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| Interviewee: Isa Friel (IF); Willie Friel (WF) | Interviewer: Mhari Telford-Jammeh (M T-J) |
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MTJ: This is Mhari Telford-Jammeh and it's the Seventeenth of May Twenty-twelve and this evening I'm speaking to Mrs Isa Friel, and Mr Willie Friel, and I'm gonna ask them a few questions. Aunty Isa, would you mind first of all telling us how old you are?

IF: Oh I'm just ninety-two and a half!

MTJ: Just! Uh huh, and what about you Uncle Bill?

WF: I'm the same age and actually I'm five days older than she is, yeah, we went to the same school, same class at school all our lives. In Langholm.

MTJ: Amazing.

IF: Yes.

WF: Isn't it.

MTJ: Well I'm gonna ask you about Langholm and I thought that tonight we'd concentrate on talking about the time in Langholm before the second world war, I know there's been quite a lot recorded about the war and stuff and we'll maybe talk about that another night but I was gonna ask Aunty Isa first of all can you tell us where you were born?

IF: Oh yes, I know where I was born in Drove Road Langholm, it used to be along the road where they drove the sheep and the cattle up to the field ye ken for the market, and we used to watch them actually we went along just to see what happened and they used to be driving along, men behind ye ken, pushing them on, and then after that...

MTJ: Where was the market?

IF: Well it was really...ye ken the showground I think at the Castle Home? And we used to go up by the brae that was at the end of Drove Road, there was a wall and we could stand at the wall and watch the cattle and things being driven up the road to go on the Castle Home.

MTJ: Where were they coming from, were they coming from the South?

IF: No they were coming frae a' the sort of farms around. A' the different farms that were showing things ye ken.

MTJ: Interesting! Can you remember any particular...was it kinda native cattle, native breeds?

IF: Oh aye I would think so there was a' kinds o' things like bullocks and they were kind of difficult to push on you know? And there would be sheep and various other things that we always...there.

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MTJ: Fascinating. Be an interesting place to live then?

IF: Oh it was then, yes.

MTJ: Uncle Bill can I ask you where you were born?

WF: I was born in Langholm, in Eskdale Street, Sixteen Eskdale Street, and I lived there for five years and I went to the new houses at Douglas Terrace, which was built by Telfords [?]

MTJ: Really?

WF: Isa's dad was a joiner on the job I remember yes, and I went to the infant school from there.

IF: Which was quite a long way really.

WF: A good walk, yeah, no cars to take us we just wandered on our own to cross the river. Our parents got worried sometimes if the Esk was in high flood we still had to cross, that's what we call the swing bridge, the suspension...

MTJ: I still feel that with my kids if the river's high.

IF: Oh aye it's frightening.

MTJ: And where was the primary school?

IF: The primary school was at the bottom o' the (what d'you ca' that street?).

WF: Free Kirk Entry.

IF: Aye the Frey Kirk Entry.

MTJ: It's called Charles Street now isn't it?

IF: It is yes. And it's no the library actually, and the day centre, but then there was three classrooms in the school, there was the headteacher and two other teachers, and it was very interesting really because I quite liked the sums and things like that [*laughs*] but otherwise there was something I couldny dae very well I canny mind what was it was something to dae with the English, the English parsing.

MTJ: And was that the whole of primary school that you were at that location?

IF: Uh huh, the whole school were there.

WF: I canny remember much about the school I was never a keen scholar, you know I couldny get back home quick enough to get into the wood across, I used to play in what we called 'The Scholars' Wood' which was opposite the main school, across from my house, and there were ditches in there that we used to jump and we used to play chasing up and down the wood. Nothing else to do, no television, no radio nothing like that I didny even have a bike! So we were on our feet all the time, and at night we used to play 'block the den'.

MTJ: What was that then?

WF: Well we hid, one sort of shut his eyes and we a' went away and hid. This was usually along in Eskdale Street where we used to live, because Eskdale Street was the ancient terraced houses and in the back there was the wash houses and the toilets, there no toilets in the houses then you had to go away down the lane to the toilets. And of course the washing house was divided, various families had the washing house, we maybe had it on a Monday, when mother would wash the clothes on a Monday, and use the drying out yard on the Monday and that was it until the following Monday.

MTJ: And was there ever any rows about the women using the...?

WF: There must have been, there must have been somebody doing the wrong thing, you know, but I never heard about any rows.

IF: But we were five before we went to school, you know you had to walk to school then, and I remember that my sister she wouldny go to school, she didny want to go, so this other chap, this plumber that lived opposite he used to take her to the school.

MTJ: Which yin was that?

IF: Nancy! She didny want to gaun to school.

WF: John Ramage was the plumber wasn't he?

IF: He was.

MTJ: So he got the job of taking her to the school! And is that where the pair of you first met?

IF: At the school.

WF: Must have been aye we'd be in the same class. We didny know each other then, boys wouldn't have owt to dae wi' lassies then, no.

MTJ: Even at age five?

IF: No no, we didny think about that.

WF: Even at the big school when we left the primary up to the secondary school, boys didny have much to do with lassies then!

MTJ: Did they no?

WF: Boys were busy playing fitba and fighting.

MTJ: What did you play in the...did you play games in the playground?

IF: Oh yes, aye, we did skipping and ball games and things like that.

MTJ: Uh huh. And what about the boys?

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IF: Rounders.

WF: We had a fight at least once a week.

MTJ: A fight! Fisticuffs?

WF: A fight! Fisticuffs, aye, we had...playing fitba and somebody would fall or trip you and you'd get up and belt them and developed into a fight.

MTJ: And did somebody stop you?

WF: Oh they had to it really got serious the fights then.

MTJ: Did everybody stand and shout?

WF: Oh yeah, 'Go on Willie, go on Tony, go on Willie, hit him Tony!' A' this sort of thing.

[laughter]

WF: Oh aye it was quite exciting. But after that we were best of mates again we're playing again you see.

MTJ: I suppose they were still doing that when I was at the school in the Sixties they were still having fights, I think I had yin myself, yince upon a time. And in that same street where the school was there was the picter hoose wasn't there?

IF: Yes, well no, I think it was the kirk.

WF: Chalmers's Kirk.

IF: And I went to the Sunday school there, as well as the Erskine Sunday school.

MTJ: So you went to tway Sunday schools?

IF: Mm hmm, you went to Erskine in the morning and then the kirk, then in the afternoon you went to the Chalmers they called it the Chalmers Kirk, there.

WF: I used to go to that yin, that's the only one I went to. Chalmers's Kirk, and old dear Mrs...she just lived across the way? I forget her name.

IF: Mary...they had that shop efter...what was the name again, Mary somebody? And Bella.

WF: Miller?

IF: No it wasn't Miller, forgotten what it was...Thomson I think Thomson, Mary Thomson.

WF: That's right that was the name, Thomson's.

IF: They were both teachers.

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MTJ: Where was the shop, beside the kirk?

IF: The shop was, aye, at the end of the kirk, you could spend a penny for sweeties!

MTJ: I think that was the shop that was still there when I went to the same primary school, and they had a big penny tray and on the tray...you got a ha'penny tray and a penny tray, did you get that?

WF: Yep uh huh.

MTJ: And you could get like sweeties. And there was nae cinema, there was nae picter hoose then, no.

IF: No it was in Eskdale.

WF: I used to get gobstoppers in that shop, gey big for a ha'penny, They'd last you a long time.

IF: I tell ee where there was a shop tae at the top of Wapping Lane, Germans had it, they called the folk that had it 'germs' and you used to go in and buy aniseed balls. They were horrible!

*[laughter]*

MTJ: Were they, I quite like them! Cause you sook them and sook them until there's a tiny wee bit left!

WF: They started brown, broon's first one to...

MTJ: And they were blue in the middle.

IF: At the top of Wapping Lane you were on the side o' a hill and you had to gaun doon there steps to get to the shop, it was just in this hoose and they only selt certain things I couldny tell ee what they selt.

WF: I was never in that shop that was the auld toonies side, I was a new tooner.

MTJ: And was there quite a difference between the auld toon and the new toon?

WF: Oh aye we very seldom met, very seldom.

MTJ: There'd be plenty kids in the auld toon and plenty kids in the new toon to play wi'?

IF: Oh aye, we played that game tae, ken, like running up and doon the closes and hiding and what was on the shop windows on the high street.

MTJ: What guessing?

IF: Aye.

MTJ: And did you play any other...did you play wi' dolls and things like that?

IF: Well not a lot I don't think I canny remember much about dolls.

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MTJ: Were the hooses cald in them days?

IF: Oh aye, they only had coal fires.

WF: Coal fires, and no gas. Well you had gas for heating...had gas lighting, no electric lighting.

IF: They hadny even gas on ye ken the ceilings, they were just like lamps.

MTJ: Like Tilley lamps kinda thing?

WF: We had Langholm gas fae the gasworks here, on the mantle shelf we had tway little gas lamps that came up and hang ower, and they had what we used to call (what you used to light again?) kinda cloth little cloth things...

MTJ: Mantles?

WF: Aye, and you fitted them on and you had to light them and they used to burn away and then the gas came and they glowed white and that was oor light. They lasted for maybe a week or two before they burnt oot a' thegither.

IF: I tell you what was in our home at...well we moved frae Drove Road when I would be about four I think, to Parliament Square, which was near the shop.

MTJ: The workshop.

IF: Aye, joiners shop they called it, and in that house we had...the oven was attached to the fire, and we used to bake the girdle scones and things on the girdle, and the oven was at the side, well you had to heat...the oven was heated frae the coal fire, so that was where a' the baking and things went on.

MTJ: And did you have running water and things in the hooses in Drove Road in the hoose in Drove Road, did you have running water?

IF: I canny think about that?

WF: You had stand pipes outside,

IF: Yeah there was further along, stand pipes.

WF: Remember you had stand pipes up the road, up in Drove Road, that was the last street to have stand pipes, and I can remember it's no very long ago since the last one was taken away.

IF: No it's not.

MTJ: You didn't remember having to go as a lassie and carry water?

IF: No.

WF: No, water in the houses mainly, there was a sink and water, that's all.

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MTJ: You didn't have a bath?

IF: No never had a bath.

WF: Aw had a big tin bath.

MTJ: Did you have a tin bath in front of the fire?

IF: Yes, on a certain night.

MTJ: Yince a week if ye needed it or no!

IF: Get your hair washed in the bath and you had a bath.

MTJ: So did everybody have the same night? Everybody the same night?

WF: Same water. In the same water?

IF: Oh I don't know about that! I wouldn't think sae.

MTJ: And you had long hair? A' the girls had long hair?

IF: Yeah, until I was eleven I had long hair. I mean the school photo's you ken that we've got they'd all be long hair, and folk'd be looking at the school photo's and saying, 'Oh what grand hair!' Ken how you dinny think about it but when you look at folk now, they've got kind of long hair some of them.

MTJ: It must have taken quite a lot of looking after though, brushing and everything.

IF: Oh it did, aye and sometimes at the school you'd get them nits in your hair and you'd to...you got a comb, an affa narra comb and you'd to...

WF: Brush it onto newspaper, yes!

IF: Kill the beasts! It was horrible!

MTJ: Were the hooses cauld in those days?

IF: Well I should think they would be, there was only heat in the one room.

WF: I canny remember the hoose being cald, I can remember the fire an all just a coal fire, and there'd be the odd log brought in, and there was only one fire in the hoose, ye ne'er got fires in the bedroom or [?] like that.

IF: There was maybe in some of the hooses there would be grates but they never had fires in them.

MTJ: But would you share a bed wi' your sisters or would you share a bed brothers or...?

IF: We had tway attics and we a' slept up in the attic ye see, and I can always remember this eiderdoon that we had, it was made wi' velvet, and it was a' sewn thegither little patches o' velvet  
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wi' herringbone ye ken, stitch the a' thegither, and that was the cosiest thing that you could have, on the bed.

MTJ: And did you fight ower it?

IF: Oh well, there were tway on us at least in the bed anyway.

MTJ: And you didn't get chilblains or anything like that?

IF: No canny think of anything like that.

WF: No canny remember having [them]. Well my dad was a postman you see and he walked for miles and mile...walking postman, country he did [ ? ].

MTJ: So how far would that be?

WF: Fifteen mile a day he walked. Sometimes he'd get a lift back down the main road but that was his walk, fifteen miles a day so. And he was [?] fit but when he got back in the afternoon he always went to bed cause he's tired.

MTJ: Did he?

WF: Oh he was tired aye.

MTJ: So what time would he start in the morning?

WF: Oh six o'clock.



MTJ: And leave Langham wi' the post?

WF: Leave Langham wi' the post about maybe half seven, then right up the road, walking up the main road.

MTJ: And he would ken everybody?

WF: Aye well, there were two postmen on the Ewes Road, one had a bike, and he stayed on the main road, delivered the houses at the roadside. But my dad, he hadn't a bike, he got off the road at Highmill Bridge and he walked up the right hand side of the river Ewes and he did all the houses on that side o' the river, right up until it got to Arkleton, which is the biggest house in the valley, and he crossed the river on the main road and he went up this country road to a bit called 'The Swingle', and that was the end of his walk.

MTJ: My goodness that's a good walk isn't it?

IF: It was.

WF: Fifteen mile a day.

MTJ: Rain hail or shine.

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WF: Six days a week.

MTJ: Heavens.

IF: Cause when you were in the post office he worked on Sundays.

WF: Oh yes I worked on Sundays, that was just before the Second World War.

MTJ: And what age were you when you started work in the post office?

IF: Fourteen.

WF: Fourteen. I left the school when I was fourteen, and I got a job as a telegraph boy, there wasn't many telephones in them days you see? So my job was to deliver telegram...telephone messages, like telex's nowadays they telex them, but my day they would telegram, and I'd a uniform, a pillbox hat, a leather belt wi' a pouch.

IF: And a bike.

WF: And a bike, a big double bike wi' double bar a super bike I fair enjoyed it. I lived in a little office above the post office...Billy Barrow's shop, that was the post office then and I had a little room above. And if a telegram come in they'd whistle, 'Come on,' and I would jump on the bike and deliver...Arthur Bell's was the favourite bit that's where Isa worked.

MTJ: At the mill?

IF: The mill office, Isa worked there I used to see Isa gey often then.

MTJ: So did you give her a whistle?

WF: Oh aye, mm mhm.

[laughter]

WF: And then I'd to deliver telegrams right over [Whiten?], away to Middlemoss.

MTJ: Lakeburn?

IF: Middlemoss.

WF: Aw right round the back o' the hill, a' them kind o' places.

IF: What's that bit further up? [Dyers Lodge?]

MTJ: Aye [Dyers Lodge].

WF: [Dyers Lodge] Away up there to the Combs. Oh I went to the Combs one morning early, telegram came it at night six o'clock, winter night, pouring with rain, black. Nae lights then, just had a little oil lamp for me bike and the postmaster said, 'I'll no send you oot the night son. Come oot six o'clock in the morning when the office open take it then,' you see? So I did and it was still dark,

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but I knew the road and by the time I got there it was daylight, and the cottage was on the other side o' this burn, you see? And a woman welcomed me and I was so...and actually she gave us bacon and egg beside a big hot fire, I was sitting there, fair enjoying myself, and the fact was the telegram telling the father to come doon to the ten fifteen train and get the chickens, so he said to me, 'Boy, you'll have to help me get me car across this bridge', because he had a little car, I think a baby Austin or something, and he had a little wooden bridge up above the main road bridge and he kept his car over this little wooden bridge well it was on the wrong side of the river, the river was in a right [?] so I had to help him to push the car across this bridge and get it onto the road, and I was laughing saying to myself, I'll get a lift hame, grand! So I said to the [bloke], 'Tie me bike on the spare wheel and just get in beside ye.' 'Neh neh laddie, that spare wheel wouldny haud your bike look at the size o' your bike it, would brek it nah nah you'll just have to cycle hame.' Aw, I was terribly let doon.

MTJ: So if your dad was a postman and he walked a lot of miles every day and you cycled a lot of miles every day, the pair of you must have taken a bit of feeding?

WF: Oh yes, well my mother was a professional cook though, she worked in big houses in the Glasgow area, cooked in (where's the name of that place again, you used to work there?).

IF: No Rutherglen would it be, or...?

WF: No, where is it Jim Graham lives now in that place, it's a suburb o' Glasgow, big houses, all professional people, and she worked there a' her life until I got married.

MTJ: So what kind of things would ee eat?

WF: Oh steak, stew, meat, a' things like that.

MTJ: A lot o' tatties?

IF: Tripe!

WF: My father got a lot ' stuff from the country, rabbits and things like that.

MTJ: So did people give him them?

WF: Oh aye, chickens and rabbits, he was well looked after, aye.

MTJ: When he was on his rounds?

WF: On his rounds, he came back wi' post office bags full o' rabbits sometimes, and hens.

IF: I mind getting tripe at Lyons the butchers. Lyons had a [field?] you know?

MTJ: Where was Lyons?

IF: Aitkens shop.

MTJ: Oh Aitkins the butcher.

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WF: In those days they killed their own meat.

IF: Aye they did, they had a bit doon the back where they killed their own cattle and things like that ye ken.

MTJ: I mean I can mind o' that actually they were still daeing that when I was little so in the sixties they were still doing that.

IF: Oh aye, Aitken did it, he did.

WF: Aitken's did it.

MTJ: And you would get fresh tripe?

IF: Oh aye!

WF: Very popular, tripe. I've seen it in the shops today but we used to get it maybe once a fortnight

in my hoose.

IF: Did you? I dinny think we got it as much as that.

WF: Oh I used to like it it was heck of a stuff, when you look back it was [chewy] and nowt else.

IF: And you got potted meat it think as well. They'd have made it theirsels in dishes.

WF: Potted heid they ca'd it.

MTJ: They did ca' it potted heid.

IF: Did they? It'd be the heid o' some animal likely.

MTJ: Oh what a thought! I was gonna ask you about ye ken people, adults or others roon aboot ye, did they have any social things, or sporting interests that they were involved in when you were young?

IF: Aye.

WF: I think it was quite social in them days from the point of view that neighbours visit each other more at nights. Quite often when I was a little boy I used to go with mother to visit Mrs Graham across the road, [ ? ] You know Jimmy's Brae? Jimmy Graham had the dairy there and we got our milk from him and mother and her were quite pally so we went across there, and then we visited [Ellen/Eileen?] at home just next to Mrs Graham, we visited there. And we visited Little the bakers brother...

IF: Matt Little.

WF: They had a brother or a sister living in Caroline Street and we used to go there.

MTJ: And when you were visiting did you do anything, did you play games with cards or anything

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like that?

WF: No no they just blethered but I used to get under the tables, and I used to play under the table, just a table like that, would get under a table and pretend it was a train or something like that. I used to...I just played meself, there was never anybody else.

MTJ: Uh huh. What about across in the auld toon, what did ye dae in the auld toon?

IF: Oh well, we use to gan for walks mair or less up the new road. Oor neighbours, there were tway o' mine, living next door to us, they were both working in the mills, an' one o' them, she was a weaver, and she worked there a' her life from when she used to gaun to the mill in clogs! When they were very young they a' wore clogs, an' she worked there oh for just years and years, and she used to come with us up the new roads, and the golf course ye see was quite near that, and we used to just go to a certain spot, and we could slide doon the hill cause it was slopey, and have good fun like that. And also there was a house sort o' up on the golf course route, and they had

milk and so forth, [?] and we used to go in there for milk, and back. And I can remember even when we were at the big school, well I think I was at the big school by that time. This other girl [?] Jeffrey, she used to go to the sawmill for the milk and they had cans you see we'd to take the can, and we went to the sawmill. The teacher, like the Wilson's two teachers, they got this, their brother's baby to look after an' she asked if we would get milk for them, so we used to get the milk for them as well.

WF: And you say the sawmill it wasny the sawmill it was the farm behind the sawmill.

IF: Well it was but we ca'd it the sawmill.

WF: Ay but what was the name o' the farm?

IF: Just Langholm Mill.

WF: That's right Langholm Mill.

MTJ: Which end o' the toon was that sawmill?

WF: Next to the rugby field.

IF: Next to the dam ye ken, there was the dam.

WF: Ken the dam [?] the rugby field? Filled in now.

MTJ: And did any o' the...I was gonna ask first abut sledging, you mentioned sledging, did you gan sledging in the winter?

IF: Oh aye, yes, I got my sledge...they made it at the shop you see, the joiners shop, and the blacksmith's was along at the end o' oor street, so we used to tape it and get the runners put on the wood, and we had grand time sledging on the Lamb Hill which you had to walk up to there and then you could come right doon the hill and see who could get the furthest on the thing. And also when it came to Easter time, well the weather was always good, it seemed different a' thegither.

WF: We think it was better weather in them days but you're talking now about what, seventy/eighty years ago.

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IF: Oh it definitely was. When it come to the spring you were changed into your summer clothes and fancy straw hats and things wi' daisies on.

MTJ: Do you think it was drier?

IF: Oh definitely.

MTJ: And caulder winters?

IF: Yeah we got snow.

WF: Quite a lot of snow.

MTJ: So do you think you can see a climate change?

IF: Oh yes definitely it's changed, completely, we're always saying that, aren't we?

WF: We are yeah.

IF: Because we used to get, oh it was just like summer, you could run about in your bare feet and things like that.

WF: We did an awful lot on our bare feet in them days, we didn't have plimsols the way they do now.

MTJ: In the summer?

WF: Well to be true our folks weren't that well off, I mean a mill worker, a man would get two pounds fifty a week. My dad was better paid than most.

IF: No but that was until 1940.

WF: What, Two fifty? Oh I know, aye 1940 but before that it'd be even less.

IF: That was like the labourers.

MTJ: I mean you grew up in the Twenties and Thirties really didn't you, there was a depression on then?

IF: Mm hmm.

WF: I suppose there was, aye that's right.

MTJ: Do you think it...now we're in the middle of a recession, do you think that was worse then, when you were growing up?

WF: I wouldn't like to compare the two really because the mills are a' closed now in Langholm you see and when we were young we'd five mills, but it was mainly women that worked in them, the men had maybe the engineering jobs, hadn't they?

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IF: Yes, the tuners and things like that.

WF: Women did all the weaving and ingiving and a' them kind o' things, so there still wasn't an awful lot of work for men, but I canny think o' many men unemployed in Langholm just the same, can you?

IF: No I canny think of anybody really.

MTJ: You ken when you were growing up, it wasny that long...I mean you were born...what year were you born?

IF: Nineteen Nineteen.

MTJ: Nineteen Nineteen, so a year after the end o' the war, can you remember a lot of women...husbands, cause there was such a lot of killed wasn't there in the First War, can you remember people, you know like children your age withoot their faithers?

WF: Yes well Tony Blackstock was one, he was in my class. Tony's dad was killed in the First World War, and unfortunately he was killed in the Second World War.

MTJ: Oh right, how sad.

WF: I'm just thinking about him, then we got quite a few wounded people, I mean Tommy Warwick's dad he'd lost an arm in the First World War, and he was a [?] There was one or two people...legless folk you know, [?] leg going about the toon too.

IF: And then they had some prisoners, well no some that were sick, had been sick during the war and they were billeted in the mission hall, and they had the VAD or the nurses.

MTJ: Were they Germans' then?

WF: No they were British.

IF: No no British [?]

WF: One or two o' them married Langholm girls and stayed in the town.

MTJ: And what about your faither Aunty Isa what did he dae?

IF: Oh he was a cyclist, he did a lot o' cycling.

MTJ: Tell us about that?

IF: Oh aye, well, I suppose when I would be young, maybe he would be about twenty I think in about nineteen-two, and he was in the Hawick Cycling Club, and he had to cycle to Hawick which was twenty three miles frae here, but we got a record just not very long ago, saying that he'd been in the Hawick Cycling Club and they were great cyclists for Scotland, and they won one or two...he won four medals actually.

MTJ: So he competed at a level?

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IF: He competed at different places I suppose it would be, and what else...and of course during his work as well, if they were working they had a lot of jobs in the country, making cartwheels and different things that they needed in the country, and he used to cycle to these places to work, and I can remember one time hearing about him cycling on a tandem and he had this other worker behind him, course he couldny cycle, the yin behind! And yin on front had to dae a' the...

MTJ: The peddling! [*laughs*]

IF: Aye! Which was quite heavy work.

WF: Sometimes in those days you see when they worked in the country, they stayed there from the Monday until the Friday, the country people put them up so's they'd get the work done. Quite common that cause my brother used to dae that when he was a plumber with Martin Beattie.

MTJ: And what about ye ken during the First World War, did he do anything?

IF: My faither? Oh yes he was in the Cameronian Scottish Rifles to begin with, but he was away up in Nigg, which was quite near the north of Scotland, and they wanted joiners to work on aeroplanes, this was...I mean they hadny the aeroplanes in these days, they were just starting to make aeroplanes.

WF: They were a' wooden you see, they had canvas.

IF: They were a' wooden aeroplanes, and he got posted to Farnborough, then the south of England, so of course he was there for...until the war finished. He was in the Royal Air force, it was the Royal Air Force then.

WF: The flying corps.

MTJ: And did you get letters home from him? Or you'll no remember?

IF: No, I don't remember, of course I wasny born! But we were looking at Willie's faither's records, he had a little box he left ye ken, and his medals were in it, and he'd been in India aboot 1897.

WF: He was a regular soldier you see, he was in the Royal Horse Artillery.

IF: So that was why they joined the army because there was no work for them. But he didny live in Langholm you see.

MTJ: No, where was he brought up, Uncle Bill?

WF: Rothesay.

IF: Rothesay.

MTJ: In Rothesay. So he'd joined the army...a lot of them from the islands did join the army didn't they?

WF: He joined the army from there, yeah, he did that aye.

00:32:37

MTJ: So he was in India.



WF: In India, it was the Khyber Pass he used to talk about. Afghanistan, same as it is now, and then he was demobbed from there, from Meerut, we've got a thing there written by his company commander, or his battery commander, a what d'you call it, a testimonial, [?] good worker a' that, it's signed Captain 'somebody', Meerut, India. But after that he was in the reserves you see, because when the First World War broke out he was away the first day, didn't even wait to be called up he got on the train and went away right away.

MTJ: So where was he?

WF: Went to Woolies.

MTJ: And do you know where he was in the First War?

WF: Oh in France all the time.

MTJ: He was in France, aye.

IF: He was in the Royal Artillery, wasn't he?

WF: Royal Horse Artillery.

MTJ: But he was an experienced soldier before he went?

WF: Oh he was aye.

MTJ: I was kinna thinking about anything about any particular highlights of your year in Langholm, did I ask you that already maybe?

IF: Well at Eastertime, we had a lot of picnics you see, and at Eastertime we used to go to this Lambhill to toss our eggs and have a picnic, and various other places you would gaun, gaun to the river and paddle and carry on there ye see.

MTJ: And did you catch fish?

IF: Well, I think my faither was a fisherman mair or less, he liked fishing and various things like that.

MTJ: And was the picnics, was there a lot of other folk that kinna went on...that joined you?

WF: A family thing, yes.

IF: Joined up with others.

MTJ: Cousins, and...

WF: Eskdail Street was different in the new toon, we went up the Becks Burn, at the end of the Becks Burn Road.

MTJ: In the other direction!

WF: They had a grand bit for rolling the eggs you see but now it's all overgrown but when I was a boy it was a' open, and the whole street, maybe about twenty or thirty folk wi' 'er kids and we had fires boiling water making tea and a' this sort o' thing, right picnics!

MTJ: Ye ken roond the Becks there was the skating rink or the curling rink, do you remember that?

IF: Yeah, we went skating, it wasny very easy to have skates though! I think they were maybe kinna had been left by older people that used to skate on the river even, aye the river was frozen several times so it showed ee to what kind o' weather it was in the winter. But we used to gaun skating didn't we?

WF: Aye remember they had electric power at the skating rink in the dark, mind we used to go up in the dark? And they had a few electric lights, I think they must have run a cable fae the Becks Farm.

MTJ: Do you think?

WF: I canny think o' anywhere they'd a got the power from.

MTJ: They wouldny have had a car battery...a battery?

WF: Oh I'd hardly think so.

IF: No there was nae cars when we were young.

MTJ: No, but batteries?

IF: Very few vehicles at a', it was maistly bike wasn't it?

WF: It was always in the dark after school we went up, and mind they had the curling matches up there too. We were allowed to skate just on the edge you know, away fae the curlers.

MTJ: Away fae the curlers! You wereny to spoil the ice!

WF: Well it was a curling club you see, oh it was a super place. Have you ever been up there?

MTJ: Well it's in the middle of the wud I think!

IF: I dinna think it's there now.

MTJ: No I don't think it is. Was there a hut?

WF: Aye there was a hut, it's still...well it's maybe twenty years since I was there.

MTJ: I dinny think it is.

WF: Last time I saw it there was little trees growing in the...where the pond was.

MTJ: Aye, I think there's a lot of trees up there now.

00:36:28

WF: It was always mucky there wasn't a right road in, you had to go through this ploughed field and usually the cattles or horses had made a mess o' the place so it was all mucky.

MTJ: So you'd be a right mess before you got there?

WF: I never had a pair o' skates in them days I just went to watch and I used to slide aboot on the ice.

IF: Oh no well we had some kind o' auld skates.

WF: Well there was a' kinds o'...there was some folk had skates on wood, and you screwed the wood onto your boots. But if you did that you just had to keep them boots for skating, and we didny get an awful lot you know it wouldny last a' winter maybe lasted three or four weeks at a time, and then it would thaw and then maybe another spell later on.

MTJ: Amazing. What did you think about music in Langholm at that time?

WF: I was a member of the town band.

MTJ: Oh were you!

WF: I joined the town band when I was, what...eight? And I was a member o' the town band from eight until the town band got their uniforms, that was in 1934.

MTJ: And what did you play?

WF: I played the cornet and a tenor horn, eventually. And when I started working in the post office it was 1934 I had to leave the band, and it was just as well because I remember the secretary said to me, 'Willie, you're fair ower young ye'll grow oot if we buy you a uniform ye'll grow oot it in six months, so you're no getting a uniform!' So I said, 'Well I doesny metter Johnny cause I'm having to leave I've got a job wi' the Post Office and I'll be working delivering telegrams from Monday to Saturday night so I canny go to do anything.' So I left the toon band then. And me brother was in too ye ken? A musical family, my brother played in the toon band, it was a family thing there were five Johnstons in it.

MTJ: Was there? It still is a family thing.

IF: I think the Telford's were musical as well ye ken.

WF: Uh huh? They were maybe operatic kind of folk.

IF: Well no not really.

MTJ: Singing, or musical?

IF: Well me mother was a singer, I've got this little book Willie was looking at it the other day and she has a' the songs written that she used to sing.

WF: She's written words o' the songs in.

00:38:42

MTJ: Of course you would sing in the church and you'd sing at the Sunday School.

IF: That's it, she would be in the choir likely.

MTJ: And I know the common riding's a big thing in the year now, was it a big thing then?

WF: Oh very much so.

IF: Yes, aye. Oh they used to...the Telford's used to make the grandstand, and we used to in the summer holidays you see the common riding was always the last Friday in July, and when we got oor holidays, in the summer, we used to gan up to Castleholm, and we'd to find...we had a stick that we used to go around...

WF: At the racetrack.

IF: And make the sort of circle, it was a circle, and inside that circle ye ken there was bike racing and running and a' the rest o' it, and they had to make this...

MTJ: Curved track?

IF: Yes, but they always looked for the same holes!

MTJ: Oh I see!

WF: Aye just put the posts in the same holes every year.

MTJ: They put the stuckins in the same bits!

IF: Aye that's right!

WF: That's what Isa did they had to gie her a stick and she had to go prodding for holes.

MTJ: To gan and find the holes?

IF: And we used to have to gan to the lodge to get water for the men for having drinks, ye ken, when they were working.

MTJ: So you did that even then?

IF: Yes, aye.

WF: Oh aye, they built a grandstand too.

MTJ: Because Dad did that for years, didn't he, put up the stand and everything for the Common Riding?

IF: Oh he did after that, after they did it.

WF: He had a team, Billy and all were in his team.

00:40:16

IF: We've got a photograph.

WF: Photographs galore haven't we? Well we used to have anyway.

IF: But that was when we were young, we went to the Castleholm.

WF: I never went near there, I wasny [?] toonies [like]!

MTJ: Was there definitely quite a difference then between the new toon and the auld toon?

IF: Oh definitely, yes.

WF: Oh yes.

IF: Even at the school when we were in class tway we had spelling bees, and it was the auld toon against the new toon.

MTJ: Really?

IF: Aye.

WF: Oh aye it was a good division.

MTJ: Cause they did that recently for the kids rugby up at the seventh this year, they had the new toon versus the auld toon.

WF: A'ways a break and you were in the new toon.

MTJ: Amazing isn't it? Well, I think we've had a grand old chat, but last thing I want to ask really was, what was your really one happy...really happy memory of growing up in Langholm?

IF: Well I was in the Brownies and we went to country dancing. We had the guider, Mrs Graham, Homewood, she used to teach the country dancing, and we paid...it was tuppence, that was to pay for the hall, and the hall we used then had been the church and it was, you know there was nae kirk there then, so they sterted having this dancing, and she used to teach us a' to dance. And the pianist, we had a pianist you see to play the music, that was the music then, and she had a team, she got a team together, and we used to go to Dumfries to the musical festival, and we won that!

MTJ: Oh very good!

IF: We won the dancing there cause I've got a photograph of us, you know, when we were there. And also I've got a photograph of when we were at Waterbeck. They used to invite us to different places where we could dance, just to show off the teams dancing kind of thing.

MTJ: What about you Uncle Bill? Something very happy?

WF: Well I was different altogether yes, I was a keen cyclist, working in the Post Office fae a Monday to Saturday I couldny even play rugby cause I could get to train but I couldny get to the games...

00:42:49

IF: Even on Sunday you worked.

WF: I was a loner yes, I had a bike and that was my best [?] I cycled everywhere, a keen cyclist. And I never got a new bike in my life it was always somebody else's second hand bike, I used to take it to bits and paint it every year, different colours every year, paint it and hang it up and I used to enjoy that.

MTJ: Pride and joy.

WF: My pride and joy was my bike. Motivation, I used to love wheels, I always have, even now I like my cars and I've still got a bike in there, but I'm never on the bike, but in my young days it was bikes...even though I was working I was peddling about a' day on my bike, I got here and got another bike and used to cycle to [Langton, ? ].

MTJ: Fantastic.

IF: Even at the Common Riding they had bike races.

WF: I won a professional race at Langholm Common Riding. It was...I remember riding against the [?] from Carlisle, mind we got fantastic starts cause they were professional cyclists and they had right racing bikes, lightweight and they had what they call tubular tyres on their wheel, lightweight wheels. We just had our auld road bikes, and we used to let the air oot the tyres so we'd get a better grip on the grass. And I remember there was three of us Robert Carey, Mark Innes and I, we were the kinna crack cyclists in Langholm oot the boys, and Rob Carey was supposed to win this race he was the fastest o' the lot, but somehow or other I kept them at bay and I won, fifty pee I got for that.

MTJ: Brilliant!

WF: Ten bob note, fifty pee nowadays.

MTJ: Well that's a great...I think we'll kind of finish up but I'll come back and speak to you another day, with my little tape recorder, cause I think that was great.

00:44:44