin, and she was the same. They take everything in, don't they, and then they put it on paper. They don't tell you what they're thinking, but they put it on the paper.

JF: You read it in the Courier the next week.

AP: Yes, that's right, exactly [laughter].

JF: Do you remember her stories in the Courier, towards the end?

AP: No, I don't.

JF: It's very odd that no-one remembers these stories, because she wrote well over a hundred stories published over about five years,

AP: Did she?

JF: Until her death in 1974. But everyone just leaps over them to the poems. And the stories are fantastic.

AP: Yes, I'm sure they are. Did she ever print any of them?

JF: She was working on a book, her obituary says. I assume it was her stories, because she'd effectively stopped writing poems towards the end, and just done a weekly story in the Courier, for four or five years.

AP: Yes. Because she, yes, she wasn't too well, I don't know why she wasn't too well, but I do know that my mother said oh they were worried about Kathleen because she wasn't so well. She was only 70, wasn't she? Was she 70?

JF: She died aged 69.

AP: 69. So it wasn't old.

JF: No.

AP: I suppose it could have been then, I suppose, but you see we're all living a bit longer now, aren't we?

JF: Yes. I'd be nervous to call anyone old aged 69 now.

AP: Yes, I would [laughter]

JF: I've been through the W.I. minutes and if I haven't missed it in the occasional terrible handwriting, in what's written down, she seems not to have been written about, she ceases to appear in the minutes, in the early 70s, and then she is unmentioned at her death.

AP: That was the one big disagreement I had with the W.I., because if you missed paying a subscription they forgot about you. Now I remember the Mothers Union, and we don't forget our members, and so we visit them. But they wouldn't do that. I can remember being quite cross about it. They just forgot you, which I thought was terrible.

JF: And so even though, of course, everyone in the room would have known this lady who would have been there a year, two years before, because she wasn't a W.I. member when she passed away she wouldn't have been mentioned?

AP: They wouldn't have even stood in silence for her.

JF: Well that makes sense, at least explains the minutes.

AP: Yes.

JF: At least that isn't a falling out.

AP: No, she didn't fall out, that would be because she hadn't paid her subscription.

JF: And that would have been because she was ill; on the way out, as it were.

AP: I used to think that was terrible. But there you go.

JF: Well that's about it for my questions.

AP: Well I hope I've been of some help.

JF: You really have. As we have discussed about it being very important in her writing, the W.I. It's a very important. If you were to look at why she wrote, the reason seems to be for the Courier, and for the W.I., and so if you are telling her story as a writer, you've got to represent those two. It's been very nice to speak to you as a W.I. lady, so thank you very much.

AP: Oh you're welcome.

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