

Interviewee: Guy Brown (GB)	Interviewer: Julia Muir Watt (JMW)
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JMW: So, do you want to start telling me a little bit about how you came to be here and what you do?

GB: Well, I was born into a medical household, four doors along.

JMW: Right.

GB: Father was GP here before me so that it was in the blood, you couldn't help it getting into the blood. He had, for years after the war, he had an assistant for...almost living in for probably about ten years, different assistants, and of course they'd both go to do their calls and discussed them over meals, what had happened that morning and who was what and why and I had...I knew everything that was going on but I couldn't say this, say a word, say a word about it, never even thought of saying a word about it. And then went off to college and university in Glasgow. After doing house jobs there, returned to join my father, as his assistant, and his health was failing so...he was with me about three years, doing less and less and less and I was doing more and more and more and then he retired so that I had...the last of my university colleagues that could do locums were...had emigrated or moved into specialties and after three months on my own, although it was twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, I joined with Whithorn.

JMW: Right.

GB: There were originally two practices in Whithorn, they had joined previously when old Dr McDougall retired and we...the patients were split so we...it was still in the private days, it wasn't Health Service, the patients were split, a lot came to Port William, most stayed in Whithorn and so we had patients in Whithorn and Garlieston and Isle of Whithorn and as far up the shore as the Crow's Nest so it was quite a...and into Kirkinner so quite a wide area. It was good fun though, I enjoyed it thoroughly.

JMW: Yes.

GB: No troubles.

JMW: So, in the pre-Health Service days you asked for a fee, what, at the end of a visit or at the end of a surgical session?

### 0.03.00

GB: Well, my father came in 1936 and he had bought the practice and I've come across a letter, not terribly long ago, saying that the carpet in the consulting room didn't go with the sale, it would be removed with the fittings. And there was no electricity here at that time, it was oil lamps, didn't come till later in '36, the electricity come through. So, yes, he sent out bills once a quarter, when my mother needed some money, and even after the Heath Service came in he had a number of private patients that stayed private. And it was sometimes two or three years before the bills went out, when a carpet was needed or something, something along those lines. The work was different then, he had three

surgeries a day here: 9.00 till 10.00; lunchtime, I think, 1.30 till 2.00, and 6.30 to 7.30 in the evening, except Sundays and his half-day which was a Thursday and I don't know if he did a morning surgery on his half day or not. Looking at the old letterheads he might not have done, there might have been no surgeries on the Thursday.

JMW: Right. Knowing a little bit about Whithorn I imagine that some people might have been either been slow to pay bills or a least maybe just not called you at all if there was-?

GB: There was a panel, there was a panel who would pay for patients who couldn't pay and there were a number of panel patients which the accounts had to be sent in, probably monthly, I don't know, quarterly, and it involved all the doctors in Wigtownshire.

JMW: Right.

GB: And the panel paid the doctor but no, a lot of people worked on the farms in the cottages and they weren't very well paid and if there was a lot of attendance in some of the cot houses the cost of the visit to the farmer was increased to help pay for that.

JMW: Right, right.

GB: So there was a wee bit slack taken in.

JMW: And was it, do you know how much your father charged? Was it, did it vary with what he was doing?

GB: Well, I think the practice, he bought it for, I think for about £1000, I'm not sure what he charged but I do know that just prior to the Health Service, it was two and six for an extraction of a tooth without anaesthetic, five shillings with (laughter).

JMW: I wonder how many chose without.

### **0.06.13**

GB: Quite a number.

JMW: (laughs) Just to save the two and six.

GB: And the ones that had it without were either the very butch, tough nuts or the terribly terrified who wanted it out and away. But when the Health Service started the dentist did it all, the doctors stopped doing it. But, up until then the doctors pulled a large proportion of the teeth. There was no fillings it was only extractions, but he pulled quite a large number, in fact there were two full sets of tooth forceps in the surgery until I took them up to the museum at Crichton. I never pulled a tooth, I was asked once or twice and I chickened out (laughs).

JMW: Yea, I don't blame you.

GB: But it said on every forcep what tooth it was for so you could pick the right forcep.

JMW: Right.

GB: And in the surgery I was a bit of a hoarder, I didn't like flinging things out. And there were trephines for boring into the skull, lots of guillotines for removing tonsils and all sorts of things and they were gradually shifted round the surgery in boxes under the couch and on top of cupboards, wondering what to do with them till I got a letter from the Crichton

saying they were setting up a medical museum, did I have any old equipment and they all were bunged in the boot of the car and taken away and they weren't sure what some of the instruments had been for either (laughs).

JMW: Right, right. It sounds as if there was quite a bit more surgery going on as well as prescribing medicine.

GB: Well we did a lot, all the casualty was done unless it was a broken bone, very few people went to hospital.

JMW: Indeed.

GB: Even in my day, in earlier days, he's often going to get a consultant down to see the patient at home. Consultants were allowed to do so many home visits.

JMW: Right.

### **0.08.29**

GB: And they would come and see people at home, they got paid extra for it, and you could...kept a lot of your medical patients in bed at home because there was nothing more to be gained by going to hospital. Surgical patients went to hospital, the Garrick at Stranraer who had a surgeon up until quite recently. The rest to Dumfries or Glasgow. Port William went Ayr and Glasgow, Whithorn went Dumfries.

JMW: Right.

GB: Largely, we sent patients to Dumfries as well but a lot of the Ayr consultants came down to the Garrick and it was handy for people going from here to go up the coast than inland.

JMW: So, in your father's day did he have a car to get around or-?

GB: Mm. The Selbys, it was the Selbys... the first doctors here were about 1830s, resident.

JMW: Right.

GB: Previous to that they sometimes called a doctor from Whithorn, Wigtown, Stranraer, but the first resident doctors were, I think, 1830something, 1840? And the Selby senior came in about 1870s and he had a pony and trap, I have several photographs. His son joined him later, about the end of the century and he had a car, I have a photograph of him in a car with no number plate, I think number plates came in in 1903 and one of him in a car with a number plate, OS3, which is the local registration. But, yes, it was car.

JMW: That was very early to have a car.

GB: That was very early.

JMW: It must have been one of the first to be seen.

GB: Yes. So...from then on it was...they had cars, the District Nurse had a cycle, bicycle, the first District Nurse to have a car was a Nurse Robertson and it was her own car. She had been a sister in the Victoria, native of the village, but at the beginning of the war went back to Glasgow, back to the Victoria. And somewhere about then nurses were provided with a

car. There had been talk for a wee...a number of years, that they maybe should have a car, the nurse, but they never managed to raise enough funds, the local nursing association.

### **0.11.35**

JMW: Right. I guess looking back over your father's discussions over meals and so on, were there a great many changes in the actual diseases that you were treating?

GB: Well, childhood diseases have gone, largely.

JMW: Yep.

GB: Because immunisation has made an enormous difference to that...at school we all had everything, mumps, measles, chickenpox, whooping cough, the lot, they just went round the class and everybody was off. And I always managed to be about last off and I always managed to be one of the sickest, I saved it up. (Laughter) No the medical was very much as...the diseases very much as now. But infection, like pneumonia and that, no antibiotics, they were just coming in with the penicillin during the war.

JMW: Were there any diseases particularly associated with say, working conditions on farms, that you remember or poor housing conditions?

GB: There must have been a lot of...there were a lot of chest infections. But a lot of them on the farms were...they were mainly dairy farms and they got their milk and they got their potatoes and they cultivated their garden, beef was probably the short...meat was probably the short straw.

JMW: Right, right.

GB: And in terms of medicines that must have changed a great deal.

GB: Out of this world (laughter).

JMW: Yes.

GB: My father dispensed, I dispensed too, but he dispensed and the traveller would come round and he would send in an order and a tea chest would arrive, maybe two tea chests, with mixture A and mixture B, mixture C, and you had to add so many drams of this and so many drams of that and so many grains of something else and now everything is ready prepared. You just open...in fact...it came in Winchesters for us, for me, but they all come in ready prepared bottles, there's 200ml or 300ml, off the shelf. I had one stomach mixture which was...it was a bicarbonate but not baking soda...it was a very light one and you weighed out the powder and it more...the pile of powder was greater than the size of the bottle it was going into.

### **0.14.51**

And you gradually popped all this, got it into the bottle, a little water to dissolve it and then ye did an anti-spasmodic which had a nice smell and a greenish colour and ye got that in and of course the patient was standing there waiting for it while you were making it up in the consultation, because they always went away with what they required, and it worked wonders. I think it was seeing all this disappearing into the bottle and they'd be...they were back for repeats but they didn't get too many repeats for it took far too long, but it cured a

terrific number of patients right off. One bottle of it was fine and I think it was the watching it being made up.

JMW: Right.

GB: But then they started coming in bottles of, if it was tablets 10s, 500s, 1000s and you sorted these out but nowadays everything comes in packets of 28 or a course. You don't always, sometimes you want longer than an ordinary course, you've got to burst packets but it's much...and there are so more drugs now, there are effective drugs now, while the drugs were...you had analgesics and sedatives and stomach mixtures but there wasn't an awful lot more.

JMW: And have you noticed any change in life expectancy in this area over all your time?

GB: Yes, it has increased, there are more elderly people and there are going to be more still.

JMW: Yea.

GB: Because the more...many more people are going to hospital because there's more they can do in hospital now.

JMW: Yes, yes.

GB: They can go and get all their tests done and set up a course of treatment. We used to do it all from here by sending things off in the post, samples off in the post, bloods. and took them one day and you posted them that morning and they got them the next day at the hospital and then they analysed them and two or three days later you got the result back. Now you get the result back the same day. But there are so many tests now that can be done, it was all hands, and hands, eyes and ears previously. What you could feel, see and hear.

JMW: Yea, yea. And in doing home visits, do you notice a great change in, for instance if you visit agricultural homes now and then?

### **0.18.03**

GB: There's an enormous change, the housing is so much better and I think that's also one of the reasons people are living longer. But we did, I sometimes did up to forty home calls a day in addition to the surgeries. And you miss going into people's houses.

JMW: Yes.

GB: Because you...it's very odd, quite frequently or not infrequently, you picked up something, going in. You could see something or something they were going to tell you but they wouldn't think of coming to the surgery or calling you and going in...but things, again, have changed there and everybody goes to the surgery because there is a larger range of things they can do at the time...they'd need to carry a van full of bags with them.

JMW: Do you think the public's attitude towards medicine had changed? Do you think people are more demanding?

GB: Yes, yes. The number of out of hours calls I was getting towards...before retiring, towards retiral, were just increasing every year and often for absolute rubbish. And when you...your own patients, used to know what was wrong with them before you put the phone

down but you went just in case you were mistaken and a very...occasionally you were but not particularly often. And there were no carers then but there were wide...there were larger families and sometimes people, an old lady would take a stroke, living alone, and you didn't know if they had any relatives and you'd go back to see...consider whether she would go into hospital or not, and the place was full of relatives and they all took it in turn to come and there was always somebody with them. Or they lived with the...or somebody came and lived with them or they took them to live with them until the matter had settled out.

JMW: Yes.

GB: But, again, these things do better in hospital now and heart attacks do better in hospital, we never sent, very...we only sent heart attacks away if the family weren't going to be able to cope at home. But now there's so much can be done for them that the first thing is to get people away to hospital, it's changed in that way.

JMW: I guess the fact that the family was...people did not live alone so much as they may do now, elderly people find themselves often on their own now.

### **0.21.26**

GB: There are more elderly...well, this village, there are usually fifty people living alone in their houses, periodically I would just go along the street, mentally, and tick who was living alone. But now a lot of people are living alone and don't live...that haven't roots here and that makes a difference too because there's no family backup. There's quite a change there as well.

JMW: Yes, yes. Certainly when I was talking to one or two older people in Whithorn they mentioned some old ladies who would come with herbal remedies rather than call the doctor, they would dose them with some concoction that they'd made up. Do you remember any of that?

GB: Yes.

JMW: A sort of rival medical practice (laughs).

GB: Yes. I had a patient who was a nurse, a hospital nurse, and she was back with her mother and she had taken ill. And her mother had been pouring the most abominable things down her throat and she had been swallowing them quite happily. So, yes, there was quite a bit of that.

JMW: And also in terms of midwives, they mentioned some ladies who would...always turn out when there was a baby in Whithorn.

GB: Yes.

JMW: I don't know if that would be in your father's time perhaps?

GB: Again, they may have had a family connection of some kind because I know of a couple here who had connections throughout so many families and they were always there at the birth of a child. So that was probably quite widespread.

JMW: And was it often home births, did people go into hospital in your father's day?

GB: Very few in my father's day. Forceps deliveries were at home, a doctor from the neighbouring practice would come and give an anaesthetic, well... I was a forceps delivery, along the road.

JMW: Right.

#### **0.24.01**

GB: And my father actually delivered me.

JMW: Right.

GB: It was Dr Duguid from Whithorn who was coming to do the delivery but things went wrong and my father was a dab hand with forceps and Dr McDougall didn't do terribly many. Father had been in Bellshill before he bought the practice here, and in the miners' rows and rickets and one thing and another, he was doing abnormal deliveries, at least one a day, in the miners' rows, so he had a good notion of what to, what to do and so they changed rolls. Dr McDougall gave the anaesthetic and he turned and pulled me out. And that maybe has went down another generation because one of my daughters is a midwife and she's fighting against becoming a sister because to become a sister she's not going to be delivering babies and she wants to stay as she is. She only works part-time but she's being pestered to...it's high time she's becoming a sister and she says 'I have no notion to become a sister' so there's the hands...there's the practicalities and the administrative...and I think administration has gone do-lally. There are papers for everything.

JMW: Yes, yes.

GB: And notes are...that's an enormous difference, medical notes. I looked at my father's notes and it would be '2nd of January, right sided pneumonia; 3<sup>rd</sup> of March, back to work'. Now if somebody had pneumonia you would probably, they would probably go to hospital but if they hadn't gone to hospital, even if they did go to hospital you've got about a page of notes to write up everything about them in case somebody...some lawyer wants to see them if-. And if you haven't written them down, you haven't done them, you may well have done them.

JMW: Yes.

GB: She's finding this in midwifery now as well that she's so many forms to fill in, it's unbelievable.

JMW: It sort of comes over that there's that process of, not exactly centralisation, but the fact that you're part of a much bigger system and that you know you're part of it including the international pharmaceutical industry.

#### **0.27.06**

GB: Yes, and the pharmaceutical industry wants to sell medicines and I think a lot of them aren't particularly good for people, amongst the one...or they're very good for certain people but they're not good for everybody and they want everybody to take this or take that. It'll maybe swing the other way sometime again.

JMW: Well, I suppose that's the difference, isn't it, that people are medicated more for all sorts of things?

GB: Absolutely.

JMW: I mean, in the old days you might have said 'Go away and rest and it'll get better'.

GB: Well, I'm taking a handful of pills every day. I know...I know exactly what they're all for, they're all...but only one of these drugs was available when I started and the other ones have made enormous...an enormous difference. But the drug firms, and you see it in the papers, put things in the water so that everybody gets them, make everybody over fifty-five take such-and-such and such-and-such, I think that's probably more harmful than good.

JMW: And has there been a change in the sort of standing of the local doctor, do you think, in the community, or is it much the same?

GB: It varies. I think they're probably, they're not...for a long time they were God, they're not God anymore. But the standing is...aye, it's still all right, from what I hear, I get stopped in the street at times. Yes, and it generates...it's quite good, except for somebody who's felt they've been done wrong and once you get the whole story they haven't been done wrong. But the doctor, I don't think, is so close to the patients, they come, like going to a shop while there was more of...involved on their everyday life.

JMW: Yes. You would perhaps know more about each person, do you think?

GB: You knew a lot about each person because you would...going round their houses you would sit and talk to them.

JMW: Of course.

GB: Sometimes you sat too long. Some of them were always good places to have a seat and a blether and others, you couldn't wait to get out of them quickly enough (laughs). And that was nothing to do with social standing. Some of the best ones, when you stood up the carpet came with your feet and shoes (laughs). And you learned how their minds ticked over.

#### **0.30.44**

JMW: So, turning to Port William, which you obviously must know extremely well.

GB: Fairly.

JMW: You went to the local school first, did you?

GB: Yes, here and then Newton Stewart.

JMW: Right.

GB: The Ewart. And again there were...ours was a big year, we were very...in going to secondary education, we were very lucky to have a retired teacher brought out because of the war. And we had him, our class had him, for three years, primaries one, two and three, that would be three, four and five nowadays. And he...well, the first thing ye did when ye went in was mental arithmetic but there were certain people that he reckoned should be told once, they should be told how to do some new project, arithmetic or what, and if they made a mistake they were corrected once, if they made the same mistake twice, it was the



belt. And the others were two...got maybe two or three warnings and some of them got four or five warnings. And the girls didn't get belted, it was just the boys. So, and then things like spelling which you never bothered to learn, mistake there and it was...I think you were allowed one mistake after that...so I was belted every day for about three years which I never, ever mentioned at home (laughter). But our class, when we sat the eleven-plus, more than half passed and went on to the Ewart and I'm sure it was purely due to this old teacher. We liked him, we weren't...we didn't have anything against him, we felt we had been doing wrong and we deserved to get it and we were really ready for the eleven-plus by the time...two years before it was due, because he kept on giving us something new once we had mastered something we wanted, he didn't bother with schedules he just did what was coming along next and he was...I think I've a lot to thank him for (laughs).

JMW: So you were at school during World War Two, is that right?

GB: Yes, toddled off with my gas mask to school the first morning (laughter) with Robin Kinnear who lived next door here, the pair of us went off hand in hand to school with his big sister (laughter). Yes, it was...the school here...it was entirely different from now, with the original building and there were three classes, there were four classrooms, there were three used and the fourth one, there were evacuees educated in it when we got large...large numbers. They had their own teacher with them.

#### **0.34.32**

JMW: So they were sort of kept separate from the rest of you?

GB: They were sort of kept separate, yea. Then the other schools started to close and we got more in. The ones in the country had to walk in, there was no transport, and sometimes they were absolutely drenched to the skin. But if it was really bad weather, if it was deep snow, didn't get the belt for being late but if it was a nice day they did. So that people didn't tend to be late and there was a football team picked, if we had a ball, on a Monday morning, and that played all week and the first, once there was about half a dozen there they went into two threes and then as people arrived they went into one or another team and sometimes there'd be twenty to thirty in each team. If there were no ball available, it was stones, there was a little grass in each corner of the playing field and if there was no ball available we would play a thing called (relievo?). We had our two teams and the shed was a den and the catching team went out and got the (doorbell rings) [?] ones and hit them on the head three times and if that...put them in jail and if somebody could break in, they all ran out. Excuse me.

*Interruption from 0.36.16 to 0.37.35*

GB: Where were we?

JMW: We were at Port William School, I think.

GB: Oh, yes, in the playground.

JMW: Mm.

GB: You didn't get into the school if it was pouring, you had to stand in the shed. And the boys' toilet was in the far distance of the boys' playground and the girls' toilet was the far distance of their playground, in the opposite direction. Couldn't...another thing we got was it was coal fire central heating...now in the...we would be about ten, ten or eleven, in the

headmaster's class. If we got our work done quickly and correctly and he said 'Oh, I'll need to get a fire on and our hands would go up 'Please Sir, please Sir, can I go?' So that you got out to stoke the furnace, ye had to go outside and there was a wee...little furnace at the side of the school, a wee door and you went down into the furnace, opened the door and filled it up with coal, don't think health and safety would allow that nowadays (laughs).

JMW: No.

GB: Nobody was ever burnt. But that's just something, one of the differences again.

### **0.39.03**

JMW: And presumably there were more shops than there were now in Port William?

GB: A lot more. We had about five grocers, I think, a butcher, two, three drapers, one a...well, two drapers and a milliner, a tailor, two ironmongers, two garages and I think about five sets of petrol pumps. One of the garages ran buses and there was also another bus hirer, a bus...so there were two buses, Crawford's bus and McLean's bus, and they ran taxis up to meet the train and the bus ran to Whauphill to meet the train every day.

JMW: Right.

GB: And apparently the undertaker could order a coffin from Glasgow in the morning and it would be brought back down by the bus in the evening, off the evening train. So messages were delivered quite promptly in these days.

JMW: And was there much in the way of a holiday trade? Did people come here for seaside holidays?

GB: Yes. The Monreith Arms was famous the length and breadth of the west of Scotland. I think during the war it...I think bottles of whisky went out different places and chickens and other bits...a side of bacon and various other things came in. I wouldn't be surprised anyway. But the Glasgow dental, medical and law arrived annually at the Monreith Arms, in the summer and a lot of people were slept out, but fed there, a lot of houses (doorbell rings) took people.

*Interruption at 0.41.16 to 0.42.11*

GB: We were at?

JMW: Holiday makers.

GB: Holiday makers. I meant to say there were also two bakers in the village. A chip shop and one or two other bits and pieces, I'll probably need to think about. Holiday makers? Yes, bed and breakfast, as I said, The Monreith Arms was always filled and The Eagle was...it tried to compete, especially with the food, but it was always filled as well. The Commercial only had one bedroom so that didn't make very much difference but The (Airriequhillar?) House, it was a bed and...it was a private hotel.

JMW: Right.

### **0.42.59**

GB: So there were quite a lot of holidaymakers, yes.

JMW: Speaking of the (Airriequillar?), clearly we're in Maxwell country over here, did you or your father see much of the Maxwell family?

GB: Yes, my father was quite friendly with Sir Aymer, he tended Sir Herbert before he died. And Gavin appeared, generally looked in...one of my hairiest car rides was with Gavin.

JMW: Right.

GB: To Glasgow.

JMW: Goodness.

GB: And he had just bought his long wheel-based Landrover to go to North Africa for *Lords of the Atlas*, I think it was, and he offered to give me a lift up. Well, I think the slowest we were was seventy miles an hour through Cairnryan and going across the Fenwick Moor from Kilmarnock to Glasgow, on one occasion we clipped the glass verge on the fourth...the other side of the fourth lane and I was really...he turned off to go to the Clyde Tunnel and up to...up north and dropped me and I really felt very happy rattling along in a tram to get back to university (laughs). Also, one of my friends was down, a classmate, and he was here with his otter, first one, and we had gone up to see it and not very happy with this thing running around our feet and it gave John a nip on the ankle.

JMW: Right.

GB: So I had to... yea, Gavin was quite a character, without a doubt. And they had, there was a party at Monreith House, every Christmas, for the workers on the estate and Galloway House sent a darts team and (Shennodan?) sent a darts team and one of the hotels catered for the meal, and had an entertainer. And sometimes, it was a singer, they had a conjurer another time and they had a monologue...Willie McCulloch, a Glasgow monologue reciter, who had these two, the last two he had been at had been at the (BMA) and they had heard about entertaining people at the Monreith arms after they'd done their stint. so they were put on the list to be invited. But on this occasion it was a man from Stranraer singing and they always had a pianist because the workers gave...each gave a song and they sang better as the evening went on. So they had difficulty getting an organist because...they couldn't get someone to play the piano and old man Lindsay, who was church organist, had blotted his copybook so he was...he wasn't being allowed to go, by his wife, and they had asked my father if he'd maybe have a wee word with him and see if... 'It'll be alright as long as you look after him', 'Yes, we'll do our best'.

#### **0.47.01**

So I was, I must have been, I would be home from university on the holidays and I was invited along as well. And the organist was at one end of the table, my father was probably at the other end but I was next to the organist and something had gone...well, maybe not wrong with the catering, maybe right with the catering, because they didn't general...whisky wasn't given out generally till after the darts, the men drank beer with their meal. There was whisky down the tables for the men but on our table there was a whisky bottle between every two plus a jug of water except at our end of the table the carafe of water was filled with whisky and the organist was diluting his whisky with whisky (laughter) and by the time he was due to play, he couldn't see the piano and he was going 'Aheh' So he was removed and being plied with coffee and all sorts of things to try and sober him up. But that party went with a real bang, nobody was killed at the darts and they couldn't get the

house empty, and every time they got the men out to their cars, or their taxi to be taken home...and they came back in for somebody...the ones that were out were back in signing *For He's a Jolly Good Fellow* for Sir Aymer. It reminded me of a final year medical dinner and it was hilarious, Mr Christie ultimately slipped them home and we heard no more about it. That was always a big night for the estate.

JMW: Right. So there were still quite a few people employed on it, were there?

GB: No, numbers diminished, oh, six-fold I would say, five or six-fold. They used to, the estate and the (Dowery) used to employ about, I'm sure about a hundred and probably about twenty now. It's gone right down, the numbers employed have gone right down.

JMW: I've certainly seen postcards, and they're probably late 19<sup>th</sup> century, of house parties at Monreith House, that must have had quite an impact in terms of goods and services that were needed to service them.

GB: It probably would, yes, because they would source everything locally. And there's an article in one of the London magazines about the number of birds shot on Monreith estate, I think over a month and it was horrendous or amazing. Well over a thousand brace, I think, for four guns, something like...it was quite amazing. That was back in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

JMW: And had the House of Elrig already gone over to [?] by what? The thirties was it?

### **0.50.32**

GB: Yes, I think the (Conners/Cornwalls?) were there when my father came or they came very shortly afterwards. He was a real character, he had a programme and he stuck to his programme come rain, hail or snow, but he was very interesting. They moved to London but he came back up here latterly. They...both he and his wife died up here.

JMW: I knew he'd had a friendship with the artist Kokoschka.

GB: Kokoschka, yes, he wished to draw my brother.

JMW: Really!

GB: Paint my brother. He called him 'the angel child' apparently.

JMW: Goodness.

GB: And my father wasn't for it.

JMW: You could have had a very worthwhile painting (laughs).

GB: And the...he painted, the McFadden's at [?] Johnny was my vintage and he painted, I think, it was Stewart, Johnny's brother, at the steading at [?] and apparently Mrs McFadden tore it up and flung it in the fire (laughter). So there were...you just got to know what to do at the right time, don't you (laughter)?

JMW: I guess, Whithorn, you would get to know as a medical practitioner rather than as a child or did you go over to Whithorn when you were a child?

GB: Rarely.

JMW: Really.

GB: Before the, in my father's day, he had a branch surgery in Whithorn which bounced around Whithorn, it was McEwan the grocer's shop and then it was down at the creamery, was it Mrs Green, ah think it was, and latterly, in [?] next to the chemist, which is now part of the chemists. And it was...we had an afternoon surgery there for the Whithorn people about three, four afternoons a week. I liked it when it was Whithorn monthly holiday because sometimes nobody came and I could put up my feet and have a read or a nose. And it was quite handy because the chemist was next door and you could always get prescriptions, it was John Baxter then, from John. So I accompanied him, sometimes out in the car with him, listen to the radio while he was at his surgery and then it was as a workplace and then we joined up, as I said, when the last of my friends had emigrated, I joined up with Frank Findlay and Norman Robertson and it's been that way since.

**0.53.57**

JMW: So was your father's surgery just the room in these houses, just a room with a desk?

GB: Initially it was his front room, you went to the house and it was the front room on the left and the back room on the left was the dispensary, it was a really dark hole, and people waited in the hall. There was a box seat in the hall and a coat rack beside it, and it would hold about two people, and the overflow sat on the stairs and apparently I occasionally gave them an impromptu concert from the landing when they were waiting, as a child. But there was one night they had...ma father had finished his surgery, nobody sitting, no-one to be seen and he come through to the kitchen where ma mother was and after half an hour or so they moved up to...the sitting room was up the stairs, they moved to the sitting room and as they were coming through the hall they saw a pair of feet sticking out from beneath the coat stand and on moving the coats they found that somebody had fallen asleep waiting and just slumped to the side and the coats and fallen over them (laughter). So the patient was attended to and they went up for a seat. Somewhere about the end of the war he...there was a large room to the right-hand side of the front door and he divided that into a surgery and a waiting room and knocked a cupboard door out to make a doorway into the...which was the, where the garage was, into the garage entrance, so that the patients could come in that way. Prior to that they'd come and rung the doorbell and then shown in by the maid that they could come in. But it was all wartime material and the soundproofing wasn't particularly good and the people with the most intimate complaints wanted to shout at the top of their voices. You're trying to 'sh' (laughter) and you could often hear what was happening in the...when...a stir when something more urgent was being brought into the waiting room. I heard the whispering one day, 'Maybe I should let them go in next, maybe I should let them go next' and I opened the door to see who it was, it was one of my daughters brought along [?]. She'd put her hand through the glass in the front door so they got promoted up to get her hand stitched. It was functional at the time but it was behind the times, the consulting room was lined with bottles and shelves for medicines and most people came for their repeat prescription and consultation so they got their repeat prescription at the time and that's probably most of the surgery. It's now...I think it's made into, the people who have it just now, I think they have a workshop in there for repairing violins.

JMW: Right.

**0.57.22**

GB: The ones before, made a granny flat of it and the two bedrooms above, and putting in a second stair. So things keep changing.

JMW: Yes. So, did you work with the chemists that were in Whithorn or were you dispensing separately?

GB: We dispensed for all our patients except...we couldn't dispense for Whithorn, I think if somebody lived within three miles of a chemist you had to give them prescriptions. So there was John Baxter and Ross, was it John Ross, on the other side of the road, down opposite the bank.

JMW: One with sort of gothic windows?

GB: Yep.

JMW: Yep.

GB: And then the dispensing was, there were two ways of paying for dispensing, you could take a capitation fee of...I don't know, a very small amount, a couple of pounds, or something like that, per patient, and you didn't write, you didn't write 'scripts so they weren't priced and if you wanted anything special we had to apply in writing to Kirkcudbright where the...we were...there was...Galloway and Dumfries were two Health Offices and we were...and you had to apply in writing to get permission to prescribe the new tranquilizers and antibiotics and things like that, you got a line saying you could give them to this patient, usually had given them to this patient before, but you wouldn't be paid for them till you got the line, so that was the dispensing. He could have made a lot more money and a much better pension if he had written a prescription of everything but he couldn't be bothered with paperwork, in any shape or form, and we had to send in a return once a quarter of the number of people we had given immunisations to, the number of people who had had babies, and the number of holidaymakers we had seen, and I remember on one occasion getting a phone call from the... what would later become the Health Board, saying 'You haven't sent in your return this quarter, what have you got?' I said 'Dear knows', 'How many confinements?' 'Oh maybe about four, five', 'The same as last time?' 'Aye, well, maybe one less or something' 'Right, and holidaymakers?' 'It wasn't a good quarter for holidaymakers, they'd be down, about the same as last year.' 'Right, and immunisations?', 'Oh, just the usual run'. 'Well, we'll pay you on that' they said 'and make sure you have it in next time and we'll balance it up'.

### **1.00.38**

You don't get that now, I think it's got to be in quadruple, on the right colour of form on the right day. Anything you were perturbed about, you weren't sure what to do form-wise, you just gave them a ring and you got...there was a clerk, a deputy and three secretaries or two secretaries, you gave them a ring and they sorted it out for you. So, when they joined up to form Dumfries and Galloway Health Board our Kirkcudbright man got the job and I phoned him about six months after that to ask him a question and he said 'Oh sorry, ah can't tell you that now' he said 'It's one of my deputies. I'll put you through to this deputy, ah think he had six deputies, this deputy and he got 'Oh the deputy's out just now but there's so-and-so in, ah'll ask him.' No, he didn't know, so I never bothered phoning them again. And they never bothered phoning me, so we were kind of at the end of a line, nobody was bothering with us. We were quite happy about that.

JMW: Yes, yes.

GB: We probably missed out on some things but we had a lot more peace and quiet.

JMW: Yes, well as you said, it's probably the fact that things are more actionable and people are willing to take action that dictates all that.

GB: That's right, it is. It's a pity in many...there should be a comeback for badness and stupidity but everything is 'Ah've got a sore neck', and you can't say 'You haven't got a sore neck'. I had somebody for mobility allowance, they couldn't get about, and I went to do the examination and there was no car there. Ah thought 'How on earth have they got here? They weren't patients with this practice, they were Stranraer, I think. 'Oh, I left my car on the car park across there on the sand', 'Ah!', 'I was a bit early so I had a walk down to the harbour'. Well I think the first question is 'can they walk a hundred yards', they were...and then they would, if you put them down, they would appeal and they appealed so often ah don't know how they got through. Until they started sending me further and further afield, I didn't mind going around Wigtownshire, but they started giving me Maybole and places like that. I phoned them to say 'I've got a thing for Maybole, is there nobody nearer Maybole? There must be somebody in Ayr does these examinations.' And they never sent me another one so I lost that source of income. I would have got mileage up and subsistence and all sorts of things but I thought what a waste of time going up to Maybole to see somebody, so that was that. I'm not one for bureaucracy.

#### **1.04.01**

JMW: Well, do you feel, looking at the way the Health Service came in after the war and what it is now, do you think it's doing what it was originally intended or do you think it's developed a life of its own and it's heading in an unknown direction, or somewhere in between?

GB: It's doing what it intended but it's heading in a definitely unknown direction. There are so...I'm absolutely for everybody getting free medical treatment but there's so many pressures that this has got to be done and that has got to be done, that often the patient isn't any better for having them done but when they say 'I must have it done,' they get it, they get it done. So yes, it's very...and you could fling as much money as you could find into it and it could be spent.

JMW: Yes.

GB: There are things...they take people from here to Dumfries for an appointment and they give them the first appointment in the morning instead of the last one. And they could, a lot of them could quite easily be seen at Stranraer when people come down. The administration of it could be very much better and I think there's an awful lot of money wasted but I think the people should have their...certainly the health of the nation is better. But that's not just due to better medicine, it's better housing and better feeding and better all sorts of things, I'm quite sure. They all play a part and again there are so many things you can do, you get new hips, new ankles, new knees and they're great for many people. My wife is needing two new hips and a new knee and she can't get anything because she bleeds and there's nothing...there's no way around it.

JMW: I guess one other question about the Port William area was did you, were you familiar with the Irish squads that came in to do potato lifting, did you see that in this area?

GB: It was more Whithorn.

JMW: Was it?

GB: Kildale and places down there, yes. No, there was...the squads here were out of the village children and Whithorn.

**1.06.58**

JMW: Right.

GB: I don't recollect any Irish squads being here. During the war it was very busy with planes dropping out of the sky here, though. We had one flew straight into the shack at the end of the village there.

JMW: Right.

GB: We had one landed in that field but tipped over, tipped over the wall, otherwise would have hit the houses. We had one up the Mochrum road, came down in a field, left its undercarriage in the ditch and slid up towards Mochrum with a full load of bombs. And another one tried to land in the field in front of Mochrum schoolhouse, a Spitfire, realised he couldn't land, was going to pull back the stick, flew under the telephone wires on the Port William side of the road and managed to pull it up and go over the schoolhouse on the other side of the road and I believe the schoolmaster at that time was standing in the window and dropped with a heart attack but whether that's just a story or not, I don't know. And somebody shot up the...a lot of shooting out in the bay, targets, and somebody forgot which way they were pointing and shot at the creamery, there was bullets rattling all over the cement floor but nobody hit. But there are lots and lots and the casualties of these were all hauled into our...literally were hauled into our house and the RAF doctors arrived and it was always my mother's washing day. I peered through the banisters at what was going on. That was quite a busy, quite a busy time.

JMW: So your father had to treat people from the forces who were in the area or did they-?

GB: No, they had their own doctors but accidents, yes. There was one, a lorry load of soldiers coming down from Stranraer and you know where the Changue Farm is?

JMW: Mm.

GB: Well, the lorry went on to the...being followed by a car and the car went to pass and just as the car...the lorry wobbled and saw the car and took to the beach. It went bouncing, apparently, down the beach turning somersaults and the old farmer in the car, didn't stop but he came down and rang the doorbell of my father's house, told the maid 'There's a silly bugger doing somersaults wi his lorry up the shore, I think they might need the doctor.' (Laughter) I think there were only a couple of broken bones there, it was amazingly...so there were lots of stories like that.

**1.10.07**

And of course, my father started the Home Guard here and I didn't realise, I noticed him going out, he was the MOH for the Home Guard, noticed him going out regularly in his uniform but somebody sent me a book a few months ago about the...what was it, the volunteers before they became the Home Guard...the Local Defence Volunteers...it morphed into the Home Guard, and it was being formed and there was an argument what to form but it said that a lot of people had got the idea that something was to be done and Dr Gavin Brown at Port William was the first to have a bash, so he was one of the first and they were called 'Brown's Coastwatchers' apparently.



JMW: Right.

GB: And they had places, different places, up and down, up at the rocks at Garhuegh, down at the golf course, other places where a band went out and looked out for Germans being landed by landing craft or whatever, plans how to block off the golf course because they were bound to land at the golf course and, aye, they had a great time. And I've come across one of the reports he had written on an exercise that they had done very well but the first aid people had stayed in their headquarters when they should have been out and when they were told it was time to get out they went off at such a state, such a space that they drove over a bridge that had been blown up. So I think they had a lot of fun, the Home Guard. I managed to, I found one or two bits and pieces, I just stuck them in a folder.

JMW: And so you remember Port William in the blackout, do you?

GB: Yes, we were...there were two bombings, one that land...a land mine at Barneil, which I remember hearing the plane going round and round and then hearing the bang.

JMW: Right.

GB: And ma father remembered, ma father was wakened by this plane going round and round and he stuck his head out of the window when this 'bang' and the sky lit up and he said he didn't know whether he was blown back in the window or he came back at such a rate it took the top of his head, I think he got such a fright as he came in. So, John Kinnear, again, two doors down from him, he was the ARP man and he came, he phoned him to say 'I think maybe we should be doing something, however, we'll need to wait till we find out where the bomb's gone off'. So there was a wee bit of a quandary what they should wear.

### **1.13.26**

Should they wear, ah think ma father had two steel helmets, one with a red cross and one without a red cross, with an MO on it and the other without MO, and John Kinnear had his ARP one and would they take their gas masks or would they not take their gas masks? 'Och, I think we might, we'll maybe just wait and see what other folks are doing' so they flung everything in the back of the car and put on their bonnets and the one at Barneil landed as near the...the gable end of the cot house, as that pole over there, onto rock, and the mark's still there and the bits of stone that went up and peppered it, turned the roof into a sieve and there were a lot of people in the house and not one was hurt. I've also, the Barneil farm, every window on the side facing the explosion was in, blown in, with shards of glass stuck in the wall and all the furniture on the other side of the room and they were all sleeping at the other side of the house, so nobody was hurt. And shortly afterwards another stick of bombs was dropped at South Barsallach, over a stack yard which they probably mistook for tents.

JMW: Right.

GB: But they were jettisoning bombs on their way home and it was the same farmer farmed both farms and he felt that maybe the Germans had it in for him. And that's all we had during the war.

JMW: In terms of agriculture, which I guess you saw around you, you were around when horses were still largely used, were they?

GB: This farm here, it used to be Seaview Farm, a small dairy farm and he had a horse and cart which he went round the village with, with the churns on the back delivering milk. His was TT tested milk so it was...and he also had a wee bottling plant and bottled milk for the school.

JMW: Right.

GB: And, yes, there were quite a lot, there was a horse show as well here, [?] the horse show.

JMW: I've heard of it.

GB: It alternated with Whithorn apparently, to begin with, one year here and one year at Whithorn. Initially it was in the field behind the school which is now the school playing fields and I've been at in the Maxwell Park or been at a horse show in the Maxwell Park and I've been at one at the Dowery, the fields this side of the Dowery, was again the horse show was held in there.

### **1.16.26**

But I also remember that in the school playground, horses in the road all being groomed to go to a show so that must have been, that must have been a weekday or I wouldn't have been in the playground and it must have been down in the, I presume it was down in the [?] somewhere, but I don't know where it was. I was at primary school but they were...they were all being brushed and had collars with all their fancy brasses on. So there were quite a lot of horses before the Fergusson tractors came.

JMW: Yes.

GB: Then Fordsons and then these enormous things that take up the whole road now.

JMW: Indeed, yes. And the creamery in Port William, where was that?

GB: The creamery was out on the road to Monreith.

JMW: Right.

GB: Where Robin Christie's done up his new house. Just going out of...when you go out from South Street towards Monreith, it's the first on your left about quarter of a mile out the village.

JMW: Oh right, ok.

GB: So there was a creamery house and there was a creamery manager's house, bungalow built, and then when it stopped being used as a creamery the office was turned into a wee house and then another house was built as well. So there's four houses there now. Apparently it was quite good cheese. We used to go and get dried whey was children when you couldn't get sweets you got a bag of dried whey, there were rollers to dry it.

JMW: Right.

GB: And we got a bag of dried whey, it was quite nice if it was warm but probably very indigestible but you've got to take what you can get, you got it for nothing, you took your bag out and they gave you a handful of it and you chewed it for the rest of the night.

JMW: Presumably the creamery provide quite a lot of employment for Port William?

**1.18.28**

GB: It did, yes, and it had its own lorry to collect the butts and I think Alec McLean also collected milk for it, the...that was the...he had lorries at the Mill Hill Garage. And some brought it by their own tractor, tractor and trailer brought the milk in. But yes, it would employ quite a number and in the winter...there's a wee article about it in the library, McCrawley, one of the managers...in the winter they did things like putting the burn that came down at the creamery underground and...just to keep the staff occupied when they weren't getting so much milk. So there was always something going on, the staff were kept on and used for other purposes.

JMW: Yes, did any of...in Whithorn a lot of the churns went on the train, presumably to Glasgow and places which needed it...did-?

GB: Nothing, I don't think from here.

JMW: No, so it was made into cheese.

GB: It was made into cheese.

JMW: Right. And does...did your father ever remember the mill in Port William working or was that before his time?

GB: It worked in my time, I'm sure.

JMW: Did it?

GB: I'm sure it was working, yes, it did work.

JMW: Right.

GB: I don't know what they did because I wasn't particularly interested at that time, but yes, it was there.

JMW: Presumably it took grain from surrounding farms.

GB: It must have, it was latterly used for drying grain, they used the drying floor to...if the grain wasn't dry enough to store, they dried it on the drying floor in there.

JMW: And what about the mill at Elrig? Did your father recollect that?

GB: I think that was gone by the time...but behind my garage there, was the bone yard.

JMW: Right.

**1.20.48**

GB: And I have a piece of bone about that length which I brought from home and I used for hammering in stabs because it was very, it was awfully big (laughter). But it's lying around in one of the sheds, still. They unloaded bones from all over at the harbour but they brought them here, unloaded the boat, brought them here and then at their leisure took them up to the mill.

JMW: Right.

GB: I think it was, there was a farina mill there, a bone mill and a grain mill, I think there were at least three mills there.

JMW: Yes, I think it was a big concern,

GB: I don't recollect...it may well have been working but I don't recollect that but certainly they stored bones there.

JMW: And I suppose that's the other factor, is the activity in the harbour here. Do you remember it being a busy place for having stuff shipped in?

GB: No, I remember the coal boats coming in when I was a wee boy. And my mother commenting that all that soot was going to go into the washing. Coal dust not soot, going onto the washing. But ah don't...ah remember the odd puffer being in, ah don't remember any sailing boats.

JMW: And in terms of delivery of fertiliser and stuff from...that was a trade on the Solway?

GB: Yes, it may well have been something they brought in...they brought in coal, they probably did bring in fertiliser but I don't recollect any of it. I know in the past, early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, yes, it all came in, everything came in by boat because the train stopped at...well, it passed, the nearest place was Whauphill so anything heavy came by sea.

JMW: And commercial fishing out of the port?

GB: Just small boats, two slightly bigger boats at the minute but they were small open boats and line. And visiting trawlers, because we used to go down, the [?] was when they flung the dabs, the wee ones, onto the harbour we scrambled for them. We could get a bit of wire from behind the garage, I think where they had been burning tyres...we got a rusty wire and we took a half a dozen fish home for supper. But the harbour's silted up very badly.

#### **1.23.45**

JMW: Right.

GB: You could almost jump from the harbour deck onto the beach across the channel that was left and you could climb over onto the main street, the wall at the...there was a huge bank of stones there. But there are two or three families always have fished.

JMW: Yes.

GB: Although they are not fishing...different families that are fishing now. But there were two or three, the Gilmours and the [?] always fished and Captain McGuffie who has the last...and Joe Fairbairn, he, I think he always fished. But Captain McGuffie was the last Master of the *Ellen and Mary*, longest serving captain on the Solway, and he was my neighbour when I came here to start with in South Street.

JMW: Right, right.

GB: And the figurehead was in his garden which is now in...it went to the Seamen's Mission at Ayr, I think it's now at Troon...Irvine, Irvine. And I could have asked him so much about the schooners, he broke the *Ellen and Mary* up on the King's Green opposite his house after it failed its MOT. I could have asked him so much about them and I had an elderly old lady up High Street whose father was a schooner captain and she sometimes, as a girl, went up

the west coast, up to Arran and up to the Hebrides and one day when I was in she said to me 'Do you collect postcards?' I said 'No, not really'. I said I once had a...as a wee boy I had an album given to me of postcards but they were all church gates and pulpits and I wasn't really particularly interested in it (laughs). She said 'Well, I've got two albums here and if you don't take them they're going in the bin'. I said 'Oh, you'd better let me have a wee look at them, I don't want-'. So, there were several old postcards of Port William in them so I said 'I'll take these', 'Certainly, thanks very much' and that's what started me looking for old photographs of the village and the area but it was just pure chance. And I could have spoken to her so much about...there were two postcards to her...or from her, two postcards from her, from South Uist, from Lochboisdale, and one, the first one said 'Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> of something or other. Arrived Lochboisdale 7.00am' and the second one said... and it said 'raining' and the second one said '4.30', same date, 'still raining, leaving.' I thought that was quite a good [?], it's what's it says on the back of the postcard that's sometimes more interesting than the front.

### 1.27.06

JMW: I suppose Port William's always had a good name for community life, it seems to be an active community. Is that still as true, have you seen shifts in population in the way the village behaves?

GB: It's still active, it's still got a good community life but more and more of the young ones aren't, or appear not to be, wanting to take part in it, part in organising it, let's put it that way. Although they do...I'm probably doing them a mis-...they do other things but the traditional things like the tennis and the bowls, these things have tended to fall away but there's a, quite a good dramatic or pantomime society and there are other things, yes, so there is still a very good community life. There's usually plenty going on but things come and go but they have for years, they always have.

JMW: Yes, yes. And in terms of people moving in from outside, has that seen quite an increase?

GB: Big increase, by the time I retired I wasn't recognising everybody in the street, now I'm recognising even fewer and if I see them frequently I realise that they're probably staying here somewhere but some of them come and they fit in very, very well and others come (laughs)...we had two families move in next door, they retired in Manchester and husband and wife moved up but her sister and brother came with her and they had sold their houses down somewhere about Manchester and they moved in and one of them upstairs and the other having downstairs, but they didn't get on. And the...it was a windy time and a wet time and his garage door blew in and Frank Campbell, on the other side, and myself, we managed to get it stabilised with some big bits of timber that were in his garage and that we had, we got it...so the next thing that Frank says to me is, 'I was speaking to your neighbour' he says 'He's going away, he couldnae stand this place, it was full of geriatrics and nincompoops' and we wondered whit...I was older than he was, I must have been sixty and he reckoned he was a nincompoop, we weren't quite sure which, who was who (laughter). But, yes, an awful lot of people have...some of them have tenuous connections, others have no connection whatsoever. Some of them fit in very well and others don't fit in at all and the houses turn over, they're here and then they're away. But still, there's still plenty going, plenty going on. We've got the Lifeboat and we've got the Home...the Heart Start, the various other...taking over from the National Health Service. So, and then of course there

are all the children's group nowadays, toddlers and the...this is where the playgroup started, in this room, a long while ago.

**1.31.17**

JMW: Oh, right.

GB: I started it, it's now in the school but there are so many groups now. So there are all these things going on.

JMW: Yes.

GB: We've got the charity shop, not even allowed to call it the charity shop.

JMW: Right.

GB: And, yes, so there's still quite a lot going on.

JMW: Are there particular families that were involved with the lifeboat, it's quite often a sort of family tradition?

GB: It hasn't been long enough going to...I don't know if there are any fathers and sons, oh yes, they once had a father and son in it. But that I think that only comes over...with a long...over a long period of time.

JMW: Well, are there any other things that I should have asked that you feel I haven't touched on? It's been a varied-

GB: Very varied (laughs).

JMW: -subject matter.

GB: No, I think you've covered most things, there always are things you'll miss.

JMW: Which I'll remember shortly.

GB: Yes (laughter). The tennis club, it has pretty well folded but you've got the youth group using the courts which is good. Bowling club's suffering from lack of numbers, the sport's very much suffering from that, it was a big day, the sports day here and initially connected with the flower show and there were talk, a hundred years ago, of arranging boats from Cumberland to bring people and the Isle of Man to bring people to the flower show. And they came by train to Whauphill and some of them got coaches, some of them got horses and carts and some of them walked.

JMW: Goodness.

GB: So that was the only day though, there was the horse show day and the flower show day, these were big days but now we've got the carnival week. There's a large variety but some of them are not [?] sports as a part of it, they're not well attended now because there's too small a population and too many other things going on.

JMW: Yes. Ok, well, thank you very much, I think if there's nothing I've missed, at least nothing that we think that I've missed, I'll turn this off, but thank you very much for doing it.

GB: Not at all, I hope it's of some interest.