

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

**‘TIME TO REMEMBER’**

**Interviewee:** Mr Laurence Davies

**Date of birth:** 19<sup>th</sup> November 1915

**Place of birth:**

**Interviewer:** David Callister

**Recorded by:** David Callister

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**Topic(s):** Holidays in the Isle of Man  
Studying for a teaching degree  
First teaching job  
Military career in Scarborough  
Meeting future wife  
German battleships *The Scharnhorst* and *The Gneisenau*  
Teaching radio mechanics at Swansea  
Teaching at Boys’ High School and Girls’ High School  
Corporal punishment  
School carol services  
Warden at St Thomas’ Church  
Bomb alert at Park Road School

Laurence Davies - Mr D  
David Callister - DC

**DC** It's Laurence Davies, born on 19<sup>th</sup> November 1915 in Wallasey, but better known as an organist and a teacher in the Isle of Man, but I suppose you'll have early memories of the Isle of Man then, as a child?

**Mr D** Well, I first came when I was three years old, and my family tell me that in my pushchair I was pushed across the Sulby River where the white bridge is, and carried across by some Austrian prisoners of war; to the great consternation of my mother. But we always had our summer holidays in Ramsey. There were two boats a week from Liverpool to Ramsey Pier – I remember coming over on the paddle boats – *The Mona's Queen*. And no problems over the luggage because you paid in Liverpool, or Wallasey, half a crown to the Steam Packet Company and a van came and collected your case and when you got to Ramsey, it was probably on the same boat as you were and it was delivered just after you got to your boarding house.

**DC** Yea.

**Mr D** Well, I fell in love with Ramsey and we had our holidays there year after year after year. And meantime I did a degree at Liverpool University and all of my life, the only thing I wanted to do was to teach.

**DC** Yes. Just going back to Ramsey – what did you do – I mean, how did you fill in your time in Ramsey?

**Mr D** Well, my father spent his time and his mornings on the bowling green on Mooragh Promenade and my mother sat on the beach doing knitting and things and I dug sandcastles and the like in the morning, then we went out in the afternoon, down various glens, the Fairy Glen and other glens. We usually walked there, then came back on the electric railway or Joe's Bus – whichever happened to more convenient.

**DC** Did you boat on the Mooragh?

**Mr D** Oh yes, I've boated on the Mooragh, yes. And when my father – if my father won when he was playing bowls in the morning, I got a bottle of ginger beer, two *Downward's* Ginger Beer – oh a proper celebration! (*laughter*) and sometimes, if the weather wasn't too good we'd have afternoon tea in the *Sinalee* [sp ???] *Café*, which, I think, is a dressmaker's shop now. Well, as I

say, I eventually qualified as a fully accredited teacher – a certified teacher.  
(*laughter*)

**DC** That's how they used to refer to it is it?

**Mr D** Well you have a certificate, you see, a Board of Education Certificate. And I got a job first of all in Liverpool, then in Wallasey, which was much handier, 'cos I could get to school on my bike – crossing the Mersey on a bike wasn't encouraged in those days. And eventually the war came and I was called into the army – to the artillery – and I started my military career in Scarborough on the 20<sup>th</sup> June 1940 – that was the beginning of the end of the war, really. And in the course of my moving from one place to another, I came across Arthur Luft – now of course retired Honour Deemster Luft – he was Bombardier Luft in those days, and we became very good friends and still are.

**DC** Yes.

**Mr D** Eventually I moved down to the south of England and ...

**DC** Back to teaching?

**Mr D** No, no, no – I was still in the army, still – I was defending the south coast of England from the Germans!

**DC** Not single-handed, though?

**Mr D** They must have known, 'cos they never came! (*laughter*) and I got a letter from the University – 'You've got a science degree, are you using any of it in your career? And I wrote back and said, 'No,' so a couple of days later a letter came to the Battery Office saying that Bombardier L K Davies would report forthwith to the War Office with a view to his training as a radio – Radar Maintenance Officer. So I departed there and then went on a long course at the Radio Training School which was somewhere between Richmond and Kingston-on-Thames. And it was there that I met the girl who eventually became my wife. From there I was not sent to look after any equipment – I should have been looking after the radar attached to search lights – but *The Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau*, two German battleships had managed to get through the Channel, and there was a big push on radar, and people to service it, and I was sent to

Swansea Technical College – you’d be there for six months, actually, I was there for eighteen months, to train radio mechanics. After that I went to the Continent – France and then Belgium, and then Holland and finally I finished up at a midget submarine factory in Wilhelmshaven.

**DC** Were you still dealing with radar all this time, then?

**Mr D** Well, I was with what’s called a ‘light aide’ detachment and we did sort of on the spot maintenance on anything mechanical – motors, small arms and radar, yes.

**DC** Right. Radar was relatively new when you first went to it then, was it?

**Mr D** Oh, it was, yes, and the trouble was, when I went to Swansea to train radio mechanics, the civilian staff did basic training in radio, and I had to do the last four weeks which was on the secret stuff. Well, normally, if you’re doing something new, you get a textbook and see what it’s about – there weren’t any textbooks – it was all secret!! (*laughter*) so I had to work late into the night finding stories to explain things that were happening. But after two or three courses I was able to say with some confidence, ‘Now, any questions?’

**DC** Did radar equipment develop over this time, then, or not?

**Mr D** Oh yes – there were new pieces of apparatus coming out and new ideas on the actual size of the apparatus ...

**DC** Yes, yes.

**Mr D** ... and after I’d left eighteen months in the college at Swansea, I then went on to coastal radio – radar and had to put in a big instalment in the Isle of Wight, which increased their range from about twelve miles to over twenty miles, and we got it all finished, handed over, signed and sealed and that night they had their first air raid!

**DC** How did they know whether it was enemy aircraft or not enemy aircraft through radar then?

**Mr D** They had some means of signalling in codes, yes, nothing to do with radar, but

with radio, so they knew.

**DC** Oh yes.

**Mr D** And, as I say, we had an air raid and also they had a sea alert, and they had two great big Navel guns at this site, and they began loading these with little blue bags containing – not gunpowder – I think a bit more up to date than that, but they loaded these and I thought, well, when they fire these, I don't know what's going to happen, but I'm going down into an air raid shelter! (*laughter*) And they got the word, 'Fire!' – there wasn't any bang, there was just a terrific *whoosh!* And corrugated iron was flying all over the place. And then several more *whooshes* and one of the guns jammed. And I was talking to one of the sergeants afterwards and he said, 'Well, I was in two minds whether to fire the gun or not, because we've had practice after practice and it's always been practice round load, and this time it was real, and I thought somebody had made a mistake!' (*laughter*) Anyway, as I say, the war was over and I went back to teaching and my ambition was to teach in Ramsey Grammar School, but nobody would leave. However, one Saturday evening I went down to the library in Wallasey to change our books and I just casually looked at *The Times Educational Supplement*, which is the teacher's trade journal, and there – Ramsey Grammar School wanted somebody to come and teach physics!

**DC** That was just for you, then!

**Mr D** That was for me, yes. So I went home and talked about this with my wife, who coming from London, didn't know anything at all about the Isle of Man. So she said, 'Well, if you think it's alright, you get an application form.' So I did. Sent it off and got a letter back thanking me very much, but that post had been filled – because somebody teaching in the Boys' High School, his wife had a house at Lezayre and he wanted to move there ...

**DC** Hmmm.

**Mr D** ... this leaves a vacancy at the Boys' High School and also a vacancy in the Girls' High School which could be filled by a man! That was at the bottom of the page like an insurance policy. (*laughter*) 'Are you still interested?' So I said, 'Yes,' and came for an interview on the Friday before the Whit Bank Holiday of 1947. Well, four of us were called for interview, the first one to go in,

beautifully dressed, black Alpaca jacket, pinstriped trousers and all the rest of it – he went in. Well, normally, you come back again to the waiting room, but he disappeared, disappeared. Second fellow went in – he came back looking a bit shell-shocked. He said, ‘They were asking me about teaching physics to girls!’ Well, I had no time to question him because it was my turn to go in – great big horseshoe with me at the focal point. And we talked first of all about what the crossing had been like – this, I imagine, was to make sure I could talk in an understandable way, (*laughter*) and then we got on to teaching physics, and then we got on to teaching physics to girls. And I said, ‘Well, just hang about a bit, I’ve applied for a post at the Boys’ High School; why are we talking about teaching physics to girls?’ ‘Oh, didn’t we tell you?’ ‘Tell me what?’ ‘Oh, that post has been filled!’ Well, the first fellow who went in – he was an old boy of the school – they knew what they were getting – fair enough! I was just a name on a piece of paper, so they said, ‘Well, would you be interested in the Girls’ High School?’ I said, ‘Yes,’ and if it’s a help, when I was doing my school practice, I was doing music all the time I was at University – you could do if you were going to teach, and the man in charge taught in four Liverpool schools, and the only day I could go out with *him* was to a Girls’ High School ...

**DC** Oh, right.

**Mr D** ... so, one day a week I taught in a Girls’ High School.’

**DC** Oh right, so you had that experience, yes, yes.

**Mr D** Yes, so I’ve had that experience, yes. So, alright and they then saw the third fellow, and the headmistress of the school came and asked for me and said – congratulated me on being appointed to her school, hmm.

**DC** (*laughter*) So was there something, then, that was going to make it difficult to teach physics to girls rather than boys?

**Mr D** Well I think, in those ... we’re going back a long way, you know, we’re going back fifty or more years, and girls didn’t do many mechanical things – apart from the sewing machine – and I had to pick my illustrations very carefully, the girls wouldn’t know what I was talking about. And, incidentally, I had a row with one of the publishing firms who published physics books and there was no mention at all of girls in them – apart from a windlass.

**DC** *(laughter)* Right, a windlass!

**Mr D** And I said, yes, ‘Are you going to have books which expect the girls will use them too?’ And the answer was, ‘No,’ so we had to use all sorts of domestic illustrations like food mixers and washing machines and the like.

**DC** Right, yes, and this would be new to the girls, as well, presumably, would it?

**Mr D** Yes, because I was not doing a Manx person out a job – there’d been a vacancy there for three years, so there was a three-year gap to fill up.

**DC** This was of course at Park Road, was it?

**Mr D** At Park Road – though I did eventually go to Ballakermeen which was the junior end of the Girls’ High School to teach mathematics; and how I came to teach mathematics is an interesting story. The maths department was short of a teacher and so they advertised for somebody to teach mathematics to ‘O’ level. A lady applied, was appointed, she was given a syllabus and she said, ‘but I can’t teach any of this!’ she says, ‘But that’s ‘O’ level!’ Well, it seems that she thought that ‘O’ level was what it was with *Hornby* and *Meccano* – where the basic set was ‘O’ level! *(laughter)* And so the timetable all had to be revised so that I could help the maths department out of the rut into which they’d got themselves. *(laughter)* Well that was alright because I’d done a lot of maths in my years training, but had one or two interesting experiences there. We used to do what were called ruler and compass constructions – you could bisect an angle simply with a compass and a straight edge, or you could draw a line perpendicular to another line and, in particular, if you were given a bit of a circle, you could find where the centre was ...

**DC** Right.

**Mr D** ... and we’d done this one morning and I was desperately thinking of some possible application for this and the only thing that came to my mind was – ‘Look, it’s our baby brother’s birthday tomorrow, he’s going to be one – you’ve made a cake, you want to put a candle in the middle – how would you find the middle?’ *(laughter)* ‘Please sir, I’d fold it in half.’ *(laughter)* At that point, the door opened and the inspector came in, ‘cos we had the inspectors with us that day. *(laughter)* On another occasion – a bit higher up the school – we had

questions where one line depended upon the line before and the rest, and if the whole lot was obviously right, I used to put a big 'R' on it, to show it was right. If not I would go through line by line and tick it until I came to where it broke down. Well I'd handed the books back, and one girl – very indignant – I said, 'What's the matter?' 'You've marked mine wrong, but it's the same answer she's got!' I said, 'Oh, bring it out here.' So she brought it out. I said, 'Well there's an 'R' for right!' She said, 'I thought it was for wrong!' (*laughter*) She got a degree in English!

**DC** Oh very good! (*laughter*)

**Mr D** Yes, you wouldn't believe it. And err, occasionally I got a bit mystified – the Staff Room at Park Road was at the end of a narrow corridor, and I started to go down it one day and a girl stopped me at the end says – 'Me shoes in the Staff Room.' Well, I couldn't think of any reason why her shoes should be in the Staff Room, so I said, 'What did you say?' She said, 'Me shoes in the Staff Room.' So I went in the Staff Room and we got it sorted out. The question was, 'Is Miss Hughes in the Staff Room?' (*laughter*) Now another interesting – two interesting incidents; girls who stayed in school for dinner in Park Road were allowed into parts of the building, after they'd had their dinner, before afternoon school started – they were allowed into the hall, where there was a mistress on duty; and the other parts were very much restricted. Well, I was going through the school and I came across two girls who were in a place where they shouldn't be. So I said to the first one, 'Where are you going?' She said, 'Don't know.' So I said to the second one, 'Where are you going?' 'I'm going with her.' (*laughter*) And then on another occasion it was a wet afternoon – this was the afternoon break – and there were always two prefects on duty to maintain what law and order they could, and I was sort of the backup, and they came to me and said, 'I think you'd better come, there are two girls fighting.' I said, 'Girls fighting?!' They said, 'Oh yes.' So I went and there – one girl had got another girl backwards across a desk and was thumping the daylight out of her. So I pulled her off whereupon she burst into tears, and I got everybody calmed down, and said, 'Now why were you hitting her?' She says, 'Please Sir, I wanted her to be my friend and she won't!' (*laughter*) So I said, 'Well look, if I smack you good and hard, it's only because I want you to be my friend!' (*laughter*)

**DC** Talking about smacking, I mean, in those days, and earlier, the words used were



the cane or the stick, weren't they – we never heard about corporal punishment as such. But they would still be used – but probably not in the girl's school, would they?

**Mr D** Err ... as far as I knew they weren't, but I do believe that at the Ballakermeen, the junior school, for serious offences, somebody did get caned.

**DC** Oh yes, I remember, I think they used to be sent – in my time, anyway – to Mr McKenzie, at that time.

**Mr D** Oh yes.

**DC** Yes. But the general teachers were not canning.

**Mr D** As a general rule, no man would cane a girl – had to be one of her own sex.

**DC** Yes. Of course you would find at that school – at Park Road – most of the other teachers would be women, anyway, were they?

**Mr D** They were, but, as time went on, more men were appointed, because women had just received equal pay, so they got a hefty bonus, and when we advertised for somebody to be in charge of particular subject, very few women applied, because for the small extra amount, they didn't want the responsibility. So after a time, we had three or four men on the staff, and they were all told when they were invited, 'I was on the staff and I'd survived,' so I was a sort of bait for the hook. (*laughter*) And it became obvious to me that, before very long, I would have to become a form master. And I sort of worked this out with probably the third form I could do least harm there. (*laughter*) But after a couple of years, at the end of the summer term, I was told the Head Mistress wants to see you – 'Oh, what have I done?!' So I went and she asked how physics was doing – well, it was doing very nicely, and she said, 'Now, I want you to have a form.' Oh Lord, here we go ... 'I want you to have the sixth form.' Well, I prefer the word 'dumfounded' to 'gob-smacked'! (*laughter*) But I had no response to that whatsoever! Cor! ... and the September I started with twenty-five young ladies in my care – to get them – felt like a father trying to get his daughter off his hands, because I had to get them into college and university, yes.

**DC** Oh, of course, yes, that's right.

**Mr D** We got on very well indeed together. I can remember part of my opening remarks to them, I said, ‘Look, now, a lot of the people you were with in the fifth form have now left school – they’re in offices, shops, training in hospitals and the like – they are young ladies,’ and I said, ‘as far as I am concerned, you are in the same category as they are, I propose treating you as young ladies – but in return, I want you to behave as such.’

**DC** Yes. That got you off to a good start, did it?

**Mr D** It did indeed, yes – we got on very well together, indeed.

**DC** Any other incidents from this time at Park Road?

**Mr D** Oh well, there was one. It really caught me out. We used to do practical physics – the girls used to work in pairs. And one afternoon, I think it was the fifth form were coming – they arrived and I said, ‘Well now, where is Ann?’ ‘Oh she’s coming.’ ‘Oh, all right.’ Started the lesson, gave them back their homework, went over it with them. Then told them the experiment we were going to do – what we were looking for and all the rest of it. Gave out the apparatus – still no Ann. ‘Well where’s Ann? Where’s she got to?’ ‘Oh Sir, she’s taken her mother to the vet, they’re having the cat doctored.’ (*laughter*) Well, how I went on with the lesson at that point, I do not know, but I got everybody started and I went outside the door and propped myself against the wall and just shook with laughter. (*laughter*)

**DC** So those were quite happy times, really, yes.

**Mr D** They were very happy times indeed, and we had one girl in the fifth form; she had to leave because her father had got a job out at Dubai I think, or somewhere. And after the end of that particular term, when everybody, I thought, had gone home, I found her in the cloakroom sobbing her heart out – she just didn’t want to go and leave us. And, in assembly, the prefects, which are mostly from my form, would sit on the platform with the Headmistress, and the last day of term, the summer term, when some of the girls were leaving, they said to me, ‘Please, do you mind if we don’t go in, because we shall be crying?’ They loved their time at school – it wasn’t, ‘The sooner I can leave the better.’ One other thing, when I started there, we had a carol service up at Ballakermeen, we had another one at Park Road, because neither building had a

hall which could accommodate both lots. When I became warden at St Thomas's, and the vicar at St Thomas's was also on the Board of Education – George Duckworth – so I said to him, 'Would you mind if we had a combined carol service for the Girls' High School here?' 'Not at all.' So I had a word on the Head Mistress and the music teachers, and they thought this was a good idea, and so Thursday afternoon – the end of term, the Christmas term, we had a combined carol service – a united school carol service. Well, we hadn't asked the parents to come, but they did. And the previous Sunday, the Bishop had been taking the service at St Thomas's and he told me about a carol service from a girls' school he'd heard on the wireless – how good it was. 'But,' I said 'it's nothing compared to what is going to be here on Thursday.' Well, he knew nothing about it, so I told him, so he said, 'Oh well, I'll come.' That took the wardens by surprise! (*laughter*) And the church was absolutely packed – chairs everywhere, people standing, and it was a great success, and ever after we had two services, one for the children in the afternoon, one for the parents in the evening.

**DC** Yes. The carol services were a success, then, from the outset?

**Mr D** A great success, indeed, far more than we'd expected. We were almost embarrassed by the number of folk who wanted to get in. The only folk who didn't get there were the Roman Catholics. They wanted to come but the priest at St Mary's said, 'No, you must come down to St Mary's school and have a carol service here.'

**DC** So ecumenical thoughts were not in in those days?

**Mr D** Were not in those days. Well, some years later, we got a new teacher – chemistry, who was a Roman Catholic, and he was given a book by one of the priests and said, 'Well, you can take the Catholic assembly – get on with it!' – which he did – very good with it too. And then, at the time of the carol service he came to me and he said, 'Well, I've got a do-it-yourself on my hands.' I said, 'How come?' He said, 'The girls have said well, if we can't go with the rest of the school, we are certainly not going to St Mary's. We'll stay here and you do a carol service for us.' And I think, the next year, they came down with the rest of us. And I can remember the Head Girl, who was a Roman Catholic, reading one of the lessons, which was, I thought, very good indeed.

**DC** Now, in front of us, on the table here, is an example of something that ties into that carol service, and that's – it's a lovely tray that was presented to you. What does it say on there? Because it's engraved, this, and it's silver ...

**Mr D** It says, 'Girls High School Choirs, December 1973,' and that was the last one before the schools were re-organised.

**DC** And that was a presentation to you after – how many services – twenty years?

**Mr D** Well, if you can take – well, it was about twenty – twenty all told, yes.

**DC** When you started, then, in 1947, at Park Road, who would be the Head Teacher?

**Mr D** It was Miss Naylor. Oh yes, Miss Naylor.

**DC** She was there for a long time, wasn't she?

**Mr D** She was there for a long time, and by the heck, she knew what was going on in her school! She never had to look at the timetable on the wall – she knew where everybody should be at any particular time.

**DC** It's a name that's outstanding in Manx teaching, I think, isn't it, really?

**Mr D** Yes, well, eventually they, after she'd gone, a teak seat was put in the – dare I say – playground at Park Road, in her memory, and referred to as Miss Naylor's teak seat. (*laughter*)

**DC** Yes – but she was quite tough – tough lady, was she?

**Mr D** She was a very tough lady, yes. She stood for no nonsense whatsoever. Oh! And on that topic, but after her time, at morning assembly it was taken either by the Head Mistress or her deputy – there were two deputies, one for Park Road, one for Ballakermeen, and if neither of them were available, I used to take morning assembly, you see. But about a couple of days before the end of Christmas term, I'd taken the assembly because Miss Kelly had been called away for a telephone call. We'd finished assembly and we were just coming out and Miss Kelly appears and said, 'No, they're all to go back in again.' I said, 'What's to do?'

She said, ‘There’s been a bomb alert for the school and the police are coming to examine – go through the place and the girls are to stay in the hall.’ Well, my training – teacher training – never said what do you do when you’ve got 450 girls suddenly loaded on you? Well, I used what is known in the trade as an ‘arrow’ prayer – and the Lord said to me, ‘Well, it’s a carol service two days’ time – you’ve got carols in your hymn book, practice them!’ So we practiced carols – one half singing one verse, the other half singing another verse – the staff singing a verse and the rest of it, and err ...

**DC** That would go on for some time then?

**Mr D** A very long time – I was getting desperate! Fortunately Miss Kelly appeared and said, ‘Well, that’s alright, you can come out now.’

**DC** But, I mean, with a bomb alert today, everyone had to go outside a building, wouldn’t they?

**Mr D** Oh yes, but not Park Road – it takes more than a bomb to break Park Road – the Board of Education has been trying to get rid of it for a long time, but they haven’t succeeded! Other buildings have come and gone! When I got back to my form room – my form was the sixth form and we were on very good terms and they said to me, ‘What was all that about sir?’ I said, ‘Well, I’m not too sure ...’ They said, ‘Come on, we’re not stupid, you know, we saw the police cars out in the road – what’s going on?’ Well, the Acting Head Mistress called a staff meeting and said, ‘Now not a word to the children about what has happened.’ So I said, ‘Well, look, if we don’t tell them, there are going to be rumours – the police were looking for drugs, or stolen property, or what have you.’ She said, ‘Thank you very much – we’ll tell them.’ So we did. That, I think, was one of the most exciting points of my career.

**DC** *(laughter)* It would be exciting for the children, as well, wouldn’t it just?

**Mr D** Well, they didn’t know what was happening – they were just singing carols.

**DC** At this time, then, were teachers wearing their mortar boards and their cloaks and so on?

**Mr D** Oh heavens, no, not at all, when I was there. What they were doing at the boys

school, I'm not too sure.

**DC** But they did that at the boys school, yes?

**Mr D** I believe so, yes.

**DC** Yes, but what about the dress of the pupils – uniform – had to be uniform?

**Mr D** Oh – proper uniform, yes. Navy blue skirt, white blouse, tie, and from Miss Naylor – ‘No coloured hair slides, no jewellery on your fingers.’ And I still want ... I see a lady going by ... I still do a quick body count as it were to see what's on the rings and what's in their hair. *(laughter)*

**DC** I think there's more freedom of choice, now, for youngsters in what they can wear in schools, but what about trousers – were they permitted?

**Mr D** Not when I started, no, but after a few years, the dress was almost an undress – we'd reached the time of the miniskirt, which was more of a pelmet than anything else. And winter was coming on, and my girls said to me, ‘Would you ask the Headmistress if we can wear trousers or slacks or what-have-you?’ And I said, ‘Well, I'll do that, yes, but why don't you wear longer skirts?’ ‘Oh,’ they said, ‘we couldn't do that – it's not fashionable!’ So apparently you would rather freeze, than be unfashionable – and we were allowed to wear trousers. We weren't allowed to wear Wellingtons in school, so, in bad weather, girls came in Wellingtons, and I can remember, alongside the wall with the radiators on in my room were stacked pairs – about twenty pairs of Wellingtons, which looked rather like – looked extraordinary, as though there was a very enormous family about somewhere or other that had left their shoes there. *(laughter)*

**DC** What about hairstyles? I mean, you referred to slides, but there was, in the sixties, there was bouffant hairstyles – were there any rules on girls hair?

**Mr D** Well I made a rule for my own form, which as I say which was the sixth form, that before any girl changed her hairstyles I wanted 48 hours' notice *(laughter)* and if she was going to change its colour, I wanted 60 hours' notice! *(laughter)*

**DC** Why did you make that rule – were you joking, or what? *(laughter)*

**Mr D** Ah, well, I was joking – yes, well, one would appear and you didn't recognise her the next day! (*laughter*) She turned out to be a ravishing blond! Oh, one interesting little item, where the Lord very kindly gave me the right word to say. The physic lab, along with the other science labs, was in a building on its own, very short, a few paces from the main building – there were two steps up to the labs and about six steps down from the main building. And I'd finished a lesson just before break – I was out at break and girls were coming over from the other side, some moving rather quickly, and as I got to the top of the steps from my side, another girl had also got to the top of the steps, and being a very polite girl – well, I taught her mother, so she would be polite, she stepped backwards, and in so doing, began to fall backwards. Well, being the perfect gentleman I clasped her to me. (*laughter*) Nice looking girl, too, and the other girls were stood in amazement, seeing their Physics Master hugging one of their own girls! (*laughter*) So there was a pause – a breathless pause – so I got her on her feet and released her and said, 'Well, thank you my dear, that was very nice, but I don't think you're my size.'

**DC** You'd be getting yourself in the tabloids these days, if you did that, wouldn't you? (*laughter*)

**Mr D** Well, I almost did, because we had the 'A' level exams which are very important, and one girl got her time wrong – she should have been there for 9.00 o'clock on Monday morning, but she didn't turn up. So I got in touch with her mother. She said, 'Oh, the exam's this afternoon.' So I said, 'Well, you may think, but what we think in the hall is that it's this morning – get her in as fast as you can!' So she came in a very excited state, and I put my arm around her and said, 'Look, love, you've got plenty of time to answer all the questions and do alright, so don't panic, just get on and answer,' which she did and she passed. Well, years later somebody showed me the opening page of a ladies magazine where the readers sent in a letter and got two pounds, or whatever it was for it, and there was an account of this and how kind Mr Davies had been to her. (*laughter*)

**DC** Oh, right!

**Mr D** Yes, so I did get into the magazines!

**DC** Yes, but of course, you had experience then, of teaching girls over a longish

period of time, and also teaching boys – what were the differences – from a teaching point of view?

**Mr D** Well when we were separate, the girls – shall we say – were politer. The boys would ask and say things that wouldn't occur to the girls. When we came together, I'm afraid it was the attitude of the boys that won. And the politeness and the like of the girls began to fade a bit. I don't mean that they became outwardly rude, but, what did happen, of course, that girls develop sooner than boys and you'd teach something to a mixed class, and the girls would take it in, and you'd have to go over it again and again for the boys. And so it went on, right up the school, until you got into the sixth form, and then it began to even out. But the girls were certainly ahead of the boys in mental development. Talking about that – we had a girl from Hong Kong who joined us and she had no English. So she was given special English lessons – they would bring her on – this was starting in September. In November I heard her first English, 'Gerr off!!' (*laughter*)

**DC** A good old Manx word, I suppose!

**Mr D** Mind you, she was a bit handicapped because her name was 'Cai Muk' [sp ???]. (*laughter*)

**DC** Oh, gosh! Yes, she'd get some ribbing on that, I should think, from the ...

**Mr D** Yes, probably, but she was a very good worker. You'd put something on the board that they had to copy down – she got it down while the rest were still looking for their pens!

**DC** Right, yes. What were the most important lessons that they had to learn – would you say English was more important than maths, or ... where did physics lie in the importance in teaching really because, today, although a number of the applications of physics we just take for granted, we don't really remember studying it – I don't think many people remember studying physics, will they?

**Mr D** Not even till the next day. (*laughter*) I think, English, to a certain level, is very important – you have to be able to express yourself so you can't be misunderstood. And the number of notices I see around the place which can be heartily misunderstood is astonishing.



- DC** Yes, you've made a collection of them, have you?
- Mr D** Well, they keep on coming into me mind, yes, when people say things which have a totally different available meaning. Well, as I said, 'She's taken her mother to the vets to have the cat doctored' ...
- DC** Yes. (*laughter*)
- Mr D** ... and there's a notice on the buses these days – for people with wheelchairs – they're to back them against the side and they've got the problem, you see, it might be a man, it might be a woman, and so instead of saying – so they say, 'Put the wheelchair against the side,' and then, 'they put on their brake.' Well, all they have to do is say, 'The brake.' And it doesn't matter ... why they made it 'their brake' I don't know – I wouldn't give them high marks for that. And you do, from time to time, see notices that can be taken in more than one way.
- DC** So communication through English is important. Arithmetic no longer matters now that people have got calculators and other means of doing ... I mean, mental arithmetic was very important in your time, wasn't it?
- Mr D** Indeed, and doing approximations, and I used to say, when they were allowed to use calculators, 'Well, I can get the wrong answer faster using mental arithmetic than you can with your calculators.' (*laughter*)
- DC** Yes. Of course, since you left school, you've spent a great deal of time seated at the organ and other musical instruments, I'm sure, but did you get an opportunity to use your musical knowledge when you were teaching?
- Mr D** Well, in the carol service, certainly. But in physics, there's quite a lot about sound – there's a whole division of physics called 'Sound,' which includes how instruments produce their sounds – stretched strings, pipes, you know, flutes and organ pipes and the rest of it, and how a note gets its particular quality. Why a violin and a flute playing the same note sound totally different – how that comes about. And with organs, what happens if you block the end of one pipe – the note actually drops a whole octave.
- DC** Oh does it – just one pipe?!

**Mr D** Well, you drop the whole row of pipes, you see. Each key at the front has a pipe at the back which corresponds, and they have numbers – you’ll find it says eight – that’s eight foot, because it means that the longest pipe in that row is eight foot long. And interestingly, although they have metrication in France and Germany since the time of Napoleon, French and German music is still eight foot, eight foot.

**DC** Is it?!

**Mr D** It is. Well, if they tried to put that into metres, it would be a heck of a job! (*laughter*) And if – a pipe eight foot long is a pipe eight foot long; but if you block the end, you get the note you would from a pipe sixteen foot long, so you can have a sixteen foot pipe which is eight foot long, which is good economy.

**DC** Absolutely, of course, yes.

**Mr D** Well, all that comes into physics – the ‘Why’ and the ‘Wherefore,’ and what we call the *Doppler* effect, how, when somebody goes past you, the frequency of the note changes – rises and falls, depending whose moving, you or the object. And all that comes into physics.

**DC** But did you ... were you able to play piano at assemblies and that sort of thing?

**Mr D** Oh yes. After the business of the assembly was over we always had a piece of music, usually played by the music teacher, but if she were at the other building, then I would play a piece. A popular classical piece – not lasting very long, but, you know, to add to the cultural background of the pupils.

[Mr Davies plays a piece of music by Johannes Sebastian Bach on the piano]

**DC** Hmm, that’s Johannes Sebastian Bach, isn’t it?

**Mr D** If anybody recognises that, I shall be surprised.

**DC** No, it’s not a well-known piece, is it?

**Mr D** Oh, it is, yes, but no one recognises my playing of it!

**DC** 'Be Thou But Near' on a *Bechstein* grand [piano] which, I'm sure, is a pride and joy for you here, is it?

**Mr D** Yes ... hmmm.

**DC** And which do you prefer – organ or piano?

**Mr D** Organ, I think. You've got a much wider range of expression – different tones.

**END OF INTERVIEW**