

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

‘TIME TO REMEMBER’

Interviewee: Mr Eddie Clague

Date of birth: 1905

Place of birth:

Interviewer: David Callister

Recorded by: David Callister

Date recorded: No recording date

Topic(s): Early school memories
Memories of WWI memories
Gardener for General Stevenson
Working for the Post Office
Gardener for the Buchan School
Gardener for Castletown Commissioners
Winning flower show competitions
Cycling at the age of 80
Attending Sunday School
Memories of WWII
Collecting farmyard manure and wrack
Various fruit and tree varieties
Visiting parks and flower shows in the UK

Eddie Clague - Mr C
David Callister - DC

DC Eddie Clague, who was born in 1905, we're here at *Abbotswood* on Crossag Road, in Ballasalla, and Eddie was the wonder baby, he tells me, how did you come to be the wonder baby, Eddie?

Mr C Mum hadn't ... of course Dad had died and then I was born and of course they didn't know I was going to be born and it was rather a surprise, considering it must have been before ...

DC Before he died, yes. So he died young, did he?

Mr C 39, I think he was, yes.

DC Right. So you've lasted a long time then.

Mr C Yes, and played the world, played the world, oh, yes.

DC So your first memories will be what, going to school, I suppose, will they?

Mr C Oh, yes, well I went to school, now it's a little church, down on the quay.

DC I know it, yes.

Mr C And we done our lessons then, in sand.

DC In sand.

Mr C Little boxes of sand, yes, and that was the first of doing figures and names or something like that, and you had to do them in the sand.

DC Did they have a blackboard and chalk?

Mr C Oh, yes, later. Of course later we went to get, we were given slates and pencils, slate pencils, of course that was good, you know.

DC But the little boxes of sand, then, you could mark out the letters and so on.

Mr C That's right, yes, we did, we'd mark the letters all out in sand and that was the first time we learned how to write. And the school teacher was Miss Cowin. But

anyway it doesn't matter about that, but then we went on to the pens.

DC Pens and nibs.

Mr C It was very hard nibs. You weren't allowed to use fountain pens, nothing like that. And it was, well it was good really, because I was no scholar.

DC You weren't?

Mr C No.

DC You found it hard, did you?

Mr C I would have liked to have been, but I wasn't. I was a 'duffer', but I tried my best. And my mother wasn't very pleased.

DC Well, you'd have been about eight or nine at the start of the First World War, wouldn't you?

Mr C Well, you're a good reckoner, because I'm telling you, I'm poor to ...

DC But it would be about that, though, what do you remember, anything of those First World War years.

Mr C Oh, my mother, of course, had to take in washing to live and took in lodgers and that's how she made a living.

DC Just taking lodgers in.

Mr C Yes and taking washing in.

DC Washing?

Mr C Yes, you know, the rails? And it was a hard life, you know. And then she was going out to some of the toffs' houses, I shouldn't say it ... eh ... to see her going out like to wait dinner parties, with all, some of the – yes, and she done the tennis teas and Lord Raglan used to come up to the teas.

DC Did he?

Mr C Yes. I used to tell some of the tennis players – oh, did she –he? Yes ... it was a hard life but very, you know, she was a wonderful woman really, you know, yes.

DC And you were the only child then?

Mr C Yes, yes.

DC So you would be spoiled a bit, were you?

Mr C Well, I think I would be, sir.

DC So what got you started working then, I mean you've been a gardener all your life really?

Mr C Yes, what started my working, my mother approached General Stevenson, you've heard of the Stevensons, haven't you?

DC Yes, I have, yes.

Mr C And he agreed to take me as apprentice and there was a very good gardener there and I was, got the large amount of five shillings a week. And anyway I was, from that, I was at *Westhill*.

DC *Westhill*?

Mr C Yes, you had to do things right, you didn't have – if it wasn't right it was all had to come asunder again, like dressing a plant or something like that, you see. And then I had to take the letters to the post office, and we knocked off then at 6 o'clock.

DC It would be a six day week, was it? Did you work Saturdays?

Mr C Yes, yes, we did them days, and when I used to go to the post office with the letters – the telegram boys were sittin' on the windowsill, waiting for telephone messages to come, do you remember that?

DC Oh aye. So there would be a lot of hard work then, in those days, I mean there was no such things as rotovators and equipment, was there?

Mr C And there was no such thing as sowing the seeds by electric. Oh, my cousin, George Oates, his daughter married a chap named Craiger [sp ???] out in Surrey, and I believe now they sow the seeds with electric. That's unbelieving to me, I can't stomach that, and you see, because I've always learnt to sow them with the hand, and you know, everything, but ardent gardening, now sir, has become a different thing than when I went to work first, you see.

DC Yes, you'd find, you'd hit some hard ground at times, would you?

Mr C Yes, yes, yes, *Westhill* – there was good soil there though, oh yes, it was. And anyway I was about eight years with [unclear] and then it was sold to people the name of Mr Tongue, he was secretary of the harbour board of Singapore, a very nice gentleman, and I was sixteen or seventeen years with him.

DC Oh, were you?

Mr C Yes.

DC That's a good run, isn't it?

Mr C Wasn't it and then ...

DC You'd be getting more than five shillings a week then, I hope.

Mr C Well, more like rates of £2 and look at the wages they're getting today, you ask them to do anything for £2, they'll go mad.

DC They wouldn't strike a match for £2 today.

Mr C Oh, no, it was, it was hard.

DC So were you planting flowers and shrubs and trees, the whole lot really, weren't you?

Mr C Yes, round the plant, the lot, and General Stevenson was a very nice gentleman,

you know Sir Ralph Stevenson, doesn't he? Yes, that's right, they were a nice family. So, but Tongue's were a very nice family too, and then it was sold then to the Buchan School and I was there.

DC So you went to the Buchan then, did you?

Mr C I must have been seventeen years there

DC Really?

Mr C Yes. I fell out with one of the headmistresses.

DC Oh, yes, tell me about that.

Mr C Well, she made little bits – it was a Saturday night and the greenhouse had to be shut every, you know, and I was up to shut, and she come in and she said this was wrong, that was wrong, and the other was wrong, you see, and I said, 'Oh,' I said, 'I'd better give my notice.' I said, 'I can't do with all this sort of thing,' you know, I've done my best and I do my best, and 'oh,' she said, 'you can't do that,' and I said, 'I can.' She said, 'Who would take my place?' I said, 'Mrs Watkin ...' Did you know Mrs Watkin? I liked Mrs Watkin, and oh, she nearly ate me. And my nail was in my coffin, anyway.

DC Oh, dear, did you give your notice and leave, did you?

Mr C Yes, I was gone and the Governors didn't know I was gone and Canon Stenning, Canon said I was working up the road, I was working for the Commissioners, and I was putting flowers in the roundabout, and he stopped the car, and he said, 'What's wrong up?' 'Oh,' I said, 'I just couldn't stick the woman any more.' And he said, 'Well the place has gone as well as you,' he said. So I thought that was very nice of him to say.

DC And then, so you were actually then with the Commissioners, Castletown Commissioners then?

Mr C Yes, yes. I was with the Castletown – oh, I went with the Castletown Commissioners after, I was offered a job at the bowling green.

DC Oh aye, was there much to do there for them, then?

Mr C Well, you see, they added on pieces, the castle grounds, they added that on, and various places outside that, roundabouts and all, you were always going. I didn't mind that, I enjoyed my job.

DC You'd be stuck a bit in the winter then for outdoor work.

Mr C Well, I used to go out in the streets and brush the streets, yes, yes I did, and I don't know about them doing it after I left, I don't think so. But it was very good.

DC Did you ever get interested in any particular flower like roses or ...

Mr C Yes, dahlias.

DC Oh, dahlias.

Mr C Yes.

DC Why dahlias?

Mr C Well, I was showing dahlias, you know, for the boss, you see, this was Mr Tongue, and he said, he wouldn't go ... although he owned the place, he wouldn't go to the show, when you would come back and he'd say, 'How did your dahlias get on, Eddie?' 'Oh,' I said, 'I can't compete against that fellow,' you know, with all the varieties he had. So the next thing he said, 'Would I like to have twelve big dahlias,' and I said, 'I would very much,' and he bought the little tubers and I nursed them as if they were babies (*laughter*) and they must have been 12 inches across, yes, when – oh they were – a big photo in the paper of them and all the rest of it, oh aye. We had vines, you see, oh aye, black ones and green ones, and I got first prize – I'd beat Billown with a bunch of green grapes ...

DC Did you?

Mr C ... at the show, oh aye.

DC And were they wine grapes or edible?

Mr C Edible, well, they could be made wine, I suppose, too, yes.

DC Because they're not easy to deal with grapes, are they?

Mr C Well, it's a lot of work with them, you see, and we had a bug, a little insect, we call the mealy bug, and it was a curse, you couldn't get rid of it, yes, we used to try and we done everything, we couldn't get rid of it, no.

DC Well, gardeners have always had certain problems with soils and plants and so on, I mean, it's a constant thing, isn't it, for gardeners.

Mr C It's really the gardens are gone. My cousin comes and tells me about the wonders he's gone [done ?], you know, he's just retired quite a bit ago, from the Met [Meteorological] office and they've got all sorts. I said, 'Dennis, if I go back to my garden I wouldn't know, there's so many things,' yes, and it's true, you see, they've got everything now.

DC All the sprays and chemicals, you mean.

Mr C Yes, yes.

DC So you'd not have been using any of those then, would you?

Mr C Well, used one for greenfly, you had to do that.

DC The competition then – there was a lot of competition between gardeners, wasn't there, to get the giant marrows or whatever, you'll not have bothered with them, I suppose, will you?

Mr C Oh, yes, well the boss said to me when he was there first and he allowed them to have the show in the park and he said, 'What are you going to put in the show, Eddie?' 'Well,' I said, 'I wasn't prepared, we didn't use to show.' 'Oh, put something in, Eddie,' he said. So I had a couple of marrows, little, lovely ones, *Moore's Cream*, it was called, and I put them in and I got First with them, that's the First, but we used to grow a lot of marrows for jam for people in years gone by, they don't do that now, I suppose, marrow jam. Used to make a lot of

those, grew a lot of big ones, I don't know, the big, big ones.

DC So you were in Castletown living all this time then really, were you?

Mr C Yes, yes, I was in Castletown.

DC Did you drive a car?

Mr C No.

DC Did you ride a bike?

Mr C Oh, aye, I like a bike and then I put it aside when I was 80.

DC When you were 80, right.

Mr C I said to myself, you're a nuisance, Clague, to yourself, I couldn't get on and off, and for the other people outside of me.

DC You were becoming a danger, were you?

Mr C So I put it in the shed and that was it. I liked the bike though. Did you ever ride a bike?

DC Oh, certainly, yes, yes.

Mr C I loved a bike, yes I did.

DC Well, a lot of the old fruiterers and people used to have to deliver on bikes, didn't they?

Mr C Of course they did. Charlie Kelly, he was handyman at the Buchan, and he used to come up for vegetables and I'd have the vegetables all ready, you know, a big sack of something and, you know, and they all had to be put on this carrier bike and poor Charlie only had that much to look out.

DC He couldn't see over it.

- Mr C** No, that was funny, yes. But I used to grow a lot of chrysanthemums, too.
- DC** Well, they're very keen on chrysanths down the south here, aren't they?
- Mr C** Oh, well, yes, we used to grow a lot of chrysanths and then for Speech Day you could do the stage up with them, you see.
- DC** Oh, of course, yes. What's your favourite flower out of the lot then?
- Mr C** Sweet peas.
- DC** Oh, aye.
- Mr C** Oh, I think they're glorious. When I went to work first, sweet peas were very poor looking towards what they are today and the one that I've always thought of was one called *Jack Cornwall*, he got the VC for standing at the gun till he was killed, *Jack Cornwall*.
- DC** Really, so they named a sweet pea after him?
- Mr C** Yes, they did, *Jack Cornwall*, and I still say to them, you haven't got the right blue like that, it was a lovely navy blue, it was.
- DC** But they're easy to grow though, aren't they?
- Mr C** Well, not the way they grow them for exhibition.
- DC** Oh, right, do you have a certain special type of soil for them, do you?
- Mr C** Well, you make your seed bed, like a trench, but you see they grow them cordon system, yes, and they've got to keep the side shoots off them and all the rest of it, you know. But my cousin is great on them and he's grown some very, very fine ones since he retired and I'll tell you another gentleman that's got very good and gets lots of prizes, Ian Qualtrough. Did you know Ian?
- DC** I know Ian, yes, very well.
- Mr C** Yes, he always pulls my leg.

- DC** He pulls everybody's leg, doesn't he?
- Mr C** Oh, we used, Cyril Taggart and me used to sit together.
- DC** Oh, so you were one of the three there, ah, now it's coming out.
- Mr C** And we would converse, Cyril and me and he would go, '*Shh, shh,*' for devilment, you know, it was all nice. I went to the Wesleyan Chapel in Castletown all me life, yes. And the Sunday School, the little, in the infants right up to when I was in my teens.
- DC** Did you learn all the Latin names of these flowers and plants?
- Mr C** No, I was never very good.
- DC** You were a bad scholar, you were telling me.
- Mr C** I was, I admit.
- DC** They're not easy to get down to, are they, these Latin names?
- Mr C** Well, I ... don't know ... can I?, but I'd be speaking out of my turn. We're letting a lot – sell these houses to workmen, aren't we? We produce gardens at these houses that must make a man shudder, there's such terrible left at the builders, and that's why the gardens are not getting done right.
- DC** Yes, just full of stones and bricks and things.
- Mr C** Aye, they're not bothering you see, and I think they should be helped someway, I don't know. A person that goes in a house, you're very proud when you go in a house ...
- DC** Yes, of course. If you own it, at least, anyway.
- Mr C** Oh, aye, I know I've been speaking to ones like that and their husbands slaving in the garden.
- DC** During the Second War here in Castletown, or in the south, were people

growing, using their gardens to grow their vegetables, their food and so on as part of the war effort, were they?

Mr C Yes, there was a gentleman, a college gentleman, named Mr Paul and he used to provide things for the working man, like perhaps a spade or – and you see it was very good, yes.

DC Did they put you in the Home Guard?

Mr C No, I was in the AFS.

DC Oh, the AFS, aye, Auxiliary Fire Service.

Mr C Yes.

DC Did you attend any fires?

Mr C Yes, one up the mountain and Harry Cubbon – you didn't know Harry at all, did you?

DC No.

Mr C He had the garage up in Castletown, and we had no right thing – all our equipment was on a lorry and we were all sitting on top of it, like that, we had nothing, and the lights were poor on the car and we went up the mountain, we went over it once, the side of the mountain, only that there was the weight on the back we'd have been gone. *(laughter)*

DC It didn't turn over then?

Mr C No, we managed to get back, but it was funny that, how things happen, isn't it, yes?

DC Just going back to the gardening, what sort of manures were you using on crops and plants and so on, I mean vegetables would need one kind and flowers another.

Mr C Oh, you couldn't beat the farmyard stuff.

DC You couldn't?

Mr C And it's priceless now.

DC Well, you'd get plenty in those days, would you, in your time?

Mr C Well, you couldn't get plenty but you could get – we were lucky, we used to get it from a farm over Scarlett, Knock Rushen. Had to cart it in the barrow, and my word, it's good stuff. I reckon there's far too much fertilisers used, you see the potatoes haven't got the same taste, have they?

DC No they haven't, no.

Mr C No, and lots of things, you see.

DC So was less manure put in, in those days, then, was there, in your time?

Mr C No, no, there was a pretty good lot of manure put in. I know I said to one man, I was only a young feller then, and I said, 'You haven't got enough muck in these ...'

DC In the ridges?

Mr C He said, 'You'd better come up and fill it then,' he said, (*laughter*) I don't know, I told him straight, I didn't know [unclear] and these are all laughing, (*laughter*) I was a smart order.

DC Did you ever, did you use compost?

Mr C Oh, a lot, yes.

DC What did you put into the compost, just the garden waste, was it?

Mr C Well, you see *Westhill* was trees, and all those trees were all swept up.

DC It would be the leaves mostly, would it?

Mr C Oh, the leaves they were, and we always made a heap right down the woods that

it wouldn't smell at the house, you see, aye. And we – and that would be all put all together all the summer and then at about the end of the summer we used to get big cartload of wrack and spread that over the top and that rotted right down. Oh, talking of the – that's Manx – it'd knock the head off you, it was as smelly as, as bad as farmyard manure.

DC Aye, that was bad, wasn't it?

Mr C Oh, it was good stuff, yes, but that was very good stuff.

DC Were there any jobs you didn't like in the garden?

Mr C Well, such as a lot of scuffling.

DC What's that?

Mr C Using the hoe, yes, and the paths ... 'course they weren't like they are today, tarmacadam, they were gravel. Gravel paths, weeds coming up and I had to do, go round, and you know, look after that. And well, I used to do it all right, but they soon come up through the ... weed again.

DC Yes, very quick. This is the thing about gardening, weeds, isn't it, really? Today they seem to put mulches down, don't they, and try and stop the weeds.

Mr C So they say, where they put ...

DC Chippings.

Mr C ... and they put something, layer of something and the weeds can't get through, or something. Well, that wasn't in when I was ...

DC You've pulled a few weeds in your time then?

Mr C I've pulled – the one weed that was an awful difficulty was the one called a *Bishop's weed*. Oh, it was a curse, *Convolvulus* was bad.

DC *Convolvulus*, yes, was another.

Mr C But that was worse than *Convolvulus*, you couldn't get to the end of it, no, an awful nuisance of a thing it was. Mr Johnson was the forester when I was there, you won't remember him, perhaps, but he was a lovely gentleman and we got very friendly with him and he used to – he produced one apple, he grew it himself, by jove, a lovely eating apple, but it wouldn't keep.

DC What variety was that?

Mr C He called it *Johnson's* seedling – yes, he was the forester, aye. And there was a feller, I don't know, did you know Dougie Joyce, in Ballasalla.

DC I didn't know him but I've heard the name.

Mr C Well, poor feller, he's dead and gone now, well, he brought an apple to the bowling green one day and he said, 'What do you think of this?' I said, 'It's lovely,' and he said, 'it's ...' you know, it was *Bramley* seedling, or something. I said, 'That's not *Bramley* seedling.' He said, 'It is, I bought it as such,' you know. And I said, 'Well, if you don't mind telling ya, it's *Johnson's* seedling.' He wouldn't have it, he went over to Harry Craine, did you know Harry Craine? And he came with the same words as me.

DC Yes, it was a *Johnson*.

Mr C Oh, yes, by jove, it was a lovely apple. Well, in the garden, when I started, there was one tree called the gardener's tree, for gardeners.

DC Oh, what sort of tree was that?

Mr C Apple.

DC Oh, an apple tree, yes.

Mr C It was for – and you see we could have that apple.

DC Was that an eating apple or a cooker?

Mr C I think it was perhaps a dual purpose one, that sort, yes. And we'd one apple there and it was a glorious eating apple, yessir, and General Stevenson, at the

time, didn't know it neither, so he sent it away to be named, and it came back and the name was *Stubbard*, that was the name, by the ...

DC It was good?

Mr C Lovely and we made a sunk garden at *Westhill*, you see, Mr Tongue, and that was a feature in the garden, was coming out over the garden and there was certain blooms, it was lovely, but the wind blew it out one – so that was the end of *Stubbard*, but it was, oh, you would have liked to have eaten that.

DC We've talked about apples, I mean we grow cherries here, we'd grow various things like that, have you ever seen anybody growing oranges and lemons here?

Mr C Well, I never did, but I was in a house one day, in a garden one day, and this chap was wanting me to look at his shrubs, you see, and he said, will you come into the greenhouse, and you know the sinks that were in the garden, old-fashioned, well he had a lemon tree growing in that, with lemons.

DC With fruit on it.

Mr C Pardon?

DC Fruit on it.

Mr C Yes, and I thought that, well, I thought it was wonderful, you know, yes, and I was invited once to Sir Mark Collett's, Lady Collett – they invited me down and he had something like that there too, but they were nice people. Did you know them?

DC No. There's a few walnut trees about, isn't there?

Mr C We had a walnut tree that the boss planted down the lawn and that produced walnuts, because the kids were watching round, you know, yes they were, yes.

DC Something else that's happened over the years is that, they're now called garden centres, they used to be nurseries, didn't they? But when you first started out, they'd – there wouldn't be many nurseries in the Island, would they?

Mr C The Penny Bazaar, a penny, or tuppence for a packet of seeds, at Ned Leeming's on the ...

DC That was it.

Mr C Them sort of thing, oh, no, no, there was no ... thing like that, but then they've come rife now, there's too many.

DC So you'd have to be raising pretty nearly everything from seed then?

Mr C Oh, we did.

DC Did you ever have anything go wrong on you and get into trouble or anything like that?

Mr C Well, yes, once we did, we used weed killer cans on the tomatoes ... *(laughter)* ... so that was it.

DC What, the whole crop gone, was it?

Mr C No tomatoes. You know they got mixed up, you should have had them marked, the cans, you see, but that one wasn't marked. And one day, I had a young feller with me and we had this rat in a cage, and we thought, aah, there was no dog or nothing so we put the rat in the tank. By jove, the boss came, and he said, 'If you fellows do that again ...' Well, what were we to do with it? What could we do with it?

DC What did he want you to do with it then, let it go?

Mr C I don't know, well, that's the thing you didn't want to do, because they're awful things, the rats, aren't they, you know, anyway he wasn't very pleased.

DC How often would you get to other places on the Island then?

Mr C Pardon?

DC How often would you get to other places round the Island?

- Mr C** How do you mean?
- DC** Well, would you go off on the train and go up to Ramsey or take a look at Peel or anything?
- Mr C** Well, I'll tell you the truth sir, we never had much money and if we got to Ballasalla, that's here and got a little run up to Silverdale – that was wonderful.
- DC** That was about it.
- Mr C** That was wonderful, oh, yes.
- DC** Did you ever get off the Island then?
- Mr C** Yes, I went to Liverpool to see the chrysanths in the various ...
- DC** Shows?
- Mr C** ... in the various parks.
- DC** Oh, in the parks.
- Mr C** Yes, Newsham Park, Calderstones Park and the Palm House, lovely, it was nice, very good. Well, the next time I went off the Island was ... George Peach and Jimmy Ingles, he had a place down by the railway station, you know, and wasn't all the vegetables and all growing on the bank, and Clifford, we went to Southport.
- DC** Oh, right, to the show?
- Mr C** Yes, and stayed with my cousins and I got lost, the first day I was at the show, because it is a lovely show.
- DC** Did you ever get to Chelsea Flower Show?
- Mr C** No, no, but I know a chap, old Field, he was gardener for, what's it, oh, Major Fowler, and he'd tell what he had to do while he was away and left him to do the work, it was amusing, yes. He always went, I think, to the Chelsea Show,

but it puts you, when you went to the Southport Show, it puts you, you're only small here. But when I went in the vegetable tent there, there was good enough stuff, as good, they had as good as Castletown show here, and vegetables, yes, they had, so it's not only across the water. But really, where was it then, oh, and I had an illness and these people I hardly knew heard I was in a hospital and sent me a letter hoping would I come and stay with them until I got better, in Surrey ...

DC Right.

Mr C ... and that was an education. They used to, took me to the show in London, oh, unbelievable, it is, really. We thought we were smart here but we're only poor – that was nice, yes, they were very kind to me.

END OF INTERVIEW