

Interviewee: Jock McMaster (JMCM)	Interviewer: Julia Muir Watt (JMW)
Date of Interview: 28 August 2012	Ref: DG4-11-1-1-T

JMW: So, just to start with can you tell me about how your family came to be here?

JMCM: Well, Blairbuy and Stallock Farms are together and my great-great-great-grandfather came to Stallock Farm about 1820 something.

JMW: Goodness, right.

JMCM: And he farmed there for a few years and then Blairbuy Farm came up to let, ah think about 1830, and we've been here ever since.

JMW: Right.

JMCM: And we were tenant farmers on Monreith Estate, until 1963, when ma father and I had the chance tae buy the place and we bought it then and ah've farmed here ever since.

JMW: Right. And did your great-great-great-grandfather come down from Ayrshire or-.

JMCM: No, he came from Ardwell, over at...in the Rhinns.

JMW: Right.

JMCM: He farmed over there at a farm called High Ardwell. But where they came from before that, I'm not sure. Ma dad often thought Argyllshire, McMaster, he thought was an Argyllshire name, he said that's where he thought they came from. But ah've no records going any further back. I can go back to that one who's buried, Peter McMaster, was buried in Kirkmadrine churchyard which is over on the other side.

JMW: And what kind of farming was it they were doing?

JMCM: Well, those days it was mainly crops, they grew a lot of wheat, potatoes and barley and kept a few cattle and sheep but in my day it was a few crops but mostly cattle and sheep. And now it's just cattle.

JMW: Right. And, obviously...presumably the estate was owned then by the Maxwells?

JMCM: It was.

JMW: So they would have your ancestors' landlords?

JMCM: Yep, that's right, they were.

JMW: And do you remember the Maxwells, were you...because it's-

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JMCM: Well, ah can remember...ah know Sir Michael Maxwell who's the present laird. His uncle, Sir Aymer Maxwell, I didn't really know him, I knew him to see...in those days there was no connection, you paid your rent twice a year-

JMW: I see.

JMcM: -and that was the job done. We dealt wi the factor, the factor was the man that was the go-between.

JMW: Yes, so you didn't really even see Sir Aymer?

JMcM: No, but, funnily enough, going back to my great-grandfather's day, he and Sir Herbert Maxwell had a very, I wouldn't say a friendship, but they had a working relationship. Ma great-grandfather was an amateur photographer and he took a lot of photographs for Sir Herbert.

JMW: Right.

JMcM: Quite a few which were used in some of Sir Herbert's books.

JMW: Goodness.

JMcM: And they had a very good...there's quite a few letters in the house back and forward from the two of them.

JMW: Right.

JMcM: And Jack Hunter has actually collated them all and has spoken, as he calls them, the Blairbuy archive, and they're really interesting. Diverse things like being allowed to plant the same crop twice in succession in one field, or the fact there was no hot water at Dumfries Station for Granny McMaster's tea. That is just the sort of scale of jobs they got involved in.

JMW: And that was, presumably the lack of contact with Sir Aymer was simply the Maxwells kept themselves to themselves, they didn't-

JMcM: Well, the fact that Aymer was never here.

JMW: I see, yes of course.

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JMcM: They lived mostly in London and ah think he had an island in Greece somewhere and he was just never here. [REDACTED]

JMW: Yes, yes. Right. And do you ever remember seeing or hearing of Gavin Maxwell coming.

JMcM: Aye ah met Gavin.

JMW: Did you?

JMcM: Yes, and I actually stroked the otter.

JMW: Goodness!

JMcM: There you are now.

JMW: That's something!

JMcM: And in the book, in the book *Ring of Bright Water* he mentions the black cattle chasing the otter at the mill pond. I was there that day, it was our mill pond.

JMW: Right.

JMcM: So that's my claim to fame. Didn't know Gavin at all, just met him that day, spoke to him once when he...the premier of...was it *Ring of Bright Water*?

JMW: Yes, it would have been.

JMcM: That's the one. It was at Newton Stewart and he was there an spoke that night and ma dad and I spoke to him that night, ah remember, aye. So that's our tentative connection with the Maxwells.

JMW: No, no, that's very interesting.

JMcM: But Michael, Michael next door is...I see him quite a bit, he's back here quite a lot. [REDACTED]

JMW: Yes.

JMcM: And ah ploughed up a skeleton in a field this year and Michael was most interested in that and he was across and he was in the hole having a wee look, greatly excited, thought it might have been some of our ancestors, his or mine (laughter). It turned out to be Bronze Age.

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JMW: That's a little bit [?].

JMcM: It was three thousand years old or so.

JMW: Very interesting, though.

JMcM: Very, yea.

JMW: This is a farm with a lot of archaeology, isn't it?

JMcM: It is, yea, wi the Wren's Egg and standing stones and cup and ring markings.

JMW: I suppose its pure position on the sea and looking out to sea must have been-

JMcM: Ah think so and the Fell of [?] being a sort of elevated area, it would be a natural place to, I suppose, hide from your enemies, to climb up there and defend yourself.

JMW: Yes, absolutely. Were there any legends or stories that you knew that related to these archaeological features...people tend to tell stories about-

JMcM: The only thing ah know that's not actually written down is the Wren's Egg in the field down there, it's a big round stone and if you stand on top of it on the shortest day of the year, the sun sets directly behind Big Scaur.

JMW: Right.

JMcM: Ah've done it.

JMW: Have you?

JMcM: Two or three times. It has to be clear, obviously, because it's mid-winter and every other day it's further west, quite a considerable bit west. But it does, it sets right behind Big Scour, so whether the Wren's Egg was put up for that reason nobody knows.

JMW: Mm, fascinating.

JMcM: That's really the only kinna thing ah can think would be, no, there's just odd stories from fairly recent times.

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JMcM: So, given that you've been here so many generations and you must have heard, I guess, stories from your grandfather and perhaps things that he was told, there must have been a huge change in farming and techniques.

JMcM: Oh, tremendous, well, you've probably seen, this morning, the contractor taking the silage away.

JMW: I did, yes.

JMcM: And he'll do a hundred acres in a day whereas when ma grandfather was making hay, he would do a hundred acres o hay from the middle of June to the middle of August (laughs) with squads of people helping him out.

JMW: Yes, yes.

JMcM: It's changed completely.

JMW: Yea. So you mentioned the squads...this looks like a big complex of buildings, were there people living here that worked on the farm as well as your own family?

JMcM: Mm, well, when ah left school in '63 ah was number seven on the payroll.

JMW: Right.

JMcM: There was five full-time men and a woman, six, six people, aye. And now there's only one man and maself but we use contractors.

JMW: Yes.

JMcM: Contractors provide us wi machinery to do all the heavy work, yea.

JMW: And presumably that's the sheer capital outlay it takes to buy these enormous machines?

JMcM: That's right, that's right.

JMW: It doesn't make sense for any one farm-

JMcM: No, it doesn't make sense to have your own, you'd need to have a big, big place to have your own, yea. But I suppose in Grandfather's time there was huge squads of people came, Irish potato pickers.

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JMW: Right, ok.

JMcM: They were very much part of the economy and turnip thinning, cause turnips were the mainstay crop for the winter. So they came and ah can remember them just, in the '50s, and they stayed in a building down in Monreith, and as far as ah know the women lived upstairs and the men lived downstairs. It was very regimented, very, very organised and they cooked, potatoes mainly, that was there main diet. But they moved round from farm to farm.

JMW: Yes.

JMcM: Harvesting potatoes from about now...well, it's a bit early yet, August, probably September onwards they would dig the potatoes round the farms.

JMW: Right.

JMcM: And, of course a lot of those Irish people stayed, Whithorn, for instance.

JMW: I see Irish names.

JMcM: No disrespect to Whithorn but it's full of Irish people, Irish connections, yes. Wigtown, Wigtown'll be the same, yea.

JMW: Yes, yes.

JMcM: A lot o them would meet people here and just stay.

JMW: Did they come from a specific part of Ireland, do you know.

JMcM: Ah don't know to be honest, I'm sorry. No, ah don't know where they came from.

JMW: Yea, but they were our migrant workers of the day.

JMcM: That's right, they were.

JMW: We've now got them from different countries.

JMcM: Yes, that's right.

JMW: And were there cottages that your regular workers lived in?

JMcM: Yea, there was cottages on the farm, traditional Wigtownshire cottages, just a long line with a lean-to kitchen behind and traditionally just a room and kitchen. They're now all one house but you can see where the one door's been blocked up. And they've a door at each end and kitchen or a living room and a bedroom and that was it.

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And ah can remember them, no running water, in the '50s, no toilet, it was an outside toilet, but of course since then they've all been revamped. So we had one, two, three, four, five, yea we had five cottages in the '50s with people in them and most of the wives worked too.

JMW: Yes.

JMcM: In seasonal work, they harvested the turnips in the winter time, helped at the potatoes, helped at the harvest, helped at the hay. Hard work, it was.

JMW: And did the children join in as well?

JMcM: The children helped if they were old enough, yea. And we walked to school, a gang of us went along the fields here to Knock School.

JMW: To Knock School, yes.

JMcM: That was open then, yea. It closed in...it closed in 1961, precisely.

JMW: Right, ok.

JMcM: Ah left in '59 and it closed two years later when ma sister left.

JMW: Right, and was that a one-class school, did you have-

JMcM: One teacher.

JMW: One teacher.

JMcM: Ah tell ye, that was a culture shock, there was nineteen o us in the whole school and when ah left to go to the Ewart in '59 there was thirty-two in my class. Ah felt like a very small fish in a big pond (laughter). It was amazing.

JMW: And was the discipline quite strict at the Knock?

JMcM: Oh yes, oh yes, Mrs McCracken, that she was, was very strict, aye. Although fair, she was quite fair.

JMW: Uhuh.

0.11.07

JMcM: But how she managed to teach seven different age groups in the one room, ah'll never know.

JMW: No.

JMcM: The wee ones sat at the front, ah can remember, and as ye got older ye moved further back. You probably needed less attention as time went on. But ah look back and remember we spent most of the time in the wood, digging leaf mould and potting plants and no electricity of course, and lighting Tilly lamps in the afternoon and pulling them up on a rope tae light the classroom. No central heating, if ye were cold she sent us outside (laughs) to run round the playground (laughter).

JMW: Right (laughs) She didn't have a fireplace?

JMcM: She had a fireplace, yea, she had a fire beside her with a...one of these enclosed...like a wood burning stove type thing that burned coke, but that kept her warm, it didn't keep us warm.

JMW: Right.

JMcM: And we had our lunch in the room next door.

JMW: And do you remember children coming who were, what shall I say, considerably poorer tha-?

JMcM: Oh, yea, definitely, aye. Some...two families in particular ah remember, we used to feel very sorry for them because they all wore clothes that had been sort of handed to them from, I presume the council, and they were all a sort of uniform grey colour. Ah don't know what it was made of, some sort of flannel perhaps, and they were poor kids, aye, aye. They were...because that was the mid/early '50s, mid-'50s, aye, and they wouldnae have a lot, no, big families of course and farm worker wages then were very small. Nobody had a motor car, most of them had bikes, things were tighter.

JMW: Yes.

JMcM: A lot harder.

0.12.58

JMW: And do you remember people economising on the use of their shoes? I've heard of people who stowed pairs of shoes close to the school or who didn't have them at all in the summer.

JMcM: Right, right, ah can, no we didn't go barefoot, no, we actually kept...we kept shoes at the school because we walked across the field, so we wore wellies or we wore boots and we kept a pair of lighter shoes, ah think they probably...ah think we jist called them gym shoes, plimsoll things at school to put on. But tackety boots were the things that the boys wore, ah remember going to school wi tackety boots on and being very, unpopular because there was a slide in the winter time in the play-green with the ice and the guys slid on it wi their rubber soled shoes were fine but tackety boot, oh ho, ye ripped up the ice and spoiled the slide so ah was banished, ah was banished from that. Memories coming back now.

JMW: And where did you get the boots? Were they made somewhere locally?

JMcM: Aye, we got the boots in Newton Stewart, ah'm sure in...an old guy called Parker, who had a shoe shop somewhere down Newton Stewart, we got boots there. But the workers, the shepherd, used tae get his boots in Maybole, there was a boot maker there who made these, do you know these shepherds' boots wi the great big turned up toes?

JMW: Right, no.

JMcM: You never seem them? Well, they were specially made for walking on the hills and the soles were sloped and when you saw them coming you could see the front row of tackets, they had such a curl on them. And they bought them from a boot maker in Maybole, ah can remember the shepherd buying them there.

JMW: Was this a shepherd who worked here?

JMcM: It was the shepherd here, yea.

JMW: Right.

JMcM: And that was his sole job, just looking after the sheep, morning and... he walked round the stock every morning, he'd be finished about ten o'clock and he would go back

round again in the afternoon, or the evening. And at lambing time he was just there all the time.

JMW: Yes.

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JMcM: All the time, well, not twenty-four hours obviously but from daylight to dark.

JMW: And occasionally when you're out on the hills you see little sort of shelters that people have built and I'm assuming that was for shepherds.

JMcM: Yea, and the sheep. Oh, you mean the shelter, the ones wi the roof?

JMW: Yea.

JMcM: Yea, they were for the shepherds, yea, that's right. But the circular ones on the hills would just be for the sheep to go in, in bad weather, didn't have them here. No, there was no need for them here.

JMW: And so did you ever help out with the shearing of the sheep?

JMcM: Oh, yes, aye, jist as soon as we were old enough we rolled up the fleeces and packed them intae the big bags. In those days ye hung the bag up on ropes from the rafters and ye put in half a dozen fleeces and then you were chucked in as well because this bag was probably eight feet high, seven feet high? And the guys handed ye fleeces in and ye tramped them intae the corners. And we had a competition, as we got older we had a competition every year to see who could pack the heaviest one. And ah remember the wool then went to Kirkcowan to a chap called Milroy at Kirkcowan and he sent a note back saying he couldn't get the wool out because it was so tightly packed so in future we weren't tae pack them so hard (laughter).

JMW: Now was that Milroy's who were millers, at Kirkcowan?

JMcM: No they were, well, when you say millers, they were the clothing mill, the cloth mill.

JMW: Right.

JMcM: They worked with wool.

JMW: Yes, I've heard of that. Did you ever go up there and see it in operation?

JMcM: No, I never saw it in operation, no.

JMW: Because it was quite a big affair up there, I think.

JMcM: Yea, it was. Ah remember ma dad saying that at one time, ah think before the war, when they took the wool up...they took it there, delivered it to them, and were paid for it, obviously, but they always got some cloth as discount, it was cloth given to them that you could use for a jacket or trousers, whatever.

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And it must just have been a sort of custom of the miller, gien ye some cloth, in lieu of cash, I suppose. William Milroy, ah can remember wool bags with his name stamped on them, they were stencilled on the wool bags. But yea, we sheared sheep from about fourteen years, I suppose we'd be fourteen, fifteen year old, with hand shears, just the hand clippers.

JMW: Yes, I've seen them.

JMcM: In fact, to be honest, ah've never used electric clippers.

JMW: Right.

JMcM: By the time ah finished using the hand shears, electric shears were common and we jist used a contractor for that. But it was a very sociable thing, we only clipped forty or fifty every day, among three or four of us, because we dosed the lambs, cleaned their tails and sheared that group o sheep and then the next day we did another lot and so on and so on until it was done. Now the guys come in and can do four or five hundred in a day, two hundred and fifty each, just the way it's done. The way it has changed.

JMW: Yes, yes. And were there, did you use the shearing stool, I've seen a specific-.

JMcM: Well, we didn't but was one shepherd that we had, he and his brothers came and did the clippin then and they used the stool, yea. And one o the brothers in particular was ambidextrous, he could shear with both hands and he never had tae turn his sheep, the sheep sat on the stool and he clipped the one side wi his right hand and the other side with his left hand. It was beautiful to watch, he was just...he was just like a machine, himself, aye. And that was on a stool, it was a narrow seat at one end for the man to sit on and a sort of broader shape for the ewe to lie on and of course it's easy on the back, you didn't have to bend over because you...your work was just at your level.

JMW: Yes.

JMcM: Ah remember that.

JMW: And was there dairying on this farm or was it-?

JMcM: No, there was never dairy here.

JMW: Never?

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JMcM: No, it would always just be cows.

JMW: Is that something that's specific to the west coast, because obviously around Whithorn there's a lot of dairying?

JMcM: No, most of them in Port William were all dairy farms too.

JMW: Were they?

JMcM: Yea, aye.

JMW: And of course there was a creamery there too.

JMcM: The creamery at [?] aye. No, it was just always beef. Ah don't know, next door too (Barmalloch?) and Invermeal would be too, they were always just beef farms. It would be a dairy farm if need be, the land's good enough for dairy cows but jist nobody ever wanted to do it.

JMW: And what about the use of horses? Do you remember when they went out?

JMcM: Aye, ah can remember horses ok, in the stable, and our last horse was kept for the turnip crop, for what we called 'scufflin' the turnips, that was when ye scraped away the soil from each side o the drill, to make it easy to hoe them, instead of having to push a huge amount of soil away ye were jist left wi a narrow ridge and the horse was still there in the '60s.

JMW: Right.

JMcM: Aye, '63/4 but that was the last one. Ah don't remember seeing any ploughing wi horses but ah can remember horses carting in sheaves, a horse and a cart. Although ah was born here we stayed in Monreith shore for two or three years and ah moved up here and came up by horse and cart. And ah can remember sitting on the horse and...on the cart coming up in 1952 or something like that, so that's how ah moved here, or moved back here, anyway.

JMW: So, generally, across the Machars would you say the last of the horses went in the early '60s?

JMcM: Aye, maybe even sooner, yea. Ah would say yes, the early '60s or late '50s, yea. Ah don't...the only ones that kept them after that were the enthusiasts...they probably still have them.

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Hugh Ramsay for instance and Sheddock, these kinna boys who kept on their horses but there were no horses next door. Ah don't think (Durie?) next door or Monreith Estate next door would have horses, even then. Ah think they would be gone in the '50s, yea.

JMW: And did you, did you learn to manage horses at a young age?

JMcM: No, not personally no. In fact ah never really had much time wi horses at all, ah once saw the horse, a horse biting a woman's shoulder and from then on ah thought 'no'. I would rather have something with an engine ah could control.

JMW: Yes. So when you were growing up you were already operating with tractors on this farm.

JMcM: Yes, ah was using tractors from an early age, yea.

JMW: And was that the sort of pre-hydraulic stuff or-?

JMcM: Well, the very first one, yes, was, it just pulled the implement along, it didn't have any hydraulics at all, it had a belt pulley on the front which drove some machinery, like a threshing mill, a saw bench and a bailer. And then...but the tractor I drove when ah started at thirteen or fourteen had hydraulics, it was a Fordson Major and they were introduced about 1952/3 and it had a diesel engine whereas the previous one was petrol paraffin. And this thing had hydraulics, yea, no cab, you sat out in the open.

JMW: Yea.

JMcM: Very cold. Because the old petrol paraffin one, ye sat away down deep in the thing and the heat from the engine kept you warm but in these modern diesel ones ye sat up right on top and it was seriously cold. Jobs like harrowing or ploughing in the spring, ye were wrapped up like an Eskimo, fiendishly cold it got, ye sat there not doing anything just driving

away hour after hour. And then cabs came along, they were rickety things too when ye think but at least they stopped the wind and kept the rain off.

JMW: So, in terms of crops what's changed in your lifetime?

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JMcM: Well, the main crop in my day was oats, we grew oats in a big scale for human food and for cattle food.

JMW: Right.

JMcM: And the straw was very important to feed the cows with. So now, oats are more difficult to harvest with the combine because they're later but in those days they were cut wi the binder and put into stacks and then thrashed during the winter so now we've no oats at all, we just grow...we grow barley, it's easier to harvest. It's a heavier yield and that's the difference now, yea. All the farms round here grew oats.

JMW: Right.

JMcM: Oats and turnips, that was the staple crops. And stuck to rotation, the field would be grass for five or six years, and then ye would grow a crop of oats and then next year a crop of turnips, then the following year another crop of oats, with grass underneath and that was the traditional...and ma dad, and his father before him, stuck to that religiously, just went round all the fields so they were all re-seeded every five, six, seven years and occasionally potatoes, in the turnip field. Ye'd use part o the turnip field for potatoes.

JMW: Right.

JMcM: But we don't grow any potatoes now.

JMW: No.

JMcM: Mainly because the ground's too stony and modern machinery, when it's gathering potatoes, cannae tell a potato from a stone whereas the human being could, didn't put any stones in the bag.

JMW: So, in a way, the capacity of the machines somewhat dictates what you're doing.

JMcM: It does really, yes. Hay is a lovely crop to grow and a nice thing, a nice healthy crop to feed but it's so difficult to get with the weather. Whereas now, as I say, this guy can do a hundred acres of silage in day, that's my whole winter feed, for the whole stock on the farm is made in one day. We normally cut in on a Monday and it lies and sunbathes on the Tuesday and we chop it up and put it in the silage pit on the Wednesday and that's it done. It is just so much easier. And I think the weather has changed so much too, I don't think we could ever make hay now, on the scale that we used to. Especially this last three or four years, terrible, terrible wet summers.

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JMW: So that's something you notice over your lifetime, the changes in the seasons.

JMW: Oh aye, oh definitely, and it's not just your memory because they say you don't remember the bad days, but ah've got a diary ah keep, one single line every day for the last

forty years and when you look at your diary back in the '60s we made hay every day except an odd damp day, ye can see where it says 'The men were cutting weeds'...just trimming round the thistles and the dockens but that was maybe one day in a fortnight. Next day 'Making hay in such and such a field, turning hay, cutting hay' and, ok, there were odd bad years, there's no doubt, when you had trouble but it was...there's no way could you make hay like that now. Not in that quantity.

JMW: No. And you feel the seasons were more distinct?

JMcM: They definitely were, the winters were probably colder. Although, I can remember a winter in the '60s, don't ask me which year, probably mid-60s, when ah never had a raincoat on all winter an ah was feeding cattle outside every day. We never had a...we maybe had wet nights or wet afternoons but in the mornings we remarked at the end of the winter we never actually had a coat on. But I'm sure the summers were nicer and warmer then and the winters, ah think, were sharper and colder.

JMW: Looking way back there were curling clubs outdoors.

JMcM: That's right, there's no way could you do that.

JMW: None at all.

JMcM: No. And my grandmother who lived near Stranraer told me when she was a child she skated on Loch Ryan, Loch Ryan was frozen and it's salt water, 1890s, I presume, in there. Really hard winters then. And over in the estate woods there's an ice house which is an underground cavern where they cut ice from the loch in the winter time and stored it for use throughout the year. There's no way you could do that now.

JMW: Certainly not.

JMcM: But this could just be a blip, it could just be a seasonal thing, maybe two or three hundred years of milder weather, it may get colder again.

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JMW: Yes.

JMcM: Well, not last winter but the winter before and the one before that was cold, really cold and snowy

JMW: But we noticed them because they were exceptional.

JMW: That's right. We were never used to it and all these farmers wi water pipes hanging round their sheds and going across open fields, were all frozen up. Because this, our generation or the next generation don't remember hard frost and frozen pipes and the hassle it causes.

JMW: Yes, indeed. You mentioned a mill pond, so was there a mill on the farm?

JMcM: Yea, we'd a thrashing mill in the barn. And ah can remember it being used, it was water drive, the loch supplied the water to the mill pond and there was a sluice in the mill pond that ye opened up, a big screw thing, this handle ye screwed and by the time ye got back tae the barn the water had got there with you and ye closed a flap and the water wheel started up and the barn machinery went from there. And then the mill was taken out

in the late '50s and a corn crusher was installed, that's just to crush the grain to make it suitable for cattle feed and ah used it often. Yes, it was water powered, grand, very cheap way of...but the water wheel started to break up, it rusted and it was getting difficult to repair. There was a huge [?] bronze tooth mechanism right round the outside that drove the barn and it was starting to break up and it was very expensive to sort. So we took it out about 1960/61/62 and we put in a diesel engine instead, to drive the machinery, and funnily enough it was only eight horse power, the diesel engine which drove all that machinery, yet we thought this water wheel was enormous, it must have been hundreds of horsepower, but it wasn't, it probably was only seven or eight horse power. But very efficient.

JMW: Yes.

JMcM: Very efficient.

JMW: So that was a piece of what, Victorian engineering?

JMcM: Aye, built by a firm from Cumnock, there's a plate on the wall down there to say that they'd put it in. But tremendous expensive system to put in, it must have cost a fortune.

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The barn had to be built, because in the years gone by the steadings was away up the fell road there before power was used, so they had to build brand new steadings and this barn was three storeys, because the...naturally they used gravity, the sheaves went into the mill and the corn fell down onto the riddling mechanism, to clean it all and then it fell down again into wherever it was bagged to be taken away and the straw was...the straw came out one end into a shed where a...ah can remember a woman with a fork spreading this straw round to make a...not a stack because it was inside four walls, she couldnae go wrong and it was all hard, hard work and dusty.

JMW: Yes.

JMcM: Very dusty, especially in a bad season, if the corn was damp when it was harvested it was mouldy and when they thrashed it the place was just full of white dust which must have been really bad for their lungs, aye.

JMW: Yes, I think so.

JMcM: Because nobody wore a mask those days. If it was dusty ah can remember the men tying their handkerchiefs round their nose which would have very little effect, aye, and that was the threshing mill.

JMW: So, that's quite unusual because usually people got the mobile threshing mill.

JMcM: Well, funnily enough that's the next step, once this barn mill, it was very slow in quantity so the next thing was the threshing mill, aye, Wylie's at Garlieston provided a threshing mill and two guys came it. A mill and a baler behind to bale the straw and they also towed a caravan behind that, they stayed on the farm till the thrashing was finished. They probably came for four or five days at a time, maybe even...aye probably the whole week. And the men ate their meals in the farmhouse but they slept in their caravan at night.

JMW: Right.

JMcM: And so what sort of date was that, when Wylies-?

JMcM: That's '50s, that's '50s, yea, to my memory and way before as well, steam engines originally, I don't remember them. The one I do remember was a tractor called a Field Marshall and it was a single-cylinder tractor with a huge exhaust pipe, ah can remember it comin in and it made a very distinctive beat...like a railway engine, a sort of 'chuff, chuff, chuff' as it pulled in this thing and it drove the mill with a belt.

0.32.00

A big long end this belt drove the mill. And of course there was no Health and Safety in those days, there was no guards in this thing, people did actually fall into them occasionally or get their hands caught in them and all sorts. Oh, ah remember the mill because ah remember working at it. Ma dad actually bought one which we used for about ten or fifteen years and it was my job to feed this thing. Ye stood up in a little box with a knife and two of you cut the sheaves and poured them in and aye, it was dusty. Ah can remember going to the cinema in Newton Stewart one night after thrashing and ah couldnae open ma eyes to watch the film because they were so burning with dust (laughs). Thankfully those days are over.

JMW: Yes.

JMcM: Yea.

JMW: But was it a sort of social day when the mill came, people have mentioned-

JMcM: Well, we got guys fae Whithorn tae come and help if there was a big lot of thrashing to be done but normally we just did it ourselves. Because there was a pick-up baler behind the mill which took away the need for a man there, two of us on top and one body forking and instead of the corn coming off in bags, ma dad made a box with an auger in it that put it into a trailer, loose, so there was nobody needed at that end either so five of us could actually do the thrashing. But when Wylie's mill came in, aye there was a couple of guys came from Whithorn to give us a hand. Before ah was actually doing much work then, in ma kinna schooldays, ah remember them comin in. But harvest time was more sociable when we cut corn with a binder. We used tae get squads out from Whithorn to help, five or six every day, and potato picking, turnip hoeing. Flannigan was the man from Whithorn and he supplied labour and they quite often came in a cattle float and ah can remember them coming in the turnip field and the lorry, the back door coming down and jist a mass o humanity coming out and the girls and women all crawled up and down in the drills and they hoed the turnips by hand, just using their hands tae hold onto the small turnip and pulled the rest out, clean away the weeds, whereas the men, they used hoes, they stood behind and the gaffer, there was always a gaffer, he hoed as well but he used to help the slow people. He didn't actually take a drill of his own, he would help the slow ones and criticise and cajole them on to keep them moving. And aye, ah think ah can probably remember probably forty or fifty people one...in it...they used to come in the evenings after work so they'd come here aboot back o six...this was in June it would be, aye, sort of mid, late June and work till half past nine. And they did their three hours and amazing how much work a number of people like that could do.

0.34.52

JMW: Yes.

JMcM: A twenty acre field would be done in, quite happily, three evenings wi a squad like that.

JMW: Yes, I've interviewed somebody who was in them, Jenny Jolly was in them.

JMcM: Ah yes, Jenny used to be involved, ah didn't know her but she used to work next door.

JMW: Yes, that's right.

JMcM: For David Durie, they were regulars there, aye. Her husband would be one of the squad sort of gang masters, ah think. Ah didn't actually know her but ah know who ye mean.

JMW: Yes.

JMcM: No, Jimmy Flannigan was our man and he supplied us with labour.

JMW: Is that Jimmy who's still alive?

JMcM: No, no. No, Jimmy's...ah don't know if ye know Sally...Sally Grimble...Grimbles the...[?] Grimble, ye know who ah mean? Jimmy Graham? Sally was Jimmy's daughter.

JMW: Right.

JMcM: Sally and Mary...Mary...she's got sons who are just...one was married just recently...sorry, ah can't remember. Anyway, Sally and Mary were the two daughters and Jimmy and Agnes were the husband and wife that supplied us with labour.

JMW: So, it was more from Whithorn than Port William that-?

JMcM: We didn't seem to get any labour from Port William, no.

JMW: Right.

JMcM: An odd tradesman would come up from Port William, a builder, maybe a chimney sweep, and odd people like that but no, ah don't remember any labourers from Port William at all. Whithorn seemed to be the main area.

0.36.15

JMW: And in terms of your own involvement as a child, did you go into Port William **to** shop or buy anything?

JMcM: Yea, well we used to...Port William...we went to school at Knock, of course...so Port William school was quite alien to us. We went tae Port William probably aboot half-past seven on a Saturday morning for papers and shopping and stuff. Whithorn was a regular cinema, Whithorn, in fact ah do remember going for tea in The Grapes, high tea in The Grapes, in Whithorn, was a big night, a day out for us and then went to the cinema afterwards, a treat, ma mum and dad and (Morag?) and I, yea, that's going back a bit. Mr Chamberlain's had the cinema, [?]'s father.

JMW: Yes.

JMcM: But Port William, aye and of course the sports day and carnival week, we always, we've always been involved there so we go there for that, yea. And our schooldays we had

to get the bus in Port William, we actually got a service bus from Monreith to Port William cause the school bus went from Port William to Newton and back again at night.

JMW: And Monreith, how has that changed? Obviously the tourism there has changed a bit.

JMcM: Yea, well, all the cottages ah remember with old worthies in them are all just holiday houses now, sadly. And...I suppose it's jist the same as it was, the bungalows up the top are all just different people but the same retired sort of people. And, aye, there's a few kids, a few children in Monreith just now. They're proposing to build some new houses, twelve or thirteen new houses, so that should maybe us a wee boost in population. But Monreith was our playground, ah suppose we would know everybody there. Happy memories at Halloween, we used to go round all the houses at Halloween and come out with a huge bag of nuts and apples etc. Of course we knew it well from school.

JMW: Yes.

JMcM: If the fields were muddy we used to walk round via Monreith so ye knew most of the people that were in the village. Ma grandmother lived in Monreith anyway, so there was always a place to stop for a biscuit

JMW: Right.

JMcM: On the way home.

0.38.31

JMW: And were the people there, living there, making a living out of agriculture or-?

JMcM: Yea, ah would have said that most of them were. Yea, and when the council houses were built in the late '50s they were all agricultural workers in there then. And, aye, there was workers on Monreith Estate lived in the village, our old shepherd lived there, he lived in the village too. And we had two shops, the grocer's shop at the bottom and then the post office and then, latterly, we had a garage and petrol pumps and a caravan site opened, it caused a big boost in population, well not population but summer population. Aye, there was always something going on, yes.

JMW: I'm guessing that because of the advent of machinery and increasingly large machinery, it's the absence of people on the land that's perhaps one of the big changes.

JMcM: Oh aye, oh aye. An awful lot of smaller farms than this are really lonely places, there's only the farmer. There's nobody else, he just has to do it all himself or he gets some help if he has to pay for help. But, no, I remember the fun of having all these, all the staff, it was great fun, there was always somebody tae go with you when ye were doing things and gathering sheep and all the...just the crack. And now, well, as I say, there's one man now, it's quite different. Quite often he's on one tractor and I'm on the other and unless we actually phone each other there's no contact at all.

JMW: That's right, it's an enclosed space.

Mm: Aye it is yes. In those days it was...and then of course in those days too, aye that's a subject I want to go onto too. There was always room for sort of semi-handicapped people on the farm in those days. We always had...ah can always remember somebody...and one in particular who worked here who wasn't able to work on his own but he jist was swallowed

up by the rest of the men who looked after him and he could do menial tasks, he couldn't drive, he couldn't count, this poor lad had trouble speaking but that's another story, but there was room for him and he had, he had a valuable input into society and sadly now there's none of them now because there are no big numbers of staff to keep...to help them and ah can remember Johnny...he would just have been put in a home, I presume, if he hadn't been working here. And as long as you gave him cigarettes he was usually quite stoic, he got very cross if he had no cigarettes but as long as ye kept him plied with cigarettes...but it's amazing and that's something that's quite sad now...cause there'll be still the same proportion of people like him who need help that don't get it.

0.41.13

JMW: Certainly people have spoken in Whithorn about...what shall I say...people on the margins maybe, as you say, because of a handicap but they seem to kind of just be included.

JMcM: Oh aye, oh they were.

JMW: You would give them a penny for singing a hymn or something or something-

JMcM: Yes, seemingly they did going far enough back, yes. Aye, it's funny you should say a penny cause this guy's nickname was Johnny Pey and as a child he was always asking for a penny but with his speech impediment he couldn't pronounce penny and he called it a pey.

JMW: Right.

JMcM: And that's maybe the same...you're maybe getting the same story from farther back from someone else, aye. But he was a good...aye he just died there a few years ago. He finished up in a sort of sheltered accommodation in Newton Stewart but he was retiring age then, he worked here from...oh, he'd be in his late teens, I suppose till his sort of forties or so. But a good strong, able worker.

JMW: And did you find that the farm workers you had, did they stay long periods with you.

JMcM: Oh, aye, oh yes, aye they did. Well, the shepherd, ah remember old Tom was there forty years and the tractor driver thirty-odd and his wife was more, she came in 1935 and she just retired in, it would be in the sort of late '70s or something. She had her forty years as well. Although, there were a lot moved on very quickly, a lot of them just stayed a year or so. Ma dad always said in the spring, if ye saw them putting their garden in, it was a good sign, because they were gonnae stay on that...another year but if they didnae get the garden in you could say 'Ah ha, he's movin on'.

JMW: Right.

JMcM: Ah think the ones who are maybe down the ladder a wee bit seemed to move on more often. The shepherds and the stockmen, I think, and the tractor drivers latterly, in those days, maybe had more responsible jobs and ah think they tended to stay, to stay on the place longer. But some of the sort of second or third men down the line seemed to move a lot. The ones ah remember too, it wisnae so much the men that wanted to move, the wives werenae happy, they were away from their mother or their own family, maybe from Ayrshire, Kirkcudbright or somewhere, they seemed to be ill at ease, wanting tae get back. Ah can remember that on two or three occasions, aye, so the poor man just had tae up sticks and go somewhere else.

0.43.40

JMW: And where would you hire people? Was there a hiring fair or-?

JMcM: No, we didn't just hire, I don't remember that, that was way before my time. You would just advertise in the paper or you would see an advert in the paper, a man looking for a job. And one, and that's an instance too, there was people in the Loch Cottage along there...we walked to school that way, picked up one, two, three, four kids in the morning, walked along, went to school. We came back at night, ma father and him had fallen out in the morning and there was a cattle truck sittin at the door when we came back from school and that was him flittin that afternoon.

JMW: Right.

JMcM: Just like that, there were no labour rules then, they had a row 'On your bike!' and he was away, they moved out that night (laughs), crazy.

JMW: It wouldn't happen now.

JMcM: No, no, but that's it, ah can see it yet, and it was Agnew's float from Port William that was sitting there and when John McCarley and I came back from school wi the girls trailing behind 'What's this? What's this?' he says. 'It's a float', 'Mum must be getting something' and Mum came out and got him by the ear ah remember, and didn't speak to me at all, of course I was part of the enemy. And they were away that day, God it was crazy. Thankfully it's not as bad as that now (laughter), a bit more security.

JMW: And did your family go to church, was there a church connection?

JMcM: Aye, well, my old family, if you go back far enough, used to alternate between Mochram and Glasserton.

JMW: Right.

JMcM: We were right on, we were right on the boundary here of Glasserton and Mochram.

JMW: Yes.

JMcM: The burn there just at the road's the boundary.

JMW: Right.

0.45.14

JMcM: So some of my ancestors are buried in Mochram, in fact most of them are. And then the rest are in Glasserton. And ma dad was an elder at Glasserton Church.

JMW: Oh, was he?

JMcM: Aye, for a long time, yea, so we had a connection there. His parents are in Glasserton but his grandparents and the rest before him are in Mochram.

JMW: Right. And what about the farm workers, do you remember them going to church, as well?

JMcM: No, no, ah don't remember any of them going to the church, no. No I don't remember any, no there was none o them went to church at all. Unless there was a service in Monreith Hall, there's a little...what was the mission hall in Monreith, which is the

bowling hall now. It must have been, it must have been a...like a special occasion and they would all go to that.

JMW: Was it a Baptist Church?

JMcM: No, it used to be the local minister that'd do it, Mr Cowie, in my young days would come down from Whithorn, or not from...from Glasserton and The Isle and he would hold the service and a few of them would turn out to that. But what ah do remember is, when we got television, in the early '50s, talking about going out, and there was boxing on, my dad used to have them in to watch the boxing. And the three old guys up there and the one from Stalleck and his wife all got all dressed up to come down and watch the telly and ah can see him yet, this fellow, he had a collar and tie on and a great flowery tie outside his jumper, he had a jumper on but he'd this tie on the outside and they were all shining like shillings. So they obviously thought this was a special occasion and that's early '50s. And they would come in and...aye it would be early '50s, 55/6 and they would come in and ma mum would make a cup o tea and a sandwich or something, they had a great...they seemed to enjoy that. But gettin all dressed up for it, nowadays you'd just go jist wi yer shirt and a pair o jeans on but it's jist the way they were.

JMW: Television would be-

0.47.13

JMcM: Oh it was a novelty, total, aye, total. Cause they'd no electricity in their houses ye see, they used to get an accumulator thing charged up in the garage in Port William sort of, it was a sort of glass battery with a handle on it, and that powered their radio.

JMW: Right.

JMcM: That's really all they had was their radio set and this thing...the wee knobs, ah can remember them, they screwed the wires on and the radio cackled up and that was their...that would be their only in-house entertainment. And Willie, up there, had a gramophone, ah remember a huge thing with a great big trumpet on it that he wound up and played old scratchy music records on.

JMW: So inside the farm cottages, were there two rooms?

JMcM: Two rooms, mostly, yes. Aye, there was a main, living room and there was another, a bedroom and just stone, they were stone floors...they were tiles like quarry tiles and a black range for cooking. Oh ah remember them well, ah remember takin them out. And the water at the pump down the road, they had tae walk down the road tae get the water, carry it up in buckets and big families.

JMW: Yea.

JMcM: In ma dad's day there was Kevin's from Port William, ah think there was about eight or nine o them reared in a room and kitchen up there. How those women managed ah don't know, ah don't know at all.

JMW: Well, I suppose it was good to have labour, you had income coming in if...one they could start earning.

JMcM: That's right and children in those days, I think, were seen as a sort of asset, they could go out and work. As soon as the kids were big enough they'd be out earning some money. But in the late '50s the houses were gutted and made two into one which made them much more suitable. And kitchens and toilets and what not put in, but that's just the way they were.

JMW: Yea.

JMcM: Nobody was any different.

0.49.13

JMW: Yes.

JMcM: Electricity obviously must have made a big difference to them, although the line we had going across the stack for the house over there, by the time the electricity got to him it was so low that he couldnae watch television and boil the kettle at the same time, that was just totally out and Bob being a knacky kinna chap got in wi a screwdriver and he altered the television to take less electricity. Seemingly in those days you could turn them down, the voltage down, to keep the picture the full size, cause as soon as ye put lights on the picture shrunk away down into just a box. But Bob got a screwdriver and fixed that. But it was...they didn't know any better...sorry, ah don't mean to sound like that, it was just the way things were, then.

JMW: Everybody was the same.

JMcM: Everybody was the same. And he, ah remember him buying an old motor car and he was over the moon wi this thing, he'd never had a car before, and a bicycle was their only means of transport.

JMW: Yes, one gets the impression that when you were out and about in the countryside you would see more people either walking or cycling. And of course there were more people to see, anyway.

JMcM: Yea. And the old farmer along the road, he had a car but he preferred to cycle to Whithorn because he said if you went in the car, you never got speaking to anybody. You wouldn't stop and talk, but the bike, you're only doing seven, eight, nine miles an hour, you just stopped 'There's Willie, so, I'll stop and have a blether' and he took...he went in on the bike more often than not for that reason.

JMW: And do you remember blacksmiths in the area?

JMcM: Oh yes, we had a blacksmith over at the clachan, the clachan o Myrton, Jimmy Mulhench.

JMW: Right.

JMcM: Up until, '80s, late '80s maybe, just a man on his own. And spent a lot of time wi him, yea, fixing things, shoeing...well ah didn't shoe horses but he was shoeing horses and just generally doing repairs but by the time ah came along his job had changed, electrical

welders had appeared and he was sortin machinery, agricultural machinery, more so than making things but he could make horseshoes and he could make all these things.

0.51.16

And the smiddy, actually, is exactly as it was. His son has just closed the door and if ye ever want tae have a look in it's just a throwback tae late Victorian times.

JMW: Goodness.

JMcM: The bellows, the bellows are all made o leather and a big long wooden handle that ye put up. He'd electricity right enough, latterly, jist for light and all his machinery was driven by a small Lister engine and a system of belts and pulleys that drove the grinder and a drill and whatnot. Aye, he was a craftsman. It always amazed me how he never seemed to measure anything, if he was making a band to go round something he just seemed to know how to cut it, that it fitted. Of course, he'd done it so long. And ah can remember seeing him putting metal bands on a cartwheel when they warmed them up and then put them on a cartwheel and then when they cool they shrink and they pull the spokes in tight. Ah can remember seeing him doing that.

JMW: There was one at Glasserton, as well.

JMcM: Ah don't remember him, no. Ah don't remember being in there, anyway. But the smith would be there, yes. There was one at Clarksburn, that's just at Monreith here but that's before my time. But see, there was so many horses then and things had to be fixed locally and the blacksmith's shop, as far as ah remember the old boys telling us, it was a social place, cause he worked at nights as well, the men went there at night, well it was warm for a start for there was fire on and the conversation would be good because plenty of the local worthies...and in those days the ploughs all had shares on them and the ploughshare had to be re-metalled every so often after maybe every...ah don't know...twenty acres or so.

JMW: Right.

JMcM: So they'd take them to the smiddy and the blacksmith would put some more metal on and ye may take them today and leave them and go back and get them tomorrow night, that sort of thing, that's the way it was done usually. And Mulhench was quite funny, chalk was a favourite item because they would chalk out things on metal when they wanted tae cut it, where they wanted to cut it, and he chanked messages and he always wrote on the anvil there, the anvil was always shining like a shilling because it had been used sae much and every message always started wi 'Just', 'Just at the Port. Just at Trawdy, Trawdy being Duntrodden Farm'.

0.53.38

He always told ye where he was, maybe when he'd be back, maybe wouldnae know when he was comin back but 'Just' was always the start of the message, ah remember (laughs). Trivia but some things ye remember about it.

JMW: So clearly it was never locked.

JMcM: It was never locked and he had 'Open' painted on his door, there's not many tradesmen do that now. He was never shut, ah would go over on a Sunday morning at ten o' clock tae get an emergency thing sorted and Jimmy was there, fixing something, doing something, jist the way those boys were.

JMW: And do you remember visiting Gypsies or Travellers in the area?

JMcM: No, the only Travellers ah remember, jist beyond Port William, there was a family, a big, big family of people used to come in caravans and tents down there, Killintrae Burn, just...the Clone Burn, sorry, the Clone Burn, it would be, jist on the left after Port William, on the shore road, every summer but ah didn't really know who they were, no we didn't have any dealings wi them. Although, we had sort of Gypsy people came round tae buy and sell stuff. Ah can remember people comin in wi packs of material and stuff, ma mum entertainin them at the door. And eggs, they were always lookin for eggs, aye, and the deal was always done whatever ye were buying from them, eggs were always involved in the transaction. There was always this half dozen eggs. It was McMillans from Stranraer and there was another lot, cannae mind what they were called, no, there was folk used to come fairly regularly, tramps, ah remember a tramp comin round, Jimmy Scott, Snib Scott. They were kinna regular, well, when ah say regular visitors ah suppose once or twice a year, maybe, but no, we didn't have any Gypsies or Tinkers. Pots...aye, there was somebody came wi pots and pans once and sharpened stuff, it's away back in the hazy past, ah'm sorry. But commercial travellers then, as opposed to now, cor, they were every day there was somebody.

JMW: Yes, yes.

JMcM: That's thankfully something that's changed because they were a bloody pest, so they were. And now, to be honest, maybe ah've just been sae nasty and chased them all away, ah don't know, but ah suppose ah don't get any more than two or three in a year.

0.55.56

JMW: I think it is on the decline.

JMcM: And most of them...just so expensive tae keep these guys on the road but they were a regular occurrence, aye.

JMW: And what about mobile shops?

JMcM: Oh, aye, there was the mobile shops, aye. Well, the butcher from Whithorn, Charlie Coyde he came every...once a week. And Walker, the baker from Creetown, he came twice a week and Jimmy Dewar, Port William, again the grocer, now I think they handed in a list for him and he delivered it. Or maybe it was phoned in, ah don't know. But he only got paid once every three months, ah think. The blacksmith sent a bill every six months but the grocer, ah think he just sent it...we just paid him once a month or whatever. There wasnae much cash changed hands. The Co-op came, the Co-op van came around, ah remember him comin around wi groceries. Ah think that would be it, probably, so there was probably somebody every day, yes, there would be.

JMW: Yes.

JMcM: Charlie Coyde was a big hefty chap, great big podgy hands, an ah always remember ma mum accusing him of having his thumb on the scales when he was weighing the sausages cause his fingers looked like sausages, they were great big thick, thick fingers, somebody else has probably told you that (laughter) and ma mum occasionally 'Get yer thumb of the scales there, Charlie, ah'm just buying sausages, ah'm no buying your podgy fingers.' (Laughter). His name's still on the shop at Whithorn.

JMW: It is, yes.

JMW: Aye, it's never been taken down.

JMW: I think somebody's still in touch with...is it Rutherford Coyde?

JMcM: Oh, right, uhuh.

JMW: Or maybe it's Charles Rutherford Coyde, so that must be a son.

JMcM: Yes, something like that, well his son'll be...Charlie was an old man then and, heavens, we're all getting older so his son's probably my age or maybe more, aye.

0.57.45

What ah can remember, which is really quite interesting, is we used to sell our fat cattle in Newton Stewart and all the butchers were there on a Wednesday and they used to buy them and of course they were killed locally, they were killed in Newton Stewart, which was a...ah think was a nice green way of doing things, nowadays my cattle travel to goodness knows where...Ayr at the very least, Stirling, Aberdeen, to be slaughtered there and then dispersed throughout the country. But in those days they went from here to Newton Stewart on a Wednesday morning, they would probably be killed that afternoon or probably Thursday morning at the very latest. Ah can remember them actually walking them from the market down to the slaughter house on occasions so there was no food miles involved.

JMW: No.

JMcM: Jim Jesson, the butcher in Port William, would buy some and the butchers in Creetown and...oh Newton Stewart had four or five butchers, Charlie Coyde used to buy from us, Norris from Wigtown, and it was a nice tidier way to do things, and for the cattle too.

JMW: Yes, definitely.

JMcM: Far less stress.

JMW: So where was the slaughter house in Newton Stewart?

JMcM: Just turn right at the filling station, down the steep brae and just as you bend round that corner, it was just in there. It's still there, it's just empty. And it would employ three or four men and it was a lot handier for everybody concerned. But what were we saying about shops, travelling shops? Ah don't think there was anybody else came, ah think that was about it.

JMW: You didn't get people selling linen and stuff?

JMcM: Well, we did. This van came round, this woman ah can see wi the pack of materials and things, yes, she did. They sold clothing o some kind...blankets? Yes it was kinna blankets and sheets and ah don't remember much about that to be honest but ah can remember ma mum dealing with them at the door, anyway.

JMW: Certainly that's how the Jollys started out, but I think it was china they sold, just from a cart.

0.59.54

JMcM: Is that right?

JMcM: This is way back, this is Mrs McLean's mother.

JMcM: Oh right.

JMW: And her mother had a cart saying 'Mary Jolly, Dealer'.

JMcM: Away!

JMW: And sold china and stuff through the countryside but it would be, it would be more, it could be your grandfather's time.

JMcM: Oh aye, it would be, away back, aye. There's a photograph somewhere here of an old boy on a cart, a donkey cart, at the front gate and ah think he was maybe a Whithorn man, ah'm no sure, somebody Griffin, somebody Griffin maybe. But what he was doing...whether he was just a haulier in his own wee way, just moving goods back and forward ah don't really know.

JMW: Do you remember much about the holiday makers coming to Port William? It must have had a bit of a trade with all those hotels and pubs and things.

JMcM: Aye, well ah can remember when it was certainly a lot busier, Port William then with...well...The Eagle Hotel, The Commercial and The Monreith Arms, all fairly busy, now there's just one and ah don't know how busy it is. But Monreith was always fairly quiet, ye seemed tae, ah think ye got traditional families who came every year and probably had connections here. Maybe their parents had been coming for long enough, ah don't know, and then of course when the caravan site opened it was jist...ah wouldnae say it was jist about anybody but a much bigger a cross section of people. Because occasionally you meet people on holiday who've been coming for years, their parents came on holiday and they've just continued...some of these holiday cottages. But we never...well, we did have holidaymakers cause we used to have Girl Guides and Boy Scouts came to camp. Hamilton Academy Girl Guides came year after year in the '50s and camped doon next to the loch. And occasionally had summers like this got rained off, totally rained off and spent the...spent the most of the week in the barn trying to keep dry. One particular year they were...this room here was full o clothes, ma mum had pulleys in here and they were laden wi Girl Guide's clothes trying to get them dried off cause it just rained every day. And of course, ye cannae stay dry when yer camping, you've got to go out and get water and cook food and they were black wi smoke, these lassies, ah can see them yet, their eyes were all ringed wi smoke, cookin over an open fire, as they did.

1.02.14

Although the Boy Scouts didn't and the Boys' Brigade, when they came, they had gas cookers, they brought gas cookers, ah remember they were a bit naff (laughs). But the girls did it all basically, did the whole job, aye.

JMW: What about your mother's responsibilities running the farmhouse, did she have help or was she-?

JMcM: Aye, there was always a girl in the house, yes.

JMW: A live-in help or did she come in?

JMcM: No, there was nobody...there was one lived in for a very short time, no they usually just single girls from round about, Aye. The last one she had, ah remember, when ah was sort of late teens, she was a farm worker's daughter from just next door, she just walked over in the mornings or cycled. And then there was...when ah sort of...one or two, aye. Aye, just used the cottage wives, Mrs Parker used tae help in the house and then a woman from the Port, aye they always had some help, aye.

JMW: Did she have to cook a lunch for people coming in from the fields or-?

JMcM: No...there was teas taken out, mostly, there wasnae sae much eatin in. The mill men were the only folk ah remember actually eating in but at harvest time there was always tea and sandwiches taken out in the afternoon, especially if it was a good day and you were gonna work on till maybe eight at night, so she would make tea and...a harvest tea and take it out to the field. But of course in those days we had a three course lunch and a high tea as well. We seemed to eat all day, although we never had breakfast, Dad and I just had a cup o tea and a bit o toast but we always had either a two or three course lunch and then we had a good big hearty tea as well. Of course ye were doing a lot more hard work...ye were physically liftin things and ah suppose yer appetite was better. But no, well ah think they had pin money...was hens, she kept a few hens, and she made butter cause we had a couple o cows in the byre and she used tae make butter and ah can remember her selling it...or selling butter to various folk...it would only be pennies, ah suppose, but it would be a little extra. But Mum didn't help outside as such, a lot of farmers' wives do...she didn't do any outside...she did a lot of gardening and stuff and she jist done her housework. But a lot of farmers' wives actually physically work outside, especially dairy farmers, a lot of them do the dairy, or part of it.

1.04.44

JMW: And what about...your father may have told you about World War Two and its impact?

JMcM: Aye well, my father's brother who farmed with him, he volunteered and was unfortunately killed in the RAF.

JMW: Right.

JMcM: In, '44 so that was a big impact ah suppose, yea. Dad was in the Home Guard and ah know we laugh about it but we shouldn't, it was bloody hard work cause you were working all day.

JMW: Yes, of course.

JMcM: And patrolling at night looking for submarines, he told us some great...well, I wouldn't say great tales, he just told us as it was. Sitting on the hill at the golf course, presuming you could hear the engines throbbing and aw this and cycling away to the Rocks o (Garrichy?) to report to the Glenluce contingent.

JMW: That's a fair distance.

JMcM: A fair distance, it is, and then workin all day as well. And prisoners of war, he talked quite a lot about them, the Italians and Germans that they had workin in the farm, and actually they a lot o them were good workers, quite enthusiastic.

JMW: So, you had them on this farm?

JMcM: Yea, yes. There as a camp at Port William, just where, nowadays, it's 3B have their workshop there, that hostel was where the prisoners were billeted although the main camp was at Minnigaff but I think they must have been a few just stayed down this end, maybe for the week, ah don't know, before ma time. But funnily enough ah had a German chap came to the door, three or four years ago, and he'd been here as a prisoner.

JMW: Really?

JMcM: Aye, it was funny, God it was funny that day. He went into the garden here and he went 'My goodness this garden's never changed. Your grandfather used to put me in here' he said 'it was like a labour camp' he said 'Digging and digging and weeding.' (Laughs).

1.06.28

But he, it turned oot was only eighteen then...towards the end of the war there was an awful lot of these young lads were captured over there so he wasnae much older than I was to be honest and he could remember it well. So what other things the war affected ah don't really know, it was before my time. Food-wise they would have to produce a lot more food, they had to plough more.

JMW: Yes.

JMcM: Ah think the Ministry had a system where they went round and checked up on farms to make sure they were producing food and they were told which fields to plough and get...for the war effort.

JMW: Yes, yes, because presumably it was a reserved occupation?

JMcM: Well, it was, aye, although a lot of them did, as ah said ma father's brother he volunteered tae go. In fact they argued and fought as to who was gonna go and he said 'Well, ah'm older, ah'm goin.' That was the story, anyway. So he did his training in Canada, as a navigator, his eyesight wasnae good enough for a pilot but he was a navigator. Ah would have thought the other way round, ah would have thought the navigator would have had to be able to see where he's going...but never mind. And funnily enough part of his training was when he came back here, he was at Whitehaven and he flew over here quite regularly. We have his log, which is very interesting, and then we was stationed in the Middle East but he flew over here round the...over the Fell and Scaurs and Mull o Galloway and the Isle of Man, as part of his training which must have been good fun for him because he would know exactly where he was.

JMW: The one book, one of the books that I associate with this area is Ian Niall's *Reminiscences*. Do you know anything about that?

JMcM: Yes, ah do, ah've read it, aye, more than once. I know it, it's very true to life I'd say. And ah know the story too because it caused a great uproar when it was published.

JMW: It certainly did, yes.

1.08.26

JMcM: And ye can see why in a way, but it's just life in the raw, how it would be, aye. No, it's good, aye.

JMW: And then later he wrote the...was it *The Galloway Childhood*?

JMcM: That's right.

JMW: And some of that is focused on Monreith.

JMcM: Oh right.

JMW: I think, did he have a grandfather or something-

JMcM: Oh right. In Monreith?

JMW: -who was a blacksmith, yes.

JMcM: Now, I've read that book a while ago but ah can't remember the Monreith part.

JMW: Or maybe he's written so many books and I've read many of...there's one called *The Village Blacksmith* and I think that-

JMcM: Oh, I haven't seen that one.

JMW: -relates to Monreith.

JMcM: That's Monreith, Bob Adair was the blacksmith in his area, at [?] but ah don't know who the blacksmith would be at Monreith, no. Ah must read it again. It's probably here somewhere. But no, ah think ah enjoyed reading those and one or two other ones too, the Whithorn chap there, he wrote one about his life on the croft at...help me.

JMW: Oh, Joe?

JMcM: Joe Whiteford.

JMW: Yes, I was involved with that.

JMcM: Sorry, ah'm having trouble remembering. Aye it was very good reading, aye, ah could relate to a lot of that.

JMW: Yes.

JMcM: He's a bit older, obviously, but ah even remember the sort of [?].

1.09.40

JMW: Farming on a very small scale at the croft.

JMcM: Oh aye, very small. We spent this summer, a couple of weeks in the Western Isles, and took two weeks to see it all and it was tremendous, seeing these old crofts and just to be able to talk to the crofters and find out just how they ticked. Very interesting. But if ye look back to a hundred years ago or so, they had a hard life, by Jove, just subsistence, really. Even taking the thatch off the roof to get the soot that had accumulated to put on your tattie patch for next year. That's hard work, that's hard work. Ah thought that was jist about, ah couldn't imagine getting...Ruaraidh and me would maybe just go and buy a bag of fertiliser now and just throw it in the potato crop and away ye go but these guys were really scrapin, they were scrapin a living, no doubt about it and boiled fish and tatties, day in and day out, oatmeal. We don't know we're living.

JMW: No, no. Well, I suppose in terms of the sort of prosperity of farming, is this about the best that you've know it or has it-?

JMcM: Oh aye, now, this last few years has been, aye.

JMW: And then back in the seventies too, when it was sort of good times then because ah remember when we bought the farm, ma dad thinking what a huge amount of money it was, ah would never pay it off and inflation clicked in.

JMW: Of course, yes.

JMcM: And of course when we finished off paying off, ah wouldn't say peanuts, but it was so easy to pay off, ten, fifteen, twenty years later. So we were maybe very fortunate we bought it when we did. Because they'd been through hard times in the '30s, ah know Dad talked about that, in his youth, he said, times were really hard. We werenae producing milk but some of the milk producers were only getting twopence, or threepence a gallon, just a pittance, the prices were really bad and...ah think they did well, they seemed to do really well in the '50s. '60s I don't know, probably were a bit drier but when I was involved on the '70s, and, aye, probably the worst time ah really remember were the mid-90s when BSE kicked in from the beef point of view, up until...and of course foot and mouth jiggered the whole job too, although we didn't actually get it, but that's course there was another story. We were still...we were even probably more affected by it because we didn't get it. Marketing the stock was a nightmare. Ah must admit this last, I would say this last six or seven years has been really quite good for beef farmers, aye, especially these last two or three years, aye, prices are good.

1.12.13

JMW: So, in a way the recession isn't in agriculture?

JMcM: Well, not in lowland beef farming at the moment, ah would say it's not. But on the other hand, of course, fuel prices, fertiliser, wages and feed at the moment, if ye have tae buy in food, ah produce ma own food, but if ye have tae buy in food, especially things like soya, wheat, are all huge price but the beef price and the lamb prices are good at the moment.

JMW: So the bad summers, a bad summer like this, hasn't actually affected you adversely.

JMcM: Well, it hasn't actually. Funny, the last lot of cattle I sold I thought had just sat still, ah didn't think they had put on any flesh on the last month but it turned out, when ah got the returns back, they were actually heavier than the previous lot. So they must, although I thought they were slack lookin, skinny lookin, they'd actually survived the...but anyway ah've got a breed of cattle that can survive in the wet. Aberdeen Angus cattle can survive in the kinna cold wet conditions, so they probably scored this year.

JMW: Yea.

JMcM: But ah can imagine some of the dairy farms have produced less milk this summer wi the wet conditions and the watery grass. And dry matter's actually what the cattle like, quite often in summer time in the high summer when ye see no grass in the field and the cows all lying chowin their cud, that's when they're producing food cause the grass they're eatin is just about totally all dry matter, there's no goo in it and it makes a more efficient job of producing food or flesh, milk or flesh.

JMW: So have breeds changed, the ones that your grandfather would have had?

JMcM: Well, they had Galloway cows originally and we've changed, ah've changed tae Angus, yea, because they grow faster and they grow heavier as well and they're quieter to work with. Some of the Galloway cows can be a bit feisty to work with.

JMW: Right.

JMcM: But the basic change for other people...the continental breeds have just taken over, Limousine and Charolaise and Simmental from France, Switzerland, they're just taking over because they're quick, good converters, they can put on flesh quicker than the native breeds.

1.14.25

But ah'm a bit old fashioned ah've stuck tae ma old native breeds and ah think it's the right way to go. Ah can produce beef without using any cereals and that...ah can sell ma cereals to ma neighbour next door to feed his dairy cows, so that's my formula for doing it.

JMW: So, are you optimistic about the future in this area.

JMcM: Oh aye, oh, ah think so. Farming area? Oh, ah think it will be. Well the farm'll get bigger and bigger ah think. The small family farms are struggling badly but they'll just have to amalgamate, that's all. The days o the wee crofty place and half a dozen cows or whatever it is, has just gone.

JMW: Yes, yea.

JMcM: But no, ah think the farms...the way that people are building round about us anyway, investing in the future, they must know something and people still have to eat and if the world population rises the way they say it's gonna rise they hae tae eat something, whether we genetically modify all the crops for them, ah don't know. No, I think farming's ok, ah think it's in good hands, the young neighbours round about seem to be able to look positively at it. Difficult looking from this stage because you're finished, ah don't mean finished but you're at retirement age and ye see it in a different light but when ah was teens and twenties the days were never long enough, ye could never get enough done, ye were always desperate tae get more done.

JMW: Is there anything else you feel I haven't asked you about?

JMcM: Gosh, ah don't know (laughter), ah don't know at all. Ah've just rambled on.

JMW: No, it's been really good.

JMcM: Ah suppose...well. the only other person ah thought you may like to ask if ye were...who's ten years older is Dr Brown in Port William, you probably know Guy Brown?

JMW: I fully intend to.

JMcM: Aye well, ah was wondering cause when Alison said this morning about you coming and ah said...she said 'Guy Brown's tremendous recall' and of course he goes back that extra ten years, they guys can remember wartime which ah suppose is interesting to people.

JMW: Yea, yea, well it's a watershed.

1.16.43

JMcM: It is, it is, exactly, well, ah was born just after it finished but-. Aye ye mentioned holidaymakers and ah was thinking although ah didn't say at the time but it was due to a holiday maker comin down that ma mum appeared on the scene. She came down on holiday, her sister, her sister's husband was stationed at Muldoon, at the aerodrome, and they had a house in Monreith for a while and that's how ma dad and ma mum met so there's a...if it wasn't for that, the wartime, it would maybe be somebody quite different. But that does make a difference ah suppose, aye.

JMW: And it was a big influx in the gene pool.

JMcM: Oh heavens, yes.

JMW: Lots of marriages and-.

JMcM: That's right, that's right and some of them wouldnae even be marriages but they would be...that's right it did. But these things happen throughout history. Somebody in Port William told me once about all the dark swarthy people up that coast to Glenluce, or were, and they blamed it on the Spanish Armada. Seemingly some Spanish sailors were washed ashore, alive obviously, because there was no way of getting back home so they just stayed and of course they left their mark, the dark skin and darker hair and so the story goes. But that's the way we've all evolved, the Vikings and the...whoever else, the Romans or whatever. The skeleton that ah dug up wi the plough, we wondering now if some DNA sampling from there might be interesting to see where...what stamp he's left. He may be connected to some of the local people but sadly ah've never heard anymore. It's about four or five months ago now but we will hear about it eventually.

JMW: It's perhaps a slow process.

JMcM: Ah think so.

JMW: But it just shows you how this area's been populated for millennia.

JMcM: And how many more there could be buried down there. Could be all over, under our feet in fact.

JMW: Indeed.

JMcM: Because this gravelly hill here is exactly the same as the gravelly hill where ah found the body, the deposits o gravel from the ice-age plumped all over the place here and of course if you've a nice dry site for a house and nice easy digging for burying a body. So that's really why, goodness knows.

1.18.53

JMW: Right, well if you think we've covered-.

JMcM: Well, ah don't know, I could go on all day (laughs). No, ah couldn't, no. Have you got anything of any interest?

JMW: Yes, absolutely. From you, you mean?

JMcM: Aye.

JMW: Absolutely, yes. No, I will terminate it there but thank you very much.

JMcM: You're welcome.