

Interviewee: John Wilson (JW)	Interviewer: Julia Muir Watt (JMW)
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JMW: So, maybe we can start if I just ask you how your family came to be here and how long they've been here.

JW: Well, ma family, on the Wilson side, are related to the Wigtown Martyr, Margaret Wilson, the Wigtown Martyr.

JMW: Right.

JW: So, they came from Glenbernoch down here and my grandfather was...came down as joiner, at Glasserton, and he continued to be a joiner there until his death. At the time of his death my father and my uncle continued the business. That continued until ma father saw that there wasn't a living in it for the two of them and he went away to America. He came back to see his father, who was dying at the time, and this was at the time of the Depression and when he came back he had other, he had two other brothers in New York, and they kept writing back to him to say 'Don't come back' or 'Don't come back, there's no work'. And eventually he met ma mother and the week that his work permit expired he got a letter to say that work was pickin up and he could go back but ma mother didn't want to go to America and that's how we stayed here. Ah was born in Monreith, in 1938. It's a good job ah was born here because ah would have finished up in Vietnam (laughs).

JMW: True.

JW: But anyway, that's another story. Ma father was one of seven brothers-

JMW: Right, gosh.

JW: -and one sister. The brothers, all but two of them, emigrated to America and to...one of them went to Australia. Ma father, as I say, was in America, came back and then stayed here. Now, my uncle who had the business at that time, he died in 1954, and ma father said to me...by this time ah had left the school and ah was working at...in a garage in Port William. These were the great days when you...ah left school at fifteen ah said to ma father 'Ah want to leave school' because ah wasn't really interested in it, ah was more interested in playin football, daen boys' things (laughs). But anyway, he said 'Well ye can leave if ye can get a job' so ah jumped on ma bicycle and cycled intae Port William, the first place ah came to was the local garage and ah went in 'Any chance o a job?'. 'Aye, ye can start on Monday' it was as simple as that. So ah was there for about, well ah was there for a year, and ma father came to me, or said to me, that his brother was going to finish because he had cancer and how did I fancy being a joiner. Well, by this time I was sixteen and 'Fine whatever', easy come, easy go. So that's how ah came into the building trade, into the joinering trade. In actual fact ma grandfather...the business had been going for about an hundred and twenty years at that time.

### **0.03.36**

JMW: Goodness.

JW: So, it was just a continuation. At that time the workshop was at Glasserton and there was no electricity or anything like that at all so it was...and it was mainly agricultural work we did.

JMW: Right.

JW: Mainly...we were mainly on farms and we'd repair bits and bobs about the farms and repair carts, things like that. Ah made, well, ah helped ma father make a pair of wheels one time, the only time ah ever did that. But we made, we made a cart one time when ah was...this was at the very early days or the very last o the horses and carts basically, early...this was 1954, as ah said. So it was a time of great change-

JMW: Yes.

JW: -in agriculture. But we repaired horse troughs, there was always fork shafts, aw this sort of stuff to do so it was basically agricultural work we did but there was a lot of cottages being renovated at that time as well so we did that sort of work as well. And of course there wasn't very many different tradesmen around at that time, ye adapted, an ye could...although ah was trained as a joiner you could lay bricks and do things, bits and pieces like that, simply because these other people weren't there so ye got a sort of general all-round trade.

JMW: Yes.

JW: Ah served ma time there until 1960 and then ah did ma National Service in the RAF after that and...ah loved the RAF, in actual fact if ma father hadn't sort of made this commitment to start...to takin the business on ah would have, ah, think ah would had stayed in the RAF for ah really enjoyed it. But anyway, that was the way it was going. But it was quite funny actually, there was some...a lot of funny wee stories about farm cottages...it was hard, it was hard, hard times then.

JMW: Yes.

### **0.05.55**

JW: And people didn't have a lot of money about them and places, some of the places were really rough...they were rough sort of people, they only tended to stay about six months at a time.

JMW: Right.

JW: They were there from the May term to the November term or November tae May, they didn't last much longer than that and in the end they were away to another place so it was changing all the time.

JMW: You remember visiting the farm cottages with your father?

JW: Oh, yes, yes, yes.

JMW: And there would be what...on the floor would there be any with beaten earth floors or-?

JW: Some of them, some o them would. Some just, aye, just slabs, stone slabs, concrete.

J MW: And heated by a fire or-?

JW: Just a fire, yea, yea, just a fire. No central heating or no heating of of any type, just the fire.

JMW: And then oil lamps or something?

JW: Oil lamps, Tilly lamps, a lot of Tilly lamps. Ah can...one of the things ah do remember was when we were repairing some of these houses, you would find bits o tin, possibly a soup tin lid or something, nailed over a hole in the floor where the rats were. And if you were repairing that, you took it out and invariably was stuffed full of glass and then this bit of tin to try stop the rats comin in. This was the sort of conditions that people lived in and ah remember ma father telling us about working at one farm cottage and the woman had...we were renovating the place, and the woman had geraniums in the window and one of the mornings he went there there geraniums were...one of the geraniums was broken at the stalk and he said to her 'What happened to your geranium?' 'Oh' she says 'That was a rat last night' 'Oh' he says 'That's terrible', 'Oh' she says 'That's nothing' she says 'We have to knock them off oor faces when we're lying in the beds.' So this is the conditions that people were living in.

**0.07.57**

JMW: Yes.

JW: It was hard.

JMW: Yes. And in your own workshop was there living quarters adjacent to it?

JW: No, no, we lived at Monreith.

JMW: Right.

JW: And we travelled down tae Glasserton every morning, which was about six miles. My father had a motorbike originally, or initially, he had a motorbike and ah used to go down on ma bicycle, ah cycled down. And one of the things I do remember was it didnae matter...if ye went doon in the morning the wind was in yer face and going home the wind had invariably turned and was in yer face again, so ye always had the wind in yer face. But to start with, ah think it was maybe about six months before he got a van, and these six months we used to cycle to wherever we were working and the tools would be hung on the bike and off ye went.

JMW: It must have been pretty-

JW: Ah remember actually goin to one place wi a ladder tied to the bike and it was tied along the crossbar, so it chaffed the inside o ma leg. I mean this was the way it was, we used tae get...the farmers used to come wi a horse and cart or a, this was early days, a tractor, they'd come with a trailer and take the timber down if there was a lot of timber. But I can remember also we'd go to change a pane o glass somewhere, say a pane o glass got broken, and it would be sandwiched between two bits o hardboard or two bits o plywood and you tied it in yer bike...on yer back, and off ye went. But then, eventually, he got a van and that made a big difference. But this initial six months, because he was quite happy just...he was workin with ma uncle at the time and he was quite happy there and then suddenly ma uncle developed cancer and decided to finish so this was sort of thrown at ma father 'Do you want to take over?' and he decided he would. So he was sort o ill-

prepared for it and it was more or less straight away, 'Well, just take it over'. So that was how I came to be in the building trade.

JMW: And had the business ever been affiliated to the Glasserton Estate?

JW: We did a lot of work for Glasserton Estate but at that time the farms were all tenanted so we did a lot of work for the tenants but yes, ah think from memory, the estate had to do the repairs to the farms and we did a lot of work on the estate, yes. But the workshop at Glasserton, it was just, it was just a basic, just a basic house. It had earth floors on it, it had an earth floor in it and we had no electricity so everything was done by hand so I suppose ye could say we were trained the hard way, or I was trained the hard way, that everything had to be done by hand.

#### **0.11.22**

JMW: Yes, yes.

JW: One of the memories, as well, was there was a blacksmith had his forge across the road and he lived next to the workshop and he kept hens and the hens, we always knew what time it was if by chance we forgot to bring a watch or whatever, the hens knew the time because they always come into the workshop at ten o'clock when we were havin a cup of tea and twelve o'clock, they always come in, on the dot for the crusts. So we always knew when the hens arrived it was either teatime or lunchtime. And there used to be a red squirrel, there was trees round about the workshop at that time and there used to be a squirrel used to come in to the workshop and run round about the workshops so it as really agricultural ye know (laughs).

JMW: And I guess if your grandfather had already been in the business you would have inherited a lot of tools and techniques.

JW: Yes. In fact, to this day, ah've got a mortise machine that was my grandfather's.

JMW: Right.

JW: It's just a hand operated mortise machine...but yea, all the tools were there until I retired. In fact, in ma workshop before...I've been retied now for eight years, the workshop's still there, and in the workshop there is a gig shaft sittin there, a broken one, which came from Glasserton Estate and it was...ah kept it because it was lancewood it was made off which is a very springy type of wood. So, aye, there's plenty stuff there, ah still have a barrow that my uncle had made, we used to make barrows for the dairy farms, for the manure, and there's still a barrow there which now must be eighty year old, that was made and we always had a barrow sittin there for the famers to get but again that was a time of change, suddenly they discovered that they could buy steel barrows cheaper and this barrow was left and to this day it still sits in the workshop (laughter).

JMW: Right.

#### **0.13.45**

JW: We yaised it for takin oot the shavins oot the workshop. This was one o the funny things as well, ma father always said to me 'If anybody comes into the workshop and there's no much to do' he says 'never stand about, always be busy and if nothing else clean up the floor'. But he **always**...he was quite funny actually, he always said 'Never clean it out completely, make it look as if there's work going on' (laughter). But this was one o the

funny things as well, ma father, in the wintertime, because the workshop was surrounded wi trees it was always quite dark in it and come about three o'clock in the afternoon when it was quite dark he would say 'It's no worth lightin...putting a lamp on' and he would work at the bench with a candle on the end o the bench.

JMW: Right.

JW: I managed to get him to get some Tilly lamps, at least we could get a wee bitty more light but it was terrible, it really was, it was hard. So this is why I have to wear glasses now (laughs). But that was the way it was, we used to get glass sent down from Glasgow, we used to get a crate of glass at a time and it would come down on the train into Whithorn and then the local haulier would bring it oot tae Glasserton, in fact ah remember one time there was a crate had gone missin and it eventually turned up on the islands somewhere, ah don't know what had happened but it had ended up on one of the islands, it had gone the wrong way. But we used to get timber down, there used to be a delivery once a fortnight from Ayr and any other times we used to nip down to Garlieston to get local, if we needed something in a hurry. So that's the way...that was the way it was at that time.

JMW: And did the timber come down on the trains?

JW: No, well occasionally it did, but most times it came round by lorry and we'd get a fortnightly delivery. The traveller used to come round on a Tuesday and you'd get the delivery the following Friday.

JMW: Was there a...much in the way of the Forestry Commission, as there is now? It's a huge business up there in Newton Stewart.

JW: We never...well as far as timber was concerned, we never used home grown timber. Everything's home grown timber nowadays, we never used home grown timber because it was not very good quality and working round about on the farms ye did discover that where home grown timber was being used or had been used, it was riddled wi wood worm.

### **0.16.43**

JMW: Right.

JW: So we tended not to use it at all. It came to the stage, eventually, that we had tae use it because ah remember one time ordering some sarking boards and the traveller...it was sent down and it was home grown sarking, and ah said to the traveller 'Don't send me that stuff, ah don't want it' and he said to me 'John, if ye want tae be competitive ye've got tae use it cause everybody else is'. So in some ways this is one of the penalties of getting big firms like Jewson and...that they dictate what you will buy, basically.

JMW: And was there any heat in the workshop?

JW: No.

JMW: None?

JW: No, none at all, just what you could...what you generated (laughs). Ah can remember being sent down one time...we were workin fairly...maybe three or four miles away and we needed a bit of timber and ah was sent down an ah had tae rip this bit o timber out o a barn and it was about eight feet long and ah set too to rip this bit o timber and it's quite difficult actually when you're an apprentice tae try an rip something straight because the saw tends

tae twist. So ah had about three goes at it before ah managed tae get this thing cut an ah had tae...so eventually when the workshop would be being cleaned out because there was always garbage gathered up and every now and again we had a blitz and tidied the place out...these bits o timber would turn up and there was an inquest as to what...‘Where did this come from?’ (Laughter). But by that time the job was long finished so it wasn’t just sae bad. But that was the way it was. We used to sharpen the tools...ma father had a labourer who worked for him and every Saturday morning we sharpened the tools and my job was tae crank the big...we had a grindstone which was about two foot six in diameter and my job was to crank the handle of this grind stone and get the tools all sharpened up. That was normally on a Saturday morning we did that.

JMW: So it was what...a six day week or a five and a half?

JW: A five and a half day week.

JMW: And did you get paid on the Saturday?

### **0.19.03**

JW: Well, when ah worked wi ma father ah didnae get paid very much so obviously... (Laughter)...no, ah think it was a Friday we got paid, actually, we got paid... the wages werenae very big in thae days of course.

JMW: No, do you remember when you started as an apprentice what you got?

JW: Well, ah remember, ah can’t remember what ah got fae ma father because it was different because ah was...he started this for me so it was a different ballgame but ah remember when ah started in the garage, and ah presume the wages would be about the same in the building trade, ah was engaged at one pound ten shillings a week. An ah can remember feeling very, very deflated when ah got my first wage because ah got one pound six and fourpence because they never said to me they’d take off a stamp. So ah was bitterly disappointed, bitterly disappointed at getting twenty-six shillings, twenty-six and fourpence.

JMW: And did you have to give any of that to your parents?

JW: Ah can’t remember actually, can’t remember, ah possibly, ah would, I’m quite sure ah would, quite sure ah would.

JMW: A lot of people did, in fact some people saw nothing of it.

JMW: Yea, I’m quite sure ah would have to give some but ah can’t really truthfully say yes or no. Ah remember I wanted a bicycle when I was about fourteen an ah went to the...liftin potatoes to get ma bicycle so anything you got ye had tae work for.

JMW: Yes, yes.

JW: I also...we used to go to the turnip thinning, that sort of thing as well. Didn’t like that, it was hard work.

JMW: Yes, there was a good bit of casual labour that you could earn a bit extra if you wanted.

JW: You could, if you wanted, yea, yea. We used to go doon onto the shore and gather whelks and dulse as well, on the shore. So...the house where we lived, where we were born, it didn't have electricity in it either until I was about four-, thirteen, fourteen, before we got the electricity intae it. That was lit by Tilly lamps, it yist tae be...it was right across the road from the sea and we used tae get plagued at times if there had been a big sea came up and there was seaweed washed in or turned over, there was a particular type of fly, like a sea fly and they used to come into the house.

**0.20.46**

JMW: Right.

JW: And ah can remember ma mother sitting one night, she was writing a letter to somebody and she had some spare paper sittin beside her and the lamp was on the table and the paper was sittin beside her and this sheet of paper started to move across the table and it was flies underneath it (laughs). They moved it across the table.

JMW: So, Glasserton village was...it had a smithy opposite you?

JW: Glasserton village had a smiddy, it had the workshop and it had five houses. That was it. Ma uncle lived in one of them, the blacksmith was in the second one, there was a man who was a...did the roads, a road worker, council worker who was in one. There was an old lady, Mrs Irvine, whose son had worked...they worked for the estate but he had lost an arm at Dunkirk so although he still worked, he worked in the forestry part of the estate, which was just mair or less keepin the land tidy, it wasn't forestry as such, but he worked there, and there was an old retired man in the other house. And my uncle was in the last house.

JMW: Right. And in your time, there was no school at Glasserton?

JW: No, no. Ah can remember ah was taught at the Knock School at Monreith.

JMW: Oh, really?

JW: In fact ah can remember occasionally we...I can remember once Mr Lambert who was a teacher at Glasserton school came up, ah think maybe oor teacher was ill or something, he came in.

JMW: So it was there in your childhood.

JW: But he was really old, he was a really old man at that time. But, no, Glasserton School was...well ma father was educated at Glasserton School and then at Whithorn.

JMW: So you were at the Knock School, that presumably had the children in from Monreith village, did it?

JW: Yes, we were just at the outer edge of the catchment area from Monreith up to about three miles along Craiglemine was [?] farm which was about three miles the other way. That was the sort of catchment area, yea, there was about...there'd be about twenty of us at it possibly, about twenty, twenty-five.

**0.24.26**

JMW: Right.

JW: Some rough people, some rough, rough people. There was one lot ah can remember still runnin about in bare feet.

JMW: And was there one teacher, two teachers?

JW: It was a one teacher school, one teacher. It had been a two teacher school up until maybe 1930 but it was one teacher.

JMW: Right, there'd be a lot of children from cottages and so on round about.

JW: Yea, well this is the thing, you see, because there wis so many people...one farm, Glasserton Mains for example, employed about eleven men. So every farm had six, seven people workin about the place. It's so different now where the whole estate is ran by three men where...there was always, there was always plenty of kids around.

JMW: Yes.

JW: It's just the way it's changed and then these houses either were left to go derelict or were sold off. In some ways progress has not been kind to the countryside.

JMW: Yea. So, if you were at the Knock School did you stay there till you were twelve or was it all the way through?

JW: Twelve, no, and then we went to Douglas Ewart at Newton Stewart.

JMW: Right.

JW: And then, as I said earlier on, ah was more interested in playing football (laughs) and getting out and about.

JMW: So in Monreith village, was there a smithy there?

JW: No, the only thing that was in Monreith, at that time, there was a little grocer's shop and a Post Office, that was all.

JMW: Right.

### **0.26.21**

JW: There had been a potato mill, earlier on, and there would be a blacksmith's at one point but no, it was gone by that time. There used to be, at one time there was also a tile works at Monreith, just outside Monreith, the bricks that they made there were not terribly good. In fact a lot of the bricks that you see round about here, internally, came from there but they couldn't stand the frost, if they were used outside they'd all spail away so it didn't last terribly long.

JMW: So, was Whithorn or Port William your main shopping place?

JW: Oh, Port William, although at that time, they had...there was plenty o vans come round. There used to be a grocer come round, there was a butcher come round, ah don't know, once a week, maybe twice...the grocer might have come roond twice a week. There was baker vans, we used to go up to the Black Rocks at Monreith which was about three-quarters of a mile from where ah was, where ah lived, on a Sunday, and there used to be busloads of people came up from Whithorn up there and there'd be two ice-cream vans there and there would be fifty, sixty people there. That was the main place at the weekends.



JMW: Yes.

JW: Mostly on a Sunday, sometimes ye'd get a lot of people on a Saturday as well, but mostly on a Sunday, but people just congregated there.

JMW: Yes.

JW: But the weather has changed so much as well that ye wouldn't get that now at all.

JMW: No, no. And did you, did your family attend a church when you were a child?

JW: Yes, yes. We went to Mochram church actually, I joined the church at Mochram Church. Well, it was the church at Port William at the time but it's Mochram Church now. Eventually, when my father and mother, when ma father got a van, ma father and mother started to go to Glasserton Church but ah was...ah joined at Mochram and ah went to Mochram Church because ah was in the Boys' Brigade and ah had to go there so ah just stayed there until ah came to Whithorn.

JMW: And in your later joinery business you were also an undertaker, was your father an undertaker as well?

#### **0.28.52**

JW: Yes, that was part and parcel of the sort of agricultural joiner, or the country joiner, that initially joiners made the coffins. We, ah think we only made one coffin, we made a coffin for a child one time, we used to get the coffins from Dumfries. The coffins were sent up on the train from Dumfries up to Newton Stewart and we'd go across to Newton Stewart and pick them up.

JMW: Right.

JW: Ma father did that, ah did ma first funeral when ah was seventeen year old because ma father had the flu and ah was left at the deep end and ah had tae get on with it (laughs) and we did that, yea.

JMW: So, your duties as an undertaker, you would have to go out and visit the family and measure up the body or-?

JW: Yea, we did that, we...that has changed radically as well, we would go out and make all the arrangements, we used to hire...there is a...we hired a hearse from a man in Port William who had a hearse. We would hire a bus and the bus would go round the local area picking up the people to bring them into the funeral because people didn't have cars.

JMW: Right.

JW: So this bus would trundle round the local area, pick up people and bring them to Glasserton Church or into Whithorn or wherever. We occasionally, at the very start, we used to send out letters wi the black band round them and the black banded envelopes, we had them. That began to change as well, we had...eventually we got the coffins, the coffins were being kept...there was a firm in Glasgow had a depot in Garlieston so we could just nip down to Garlieston and get them. But in the '50s even death was looked on differently, because I can remember...when ah came intae Whithorn in 1964 and the local taxi driver

would go up and pick up coffins for some o the....the undertaker from the Isle of Whithorn and it was never thought anything about it...he had a Austin Cambridge taxi and the boot on the Austin Cambridge folded down from the back, like it came doon like a lid, and he would just set the coffin on this boot lid and tied on and off he would set. So you'd see this car going up the town with a coffin wrapped, it was all wrapped up in hessian and it was just another commodity really. That is all changed now.

JMW: Yes.

#### **0.31.54**

JW: But that was the way it was done, but you see, the thing was as well, every community where there was a joiner would have an undertaker.

JMW: Yes.

JW: There was an undertaker, the old joiner in Port William was an undertaker, the joiner in The Isle of Whithorn was an undertaker, the joiner in Whithorn was an undertaker so...and it was simply because this tradition of making the coffins.

JMW: Yes, yes. So, presumably in your father's day, he did make the coffin, or your grandfather's day?

JW: Yes, oh yes, they did, they did, aye, ma father did but by the time that ah come on the scene that...it had changed and the coffins were...we got them from Jardine's in Dumfries.

JMW: And in your father or your grandfather's day would there have been a horse-drawn hearse, did they mention that?

JW: No, well ma father's day...no it would be, ah never heard him...he never ever said anything about a horse-drawn hearse. Ah remember, ah remember a story about a local man in Whithorn here who had wanted to be taken to...when he died...he said he wanted to be taken on the coal lorry to the cemetery and of course when he died they wouldn't have that because he was quite a prominent man. The hearse, the coffin was in the house, and the hearse arrived over and...to take him to the church and...or possibly have the service in the house...anyway when the hearse was...when the coffin was put into the hearse they couldn't get the hearse to start, the hearse flatly refused tae start, ah think simply because at that time if they were warm and they were left to sit for a wee while they tended not to start and then they got flooded and they couldn't get it to start and eventually they had to get the horse-drawn lorry out and take him to the grave-yard so...it was funny, he got his wish at the end of the day. But no, ah don't know when there would be horse-drawn...in ma grandfather's day certainly there would be, certainly there would be because ma father was born in 1899 which was just more or less the start of transportation as such, as we know it.

JMW: So, did a lot of the coffins start, as it were, that you would leave them in the house for the family and then go from there because that's changed as well.

#### **0.34.28**

JW: Yes, the funerals were mainly from the house at that time, yes. That began to change I would say about...in the '60s, the early '60s and it got it was more convenient because, especially in Whithorn, if we had a funeral, say at the top o the town where the street's

narrow, people would...the funerals were always well attended, as you know, round about here they are always well attended. And what would happen at the top of the town, they would stand round the doorway and the minister, we would get the minister to stand at the doorway so the people at...the relatives could hear but also the people outside could hear what was being said and inevitably there would be a big lorry would come roarin up through the town and drowned out so it wasn't very handy and especially in the winter time as well wi bad weather and then we began then to have more and more in the church and now it's just the norm, they're all in the church. But, no, originally it was...they were all from the house.

JMW: And did your father have the responsibility of preparing the bodies before putting them in the coffins?

JW: We...most times we did that, yea, we did that ourselves. There was a lady in the town here, if it was a Whithorn funeral, there was a lady in the town who was nicknamed 'the Angel of Death' (laughter). She would prepare them but most times it was us, we did it ourselves. And people were quite happy just to let us get on with it.

JMW: And did that change over time? Was there different ways of doing it or-?

JW: Not really, no, not really, amazingly things just stayed the way they were. People, people weren't embalmed or anything like that, that didn't happen here. And this was why the funerals were normally held within about three days.

JMW: Yes.

JW: And really, there wasn't any need for it.

JMW: No.

JW: It's different as well because we used to be able to phone the graveyard foreman and say 'We've got a funeral in Glasserton' and arrange the date wi them but that all changed because it was too easy, it seemed to be, it was too easy...it had to be done through the council offices and then this is when ye get delays if somebody dies at the weekend. But it can now stretch out to four or five days. But before that we could always just phone the superintendent 'Aye that's no problem' and it as done. So, aye, things change that way.

### **0.37.22**

JMW: And were there...obviously the graves must have been dug by hand?

JW: The graves were initially dug by hand, yea. And that can be hard because round about here you don't go very far before you hit rock and ah think eventually in Glasserton they pre-dug a lot o the graves because when machinery began to be used they pre-dug them and backfilled them. But in Whithorn as well it was very, very hard, some o the graves were quite shallow and they had to, they had to bury side by side.

JMW: And was that a specific job, I mean was somebody be sexton, or the grave-digger?

JW: No, the council, by the time ah was on the scene and ma father was on the scene, the graves were dug by the council.

JMW: Right.

JW: There had been a lot of mix ups, especially in Glasserton. There was a graveyard superintendent there from the Isle of Whithorn and ah think things had not been done properly and graves hadnae been registered properly, in fact tae this day there's graves there and they don't know who are in them.

JMW: Right.

JW: So, eventually the council made the decision to take over all the administration for that and that was a good thing because it was just not being done properly. You can well imagine if they don't do the paperwork and this is what was happening.

JMW: So when you came into the town what do you remember that's now changed considerably since you first-?

JW: Well, ma father retired in 1964 and ah got married in '64 and ah bought a house in George Street, in Whithorn, an ah come in there and again, the house ah got was just a shell. It had just stone slabs on the floor and it had a toilet, it had electricity of sorts, basically light, and ah can't remember, aye, it had runnin water obviously, it had runnin water, but it came from the house next door. And the toilet was...there was a wee outhouse attached to the back of the house and in this outhouse was a cubicle about the size of a telephone box and in that cubicle was a toilet and that was it. There was one little window about eighteen inches square in the room and this cubicle was at the side of it but the people next door had built a shed right up against it so there was basically no light in the place.

#### **0.41.21**

At the other side from where the toilet was was a (set?) pot and there would be a tap in there somewhere, ah can't quite remember where the tap, there would be a tap near the (set?) pot so that was basically the house. So we had to set to and get the drainage sorted out and get our own drainage in and get water etc. intae it. As far as the town itself's concerned ah can remember we used to hear the town crier going up, occasionally going up saying about warrant sales, that was still...the bell, ring the bell, warrant sale at such and such a house, at that time. Whithorn wis, one o the other things ah remember was there was dogs all over the place.

JMW: Right.

JW: Oh aye, there was and there was three legged dogs, all this sort of stuff, dogs who roamed the streets, day and night. In actual fact when ye were talkin about, talkin about the funerals there ah remember there was one little dog, when ah was in Whithorn, there was one little dog who attended virtually every funeral. And we had a terrible time wi this wee dog, this wee dog arrived at...by this time we were using the church and this wee dog arrived up at every funeral and there was another chap who, a local worthy in the town here, who liked a drink and between him harassing us, because he was always sort of banging his stick and harassing us at the Pend mouth. Every time we came out he'd be there, between him and this dog we had quite a time of it, we had a terrible time keepin this wee dog fae going into the church actually (laughter).

JMW: I forgot to ask, when you were an undertaker was...is there a change in the clothing that you wore as undertaker when you started to when you ended?

JW: Aye, when we started first we just wore a black suit but eventually we moved with the time and went a bit more formal but yes, originally it was just a black suit.

JMW: And would you have worn a hat?

JW: We never, some did, but we never did. It was just a bit of an encumbrance at times. Too windy for example (laughter). Ah remember, ah remember doing a funeral in Sorbie at one point and the local minister had a hat and he left the hat beside the grave and the wind blew the hat into the grave. Luckily by this time we had the coffin in so we were able to get it extracted later on but this was the sort of things that happened.

**0.43.07**

JMW: And were there any things, any symbols that people used in their houses if there was a funeral? Did they drape it or did they shut their curtains?

JW: Oh, the curtains were always shut, yes, curtains were always shut. And that's another thing that ye see as time went on, people originally when I started in 1954 onwards, people always showed respect to a funeral cortege, now they don't bother. But you would see...linesmen on the roads, for example, workin on the roads and if a hearse came along they stood up and took their hat off. You'd always see that and people on the streets would stop and stand up face the hearse, now they just look at it and go on, they don't bother at all. Latterly when, for example, we were going up to the crematorium, we used to use the crematorium at Ayr and you would come up to the roundabouts at Ayr and people would just cut you up, they wouldn't give way, at all, to a funeral. And that's just the difference, you know, fifty years, sixty years, how times change and it's not for the better.

JMW: No.

JW: Not for the better at all.

JMW: And do you remember wakes being held in the houses? Was that a habit?

JW: Some o the Irish ones did, yea, yea. Ah don't know much about that because we were never really involved in that but, aye, some o the Irish connection, connected people would do that, yea. They were always very, very well attended, you would always get sixty, seventy folk at least. Because, the thing was, it was a very tight knit community, especially in the '50s up to the '60s, because everybody knew each other and a lot of them were related.

JMW: Yes.

JW: It was actually an undertaker's nightmare to go into a house when somebody had died, you'd go into a house and there would be maybe ten, fifteen folk sittin in the house and you never knew who was related and who was just the next door neighbour, so it was always quite difficult to try and work out relationships because they never, ever would tell you and ah never really liked to ask who's related here and who's just a nosey neighbour (laughs). So that was quite difficult, eventually ye began tae know but in Whithorn, especially, there were so many people related through one way or another.

**0.45.47**

JW: That was quite difficult, to do that. We used tae, ye were sayin aboot the changes, we used to send...we used to hand write the death notices for the windows for the shops, intimations, they were always hand written, and we used to phone the *Galloway Gazette*

and they put the death notices in the papers and if there was any...eventually we got faxes in and these were faxed through because the *Gazette* was quite well known for makin mistakes (laughs). So, at least when it was faxed and if there was a mistake...if there was a mistake made ye knew where the blame lay. But that was the way it was, the flowers for the funerals always came from Newton Stewart...no, sorry that's wrong, originally there was a florist in the town here, Joe Dodds, did flowers.

JMW: Right.

JW: But eventually he retired and then the flowers came from Newton Stewart so there was always quite a bit of to-ing and fro-ing to get bits and bobs, for what ye needed.

JMW: And during the war, which you'll hardly remember, was your father's occupation a reserved occupation?

JW: Yea, well he was too old.

JMW: Right, I see.

JW: Basically he was too old, he was born in 1899, as I said.

JMW: Right.

JW: He missed, he was too young for the First World War and basically he missed the Second World War, he was actually a Special Constable. So he used to go out making sure people had their blackouts on, aw this sort o stuff.

JMW: Right.

JW: Ah can remember, ah can remember hearin planes going over, ah can remember being told they could hear the planes when Belfast was bombed, they could hear the planes. And ah remember one o the things that ah do remember was, as a wee boy, sitting on the dyke at the house at Monreith and there was an Army Jeep went past an ah couldn't work this oot, ah thought it was a sort of magic thing because it didn't have a driver. In actual fact as ah came to realise, two or three years later, it would be an American Jeep but as a wee boy and this thing came past and there was somebody sittin in the, what to me was the passenger seat, couldn't work that one out at all. But ah can remember the convoys going down to, there was a lot of convoys used to go down to Burrow Head.

**0.48.18**

JMW: Yes, of course.

JW: From Port William. Ah can remember that and ah can remember ma mother saw a plane crash into the sea off the Scar Rocks, ah can remember her telling us about this, seeing this plane going in. But no, I was born in '38 so I don't have a great memory of it but ah can remember there was a...there was a shot put oot through the tin roof beside ma father's house which had come from an aeroplane so he thought it must have been something that had shot off, they saw a chink of light and they let a shot off and there was a hole punched in the roof so he was a pretty good shot if that was the case. Ah can remember there was a farm, (Burmeal?), it was bombed and the story there, they thought...it was a moonlight night and there was haystacks, they had the stacks in, it was harvest time and the stacks were there, and they think that a German had let the bomb off, he thought...they think that they thought it was maybe Burrow Head. And this bomb came

down and it blew the slates off a cottage, blew all the slates off a cottage, and, in actual fact, the dog, they had a dog in a kennel and it lifted the dog's kennel and ma father said it blew it over the house because they got the kennel on the other side of the house complete wi dog, unhurt (laughter). In fact he had...there's still there, a bit of shrapnel from that bomb, and there was property damaged at the time Liverpool was bombed, there was property up here because it was on a fault line. There were some of the houses developed cracks after that.

JMW: And did your mother work or was she mainly in the house?

JW: Ma mother originally was on the buses, as far as ah can remember. She, when ah was, when ah was around, what ah can remember she used to go down onto the shore and gather dulse which was hard, hard work and cold miserable work. Of course, every penny counted.

JMW: Yes.

JW: She gathered...and we used to go down and gather whelks as ah said. Aye, she gathered this dulse for not a lot of money. But apart from that, no, she didn't. I think that was plenty for her.

JMW: Well, there would be a lot of domestic responsibilities if you didn't have all the conveniences.

#### **0.51.12**

JW: That's right, yea, they just had a range in the house, although ma father built the house in 1934, ah think it was built, but there was no electricity anywhere near at that time and eventually the electricity was brought down which made a big difference. The water was just, even the water wasn't terribly good at that time, it came from a spring but eventually, as farming began to change, the spring got contaminated because they started putting slurry in the fields and eventually they had to get mains water brought in. So, aye, it made a big difference then.

JMW: Yes. So, with the change in agriculture, obviously, the blacksmith in Glasserton would have had somewhat less work as the years went on.

JW: The blacksmith actually was not well and he retired. But again, because he was working in...they had no electricity there...the blacksmith...it was a terrible place. We used to go over, he would get this fire going first thing in the morning in the forge and you would walk in and ye couldn't see him. It was awful, the place was as black as tar and ye just could not see this man in the shed and there he worked and he paid the price, eventually his lungs were gone and ah think he was only about fifty-four or something like that when he died and that was it finished then because there was a blacksmith in the town here and there was electricity and they could work with welders etc.

JMW: Yes.

JW: The blacksmith at Glasserton, it was all, he had acetylene welding but it was a traditional blacksmith's. Eventually he tried to do something about the smoke and he put a hood in over his forge and it improved it a bit but it was just awful. Ah don't know, it was a special type of coal that they used, quite small bits of coal and there seemed to be a lot of sulphur come off it so it must have been, it was a special grade o coal for forges. And there was all this sulphur and you would go in there and if it wasnae grey, it would be yellow. So

it wasn't surprising that his lungs were gone and he smoked as well, which didn't help him. And the one regret ah had, ah always wanted...when we made the wheels for the cart, ah wanted to see them being shod because he was doing that and he did them on a Saturday afternoon and they were done before ah got the chance to see them being done and I would like to have seen that because he had made them...we had made these wheels, he had measured them up and made the metal band and got this fire going and had them shod and on the Monday they were sittin shod and I was very disappointed in that because I would like to have seen that being done, but there you are, didn't get that.

**0.54.39**

JMW: And I suppose as tractors came in you would have seen less wood being used on farms because equipment had changed.

JW: Yes, it aw changed, it all changed because originally, when we started, the trailers, the trailers that there were, were all wooden, and originally when ah started in 1954, it was all mainly carts that we were repairing. There were some wooden trailers and there were some wooden horse lorries, there was a wooden horse lorry sat in oor workshop for years because the farmer man had went bankrupt and ah kept sayin to ma father we should do something about that and I was told 'Leave it alone, it doesn't belong to you'. So it sat there till it fell to bits which was a shame but that was just the way ma father was. Eventually, as I said earlier on, we made wooden barrows etc. That all changed, we used to repair a lot of horse troughs, cattle troughs, sheep troughs, we used to make these and repair them, that all changed and went to metal so that side of the business went. We were classified as agricultural joiners but gradually that changed till we were no more agricultural joiners, there just wasn't the work. We used to repair hecks in farms and we used to gaun in and put in bite bars in stables etc. etc. and that all changed. There was only one farmer, Henry Hall was the last farmer that really would use horse, and that finished about 1958, maybe, '57, '58, that finished so the horse were just kept for ornaments basically.

JMW: So can you remember horses being brought to the blacksmith to be shod?

JW: Yes, yes, the horses were brought in to the blacksmiths. The Clydesdales were usually quite easy to work with but there was one or two people would bring in hunting horses and they were a different kettle of fish, they were worse to work with. But, aye, ah can remember one farmer with a Clydesdale which was unusual that it was a bit flighty, and ah couldn't believe it, he put a snitch on its nose, a wee sort of...like a bit of rope that you could put on its nose and ye could turn it up and it must be quite a sensitive bit on a horse because he put the snitch on this horse's nose and he had it just lying on its side in seconds. Because the horse just lay down and after that it got back up and after that it behaved itself. So, obviously horsemen, they knew how to control them.

JMW: Smiddies were quite often a sort of meeting place, they'd be quite a social place, do you remember that?

**0.57.47**

JW: No, well yes, they come in there and they'd blether but in ma father's day ah can remember ma father saying that the young men always used to meet at Glasserton, ma father was born at Glasserton, they used to meet and there would be...they would sit on the dyke at night, all the local boys would come in and they'd have a game of football or what and then they would have a blether on the dyke. But he did say a funny thing because there



was mass emigration at that time and he told us about...there was about seven or eight men sittin on the wall one night and one of the old men who lived in Glasserton village at the time came along and he went down this row o boys or men that were sittin there and he said 'You'll go to Australia, you'll go to Canada, you'll go to New Zealand', they'd all go different places and ma father said it was unbelievable because, eventually, they all went where this old man had said they'd go. But that was the way it was. There was no work here so they had to go. Ah had an uncle in, ah had two uncles in New York, ah had one uncle in California and ah had an uncle in Australia. Ma father had went abroad as well, that was five o them had gone, ma father came back and stayed, as I said, and ah'd two other brothers who stayed and ah had, there was a sister who lived at Mochram. Now, ma father was the youngest and ma grandmother was fifty-one when ma father was born, which was a real shock to them al, and this was why the one, my uncle Sam, went away to San Francisco because o the shame of this whole business (laughs). He went down to Liverpool originally in 1899 when ma father was born, he went, cleared out to Liverpool and then he went out to San Francisco and there he lived till he died, which was about 1975, or something like that. He had a, I've got a cousin who lives in Virginia and she was a reporter and she went out tae see him in San Francisco and he would be about seventy at the time and he recited, on a tape recorder, *Hail Caledonia* and he was still broad Wigtownshire after all these years. And he came back here in 19-, about 1953, maybe, he came across here, '54, in about that time, and he...ah met him, he came off the bus and he was a big tall man and he had a sort of blouson type jacket on, a big hat and he was just like a big film star. An ah always remember, ah was quite a shy boy and ma father said to me 'This is your Uncle Sam' and ah shook hands with him and ah was standin with ma head down and his first words were to me 'Son, never be frightened to look a man in the eye and tell him to go to Hell' (laughter). And that stuck wi me, ah never forgot that. He come back when ah was seventeen and that was about the time that the Highland Show was on tour and it was Highland Show time and it was in Ayr and ma father and ma uncle and ma cousin went up to Ayr to the show and they were walkin down a alleyway and there was a Highland cow broke loose, it had gone sort of daft, it had just had calved and it had flipped its lid anyway, and it come rampaging down where they were walking and it hit ma father and ma uncle. Ma father was lucky, he got caught just under the arm, jist his jacket got torn, but ma uncle, it got him right between the horns and it threw him up in the air and he come down and landed on his neck and broke his neck.

#### **1.02.07**

JMW: Good grief.

JW: Now, he survived that, he was taken into the hospital in Ayr and they put him into traction and eventually he came back tae ma cousin's house at Drumneil at Mochram and he spent the rest o his holiday there in traction and went away back and lived on till he was ninety-five. The only drawback he had was he discovered that he couldn't turn his head right round but for a man who was about seventy-five, seventy-six at that time to survive that was, at that time, quite lucky. He was very, very...he was very, very fortunate because they called for a doctor and there was a local doctor here who was at the show who was well known for havin a good drink in him arrived on the scene and said 'Oh he's fine, get him on to his feet, he's ok' and luckily for him there was a St John's Ambulance woman thought there was something different, got him into hospital and here they discovered his neck was broken so...ma father said the doctor was more worried about the cow than what he was about the [?]. There you are.

JMW: In your time in Glasserton, had the Glasserton Estate, had the house gone by the time you remember?

JW: Glasserton big house was being demolished in about 1954 when ah was there, ah can remember it being demolished. Ah never actually saw the house but, yes, they were knocking it down at that time. And then later on Burrow Head Camp was demolished, a lot of the local farmers bought some o the buildings and we put one or two of these buildings up on farms for the farmers.

JMW: Right, right. And do you remember what happened to all the stone and so on?

JW: At Glasserton?

JMW: Yes.

JW: It was all just bulldozed. Glasserton, the house, the gardens were all terraced and as far as ah'm aware it was all just bulldozed into the terraces. In actual fact there'll be a fortune in good stone lying in there.

#### **1.04.26**

JMW: Yes.

JW: But now, ye can hardly see where it was now. I was out there not that long ago, four, five months ago and you would hardly know that it had been...if you didn't know there had been a house there you wouldn't know where it had been. And Physgill House was being radically altered at that same time because we had to go and do some work on it after it was finished because the firm that was doing it went bankrupt on it.

JMW: Right.

JW: And we had to go along and do bits and pieces of repair work after that but ah can remember we reroofed a building in Glasserton steading for the farmer and there was a wee bothy at the steading and we had a look in this bothy one day and in that bothy was a lot of the stuff that had been taken out of Glasserton House and it was a shame because there was antelope antlers, all the rest of it, all that stuff was stored in there and it was just wasted, just wasted. In actual fact ah picked up a set of chainmail armour and it was just a rusted mass, totally rusted, useless and you just thought 'What age was that, what age was it?' and there it was just left to the...the roof was half off this building and the water was pouring in and it was just ruined.

JMW: So, in your time, the Admiral, Admiral Johnston Stewart, he was already gone?

JW: He was gone. It was the present laird's father at that time.

JMW: Right. And do you remember that they had a sort of different status than they do now. I mean did people-?

JW: Oh yes, oh yes, aye, even the present laird's father, yes. They were different, they were different. But ah can remember the man who was in charge of Glasserton Gardens telling us about when the Admiral was there. At the lodge, at the Glasserton memorial, the lady who was in there had to be always on the lookout for the Admiral coming up the drive and whenever she saw him comin up the drive, if she had washing out she had to get the washin

lifted. Couldn't have washing for him to see. She had to get a white apron on and go out and open the lodge gates.

JMW: Right.

#### **1.07.04**

JW: And then, if they were going into Whithorn, she had to then keep an eye open for him coming back and she had to go out and open the gates, let them back through. I was told a story about the Admiral's son, they had a nanny and he was taken around about in a pram and he was in the pram, he was so big that he used to jump out of the pram and open gates for her to go through and then jump back into the pram (laughter) and he's still get wheeled around. Oh, aye, it was a different life then, aw these folks. But they were havin hard times, in actual fact, because ah remember the estate eventually, this would be maybe in about 1958/59, they decided that they would stop doing repairs, the farmers would be responsible for repairs on the estate because they couldn't afford to do it. Now, it was just nonsense because there was no way these farmers were going to spend the money on the estate and ah can remember one farmer in particular being really, really cut up about this extra rent, they put the rent up and said 'This is what you have to do' and he was really cut up about this extra rent he was having to pay. In actual fact people in council houses were paying more rent than what the farmer was paying for the farm and they wouldn't do...and they just refused to do any repairs and the buildings just gradually began to fall to bits. It wouldnae hae made any difference anyway cause progress in agriculture, the buildings were no use anyway. But that just shows you how the farmers thought they were being hard done by and in actual fact they weren't, they were payin less rent sometimes than what the council house people were.

JMW: And do you remember horse-drawn agricultural equipment like binders and that kind of thing being in use?

JW: Ah can remember, yes, ah can remember them vaguely. We used to repair a lot o binders and we used to repair mills, threshin mills, the threshin mills used to come round. We used to repair binders and reapers, if there was any...we used to use ash on the mills, there was what they called ash shakers which was a piece of ash about, it varied in length, about three feet long, half inch thick by about three inches wide. And ash was used because it was nice and flexible but occasionally they would break and we used to repair things like that. So, yes, ah can remember them and ah can remember being at one of the farms helping...doing stookin, as they talk about, and we used to repair, we used to have hayricks and they had a special thing for lifting the ricks and they would break occasionally we would have tae sort them, have to sort shafts, put in new shafts into these machines, originally.

JMW: Yes, and I suppose-

#### **1.10.11**

JW: But as I say, by about 1960 that was all gone, '58/'60, it was all gone.

JMW: Right, right. I suppose sometimes when things broke it was a bit of an emergency, you'd have had to be on sort of standby all the time.

JW: We always, yea, we always had, we always had these things spare in the workshop but they had to be done straight away, yea, we'd always have a spare pair o shafts because they were basically the same shape, we'd have a spare pair of shafts, we always had trough legs and that sort of stuff, yea. Shakers for the mills, we always had them sittin there.

JMW: And in Whithorn itself I guess one of the big changes is the Town Council stopping being in existence in '75. Did you notice a big change, before that they had a lot of responsibility in the town.

JW: I was on the Town Council for about five years.

JMW: Were you?

JW: Yes. In fact I was in the last Town Council.

JMW: Right.

JW: And ah can understand why it was done but ah don't think it was for the betterment of the town.

JMW: No.

JW: But ah presume the real reason would be to cut doon administration, that it would be done. Ah can see it from that point but to me the town was much better run, as a council, but I suppose it would be so much extra work for people up in Edinburgh. But to me a lot better run because people knew people, basically. Now it's all changed, we had a housing list and ah can remember for years there was a man at the top of this housing list because he was a serving soldier, now we always, the council had a policy that if you were a serving soldier you went to the top of the list so that if you finished as a serving soldier you were guaranteed a house. That policy, I don't suppose works now.

JMW: No.

### **1.12.23**

JW: Quite sure it doesn't. And we knew everybody, now there's people in here from all over, people walk doon the street and ye havenae a clue who they are, so that's not for the betterment of the town.

JMW: Yes. So the Town Council had what? Refuse collection and housing lists?

JW: Yes, we had, when we came to the town it was a horse and cart and then they had a tractor and the cart was adapted for the...and then it was out to....well it was down at the bottom of the town originally and then out to Black's plantin, after that. So yea, we had a burgh foreman and we had a joiner and we had a painter.

JMW: Right.

JW: And then of course we had the town clerk and the council was made up of about roughly about ten people, approximately ten people.

JMW: And were they mainly shop owners, tradesmen and so on?

JW: Yes, basically yes, they were, yea. We were people of so called 'standing' in the town and by and large they were.

JMW: Yes.

JW: By and large they were, yea.

JWM: I mean, in the perhaps remoter past there was some responsibility for poor relief, there was some sort of poor rate given out at the old town hall, but it might be before your time.

JW: That was before my time, yes, but there was and there's the story of Lockhart's coal which was the man who went from Cairnhead to America. To cut a long story short, founded the Standard Oil Company with Rockefeller and he had, there was money handed out at The Isle of Whithorn actually for the poor of the area and that went on till about the '30s sometime.

JMW: Right.

JW: But aye, there would be provision for the poor of the town and ah think basically the Town Council would look on people in hardship with a bit more sympathy than what they get nowadays. Of course there was no benefits then so that was the way it was.

JMW: And is suppose the number of shops has declined radically since you came first.

### **1.15.03**

JW: Oh yes, when we came to Whithorn there was about five grocer's shops, we've now got two. We had two drapers, we had one who repaired televisions, in fact we had an electrician, we'd two butchers, all gone, we had an engineer, we had an engineering works at the bottom of the town, we had an agricultural engineers at the top o the town. They've all gone, we had a mill, we had Wylie's mill at the bottom o the town, so aye there's...we had two ironmongers, two chemists, two bankers who lived in the town, all that's gone now. So yea, there's big, big changes.

JMW: In terms of employment that must have meant a huge amount.

JW: It had to, it had to. But it's this business again, as we say, of modernisation. The people were there to service, the shops were there to service the area where there was quite a high population but gradually, as modernisation took over, there's less and less employed on the land. And then they started to sell their houses and the houses were sold, initially, to holiday people and they'd be used maybe a month in the year, the rest of the time would sit empty.

JMW: Yes.

JW: So, that made a big difference, this is why eventually one by one all these shops gave up. There just wasn't the work for them.

JMW: And do you remember people still keeping horses in and around the town or was it beginning to change towards cars?

JW: Our next door neighbour, when we were in George Street, our next door neighbour had kept two ponies in her garden and you would see people walkin up the street and the door

would open, maybe people on holiday, and the door would open and out would come a horse out the front door. Aye, there was quite a few horses in the town at that time, yea, yea and people, some people kept pigs and things.

JMW: There was perhaps more of an agricultural feel to the town than there is now.

JW: Yes, yes. They used to drive, when we came here, they would drive animals through the town. They would drive animals right through the town.

JMW: And so car ownership began to spread what, in the '60s do you think?

JW: There weren't many cars when we came into Whithorn, as ah say we got married in '64 and in 1964 in the car park in George Street there was only about four cars.

### **1.18.12**

JMW: Right.

JW: That was it. And one of the cars, well it was a van, but it was a man who worked for the Forestry Commission and Dick Mills, the local builder, he had a van sittin in the car park and our next door neighbour had a taxi business and they had two cars and that was basically it. There'd only be, in the whole of George Street, I don't think there'd be twenty cars.

JMW: So it was buses and bicycles and the odd horse?

JW: Yea, yea. We used to come in, when ah lived at Monreith, we used to come in here every Saturday night to the pictures, there was a cinema here, and we would come in. There used to be a bus run from Port William to Whithorn, it was a twenty-nine seater, and there'd be normally maybe about forty on it (laughs). In fact sometimes we were comin up past the Police Station and we had to sort of crouch down so that the policeman wouldnae see that this bus was overloaded because it was...there was about four in every seat and people standin down the aisle (laughs). But that...and then of course television come in and that just killed that. So as television started the trade just disappeared. And then you see, of course, that had a big impact on the chip shop, for example, because the chip shop was always open to late, late on, until after the last film show, every night, there was films on every night. But now...there was also a bus used to run from Whithorn to Creetown for the...to the Solway pre-cast so the chip shop really did well because in the mornings people were going in there and getting their cigarettes and getting something to eat and then at nights they had the pictures.

JMW: And do you remember a lot of clubs, social activities and so on in the town, more than there are now?

JW: Well, the only social activities would be dances, there used to be...there would be a dance somewhere, maybe not necessarily in Whithorn because Whithorn had a sort of bad name for dances, a bit rough. But there was always dances, the young people used to go to Newton Stewart on a Saturday night, there was always a dance there on a Saturday night, you could get in there for half-a-crown.

JMW: Right.

JW: And there would be a dance, sometimes there was dances on a Wednesday night but there was always a dance on a Friday night and it would be all over, there would be dances

in Port William or Kirkcowan, Wigtown, Newton Stewart, Whithorn at times, so yea, there was always dances.

### **1.21.16**

So that was about the only social thing or gaun intae the pubs. But when we came here first they had this three mile limit that ye couldnae get a drink on a Sunday unless you were a bona fide traveller so ye had to travel three miles. So people from Whithorn would walk down to The Isle or get down tae Isle of Whithorn tae get a drink because it was just outside three miles. That is the way it was.

JMW: And regarding law and order, in the old days I suppose the Town Council had quite a grip on what could and couldn't be done in the town?

JW: We had two bailies and the time I was on it I don't think the...there was very little problem, very little problem. Ah can't remember, ah can't really remember the bailies having to do anything. They possibly did but maybe by that time it was being more taken to the courts rather than being dealt with at this level, it would be taken to Wigtown. But most of the crime would be drink related and it was basically fighting, there was very little, very little thieving or anything like that went on. Even to this day there's very little thieving goes on in Whithorn.

JMW: So, how many pubs do you remember in Whithorn?

JW: There was The Calcutta at the top of the town, there was The Grapes Hotel, The Station Hotel which is now the Black Hawk and The Railway, so there was the four.

JMW: That's something that's changed is the number of local pubs.

JW: I would think that would change in about the '30s, a lot maybe even earlier than that, a lot of them would close down because there was a lot of pubs in the place but that was what there was then we were here.

JMW: And was the Police Station in the old Police Station?

JW: Yes, the Police Station was in St John Street at that time and a lot of the times the policemen would dispense justice, shall we say, the way he saw fit. There would be a lot of things that would happen that wouldn't got to court, shall we say. And that was just accepted, that was accepted and just taken on board. I think it would have to be quite serious before, a lot of them would have to be a bit more serious, before it would be taken further.

### **1.23.58**

JMW: Yes.

JW: Because I certainly know of one case where a fellow was given a right clip round the ear by the local policeman and he sort of thanked the policeman for doing it. That was the way justice was sorted out (laughs).

JMW: So, looking back, what do you think is the biggest change in your memory, in your lifetime?

JW: Oh the biggest change is, I would say, is transport. That is...and has been the downfall of a lot of towns in actual fact. Transport...early on it was a captive, it was a sort of captive population.

JMW: Yes.

JW: They couldn't get out, couldn't get out and about very much so they tended to stay in the area. Then eventually along came the cars and they got better and better and by about...I would say by about 1960 people just...gone. And they would go further and further and then the supermarkets came along and I think it was just was the death knell for a lot of these little places like Whithorn because the people would go away to do their shopping and it was like a social day out, it was a bit of a social thing for them. But it was to the detriment of the towns...ah think anyway. I've always said the likes of my father, born in 1899, he went from the days, the very early days of motor transportation to men walking on the moon. What greater change could you expect or think could happen, when you think about it? Also, we were talking earlier on there about Charles Lockhart, when he went to America, it took him, ah think, it was about six weeks, ah think, or something like that to get across the Atlantic and you can fly across there in six hours now. Just the difference and ah don't think all progress is very good.

JMW: So, overall are you optimistic, pessimistic?

JMW: You've got to be optimistic, haven't ye, ye've got to be optimistic. Ah've read a book, actually, *Historical Whithorn* which is quite interesting and when ye read it about Whithorn itself it's always had its boom and bust times from the very early days. And ah think that will continue and ah think if fuel prices go the way they're going now, then people will have to radically look at how they travel and it'll maybe swing back again a wee bit. Ah know we certainly look at our travelling now, we don't travel nearly as much as we used to, we used to think nothing about just jumping in a car and go, now you don't do that.

### **1.27.07**

So, maybe things will go full circle again and I often wonder actually when you look at the...when you hear the prices that people pay for machinery on farms, hundreds of thousands of pounds and I've often...I've said this numerous times, tae farmers 'Would ye no be better wi horse and cart?' and ye begin tae think there's got tae be a cut-off point where maybe smaller is better and things might, ah wouldn't say we go back to a horse and cart, but things might swing back a wee bit.

JMW: Yes, much depends on the oil prices.

JW: It depends on the oil prices but when ye hear of machinery costing three hundred thousand pounds and it works for about a month in the year and the rest of the time it sits in a shed, ye think 'Come on, there must be a different way o doing things, this is just nonsense'. But what ah can see the farmers seem tae want tae get bigger and bigger machinery and ye jist wonder, ye'd think there's got to be a cut-off point.

JMW: Yea, yea.

JW: I might be wrong.

JMW: So, is there anything else that you feel I haven't asked you? We've covered a great deal, is there anything you feel we haven't spoken about?

JW: Well, not really. Ah don't think...ah think we've pretty well covered it. I wonder how technology will improve areas like this, the internet for example, might improve things, I don't know.



JMW: I guess one thing we haven't spoken about is the climate, do you find that that's changed in your memory?

JW: I would say yes. Ah think the climate's always been pretty miserable here to be quite honest (laughter). But, no, it seems to be a lot wetter now, seems to be a lot wetter. Having said that ah can remember in various times being out, working out in the cold and it being very, very cold. Our winters seem to be milder and...but the summers are wetter.

JMW: Do you remember any outdoor curling going on in the area?

### **1.29.27**

JW: Well, sort of second hand, ah remember when ah was at the Knock School our teacher was curling on Elrig Loch and she managed to fall and break her wrist and that's how I can remember, that was happening then. 1947 was a very, very hard winter here, ah can remember ma father was workin in Port William at the time and there was a blizzard come on and he started to walk home and he followed the...from Port William to Monreith he'd followed the water's edge because he couldn't see where he was going but he had the sense to just follow the water and he walked right past the house, he was away up nearly half a mile beyond the house, couldn't even see the house. And ah can remember in the morning, the following morning, when he did get home eventually, the following morning they opened the front door and it was just a wall of snow, there was a drift right up, right up to the eaves of the house and the water was frozen, the sea was frozen in front of the house, the water was frozen and it took weeks for the snow to go away and eventually when it did go away ah can remember there was a lot of thrushes lying dead on the grass. It had killed them. But ah can remember icicles maybe five, six feet long hanging from the gutters.

JMW: Was there a lot of loss of livestock at the time?

JW: Ah don't know, ah don't...there must have been but ah don't know, ah can't remember that. Ah can remember ma father had Samoyed dogs at the time and he ran oot o food for them but luckily the sea was so cold that there was literally hundreds of conger eels washed in and we went doon onto the shore and picked up these eels, most of them were dead, some o them were stunned. Anyway the ones that weren't dead were despatched and he used the eels, he brought the eels up and fed the dogs eels. But, aye, between the house and the Black Rocks at Monreith there was a lot of them. Talking about the sea, talking about the sea there now, I was once evacuated, you could hardly believe this, my claim to fame I was an evacuee, I was evacuated from the house to Monreith because there was a mine washed in on front of the house so we had to be taken away, we were evacuated up into Monreith until they got this thing defused. So that's ma claim to fame, ah was an evacuee (laughter). Aye, there was two or three mines got washed in there at that time.

JMW: Right.

JW: And ah can remember also a lot of timber being washed in, presumably from something that was sunk or maybe just washed off as deck cargo, I don't know. But aw this stuff had...if you had anything like that it had to be reported and they came and took it away.

### 1.32.48

JMW: Right.

JW: Because ah remember ma father had a big...he had a big sort of waxed tub of flour, it was in some sort of big round thing and the flour inside it was fine, God knows how long it had been in the sea, but the flour was fine inside it because it was sealed in it. If ah remember there was tins of paint washed in, there was a bit of a row about that. Ma sister and I got hold of this paint, went down and we painted the rocks on the shore. Now, at that time paint, you couldn't get paint, and ma father was absolutely bouncing about this because we'd used the paint and tae make matters worse it must have been really good quality paint because it stuck on the rocks for years and years and every time he wis down on the shore he'd see this paint on the rocks, he would go 'That Paint!' Aye that went on for a long time.

JMW: Was the timber ever difficult to get hold of during the war because of rationing?

JW: Ah think it was, yes. Ah think they had difficulty getting timber.

JMW: Because a lot would go to mine shafts and boats.

JW: Yes, ah think this is maybe why there would be maybe a fair bit of home grown stuff used but they did struggle tae get materials in the building trade, yes. Ah cannae remember much else but they used to...they quarried stone from just along the road from where we lived.

JMW: Right.

JW: At Barsalloch Point, and it was taken up to, they had a washing plant on the shore just up from the house and aw this stone was taken up there and washed and it was then transported to Baldoon for building the runways, at Baldoon.

JMW: Oh, right.

JW: Ah can also remember the road roller that they had, they had a steam road roller on the roads, ah can remember that at a very young age, because this steam road roller used to take on water, there was a wee stream ran down past the house at Monreith and it was damned, ah think it had been damned a wee bitty during the time that they were doing the excavating of the stones and the steam road roller used to take on water there. Ah often wonder what happened to that steam road roller. And they had the, the council at that time, had linesmen who had a certain stretch of road and ah remember the linesman that we had did from Craiglemine Farm at Glasserton to the creamery at Port William and then he did along the back road to [?] Farm and he kept that himself and it was a damned sight better kept then than what it is now-

### 1.36.06

JMW: Yes.

JW: -wi all the mechanisation, this old boy went out with just wi a scythe and a shovel and he kept that himself. Most of them had that, they had a length like that to do.

JMW: Well, I think if you feel we've covered everything you wanted to say.

JW: There will be plenty other things possibly but ah'm just trying to remember. Ah'd written things doon here but ah think we've covered it all, Julia,

JMW: We've certainly covered a wide range.

JW: We have, we have indeed.

JMW: Ok, well in that case I'll thank you very much and I'll switch off.