

Interviewee: Kirsty Robertson (KR)	Interviewer: Mark Mulhern (MM)
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Kirsty Robertson, project fieldworker, discusses with Mark Mulhern how the material that she has collected on the topic of 'kitchen' could be put to use by the Newton Stewart Museum and the advantages of doing this.

**Key words: Recording equipment 01m 43s; Choice of interviewees 03m 17s; Choice of interview topic 04m 17s; Interviewer experience 05m 05s; Use of interview material 08m 27s; Interviewee experience 10m 30s; Transcribing material 16m 23s.**

MM: So, Kirsty, for the recorder, could you just give me your full name please?

KR: Yes, my name's Kirsty Robertson.

MM: And your date of birth?

KR: 21/09/46.

MM: And if you wouldn't mind me asking, what age does that make you today?

KR: It makes me today, sixty-five.

MM: Thank you, and where were you born Kirsty?

KR: I was born in Glasgow.

MM: And where have you lived through your life?

KR: Well, I spent the first seventeen years in Newark Hill.

MM: Right.

KR: A little former, rather decaying, mining village outside Motherwell. And then we moved to Motherwell and then when ah went to university ah lived in Glasgow for three years and then I came home again for a year and then I got married and then I went to London for two years and then I went to Canada for three years and then I came back to Wishaw, in Lanarkshire, for nine years and then I moved down to Newton Stewart, in Dumfries and Galloway, where I've lived happily ever since.

MM: Gosh, you've moved around. So how long have you been living in Newton Stewart for?

KR: This is our twenty-fifth.

MM: Oh right.

**01m 22s.**

KR: Sorry, this is 2012, this is our twenty-sixth year in Newton Stewart.

MM: Right. So it's home now?

KR: Oh very much so, yes.

MM: Yes, aye. And your father, where was he born?

KR: Ma father was born in Wishaw.

MM: Right.

KR: Wishaw, Lanarkshire.

MM: Right, uhuh, and your mother?

KR: My mother was born in Clydebank.

MM: Right, right. That's great, thanks very much. So I'll now ask you a few questions about the interviewing and whatnot.

KR: Right.

### **Recording Equipment 01m 43s.**

MM: I'll just begin with the equipment. How did you find the equipment to use?

KR: Well, I went into it with some confidence but should have read the instructions because I'm a kind of technophobe.

MM: Right.

KR: And on one dreadful occasion, I didn't switch it on properly when I was interviewing my two best interviewees which had quite dramatic consequences. But, apart from that, if you read the instructions it's perfectly ok.

MM: Right.

KR: Yes.

MM: Right, ok. So the instructions themselves, were they clear enough?

KR: Oh, they were clear enough...

### **02m 20s.**

MM: They were?

KR: ...if you read them [*laughter*].

MM: [*laughs*] Ok. And the support that you've had from the co-ordinators from myself and Alison?

KR: Oh that's been excellent.

MM: Has that been ok?

KR: Yes, that's been excellent, yes.

MM: Is there anything missing, do you think? Is there anything additional that we could do that would make things go a bit more smoothly?

KR: Well I did think that if perhaps, I don't know if it would be possible, if one of the co-ordinators could have been there when you tried to interview the first time.

MM: Yes.

KR: It would have been less nerve-racking, because it, well, I found it quite nerve-racking.

MM: It is nerve-racking, yea, yea.

KR: You don't think it will be I think it is.

MM: Oh it is. I mean especially if you don't know the people.

KR: No I didn't know any of the people.

MM: Yea, well that's quite a thing, and you were interviewing more than one, there was more than one person in the room at the time so that makes it, that adds to it doesn't it?

KR: Yes, you want to do it right, you know.

#### **Choice of interviewees 03m 17s.**

MM: Of course. Now, so who did you interview, or how did you decide who to interview and then what, how did you decide what to ask them about?

KR: Well, I decided who to interview because I knew there is a day centre for older people in Newton Stewart and I knew one of the ladies who worked in there and I thought that would be a kind of captive audience, if you like, and a possibility. And when I went along, the manager, who I didn't know, was tremendously keen on this.

MM: Right.

KR: She is very, very keen on it and I got great support there.

MM: Oh good.

KR: And they actually asked me to come along and introduce the project and I thought I'd be talking to a handful of people and there was a cast of thousands.

MM: Oh no [*laughter*].

KR: And I was introduced as the entertainment so I'd to try and explain, not knowing terribly well myself, what I was about to do.

MM: Yes, aye.

#### **Choice of interview topic 04m 17s.**

KR: But because they'd decided on this topic of 'kitchen' for the connection with the Newton Stewart Museum, which I'm also involved with, I'd taken along, you know, a lot of stuff, old girdles and that sort of thing, and passed that amongst the body and that kindled a great deal of interest. I still don't think they really knew what it was about but they knew who I was and it made it a lot easier...

MM: Yes.

KR: ...when ah went along the next time to ask for, no, on that day, in fact, one of the ladies who works there went around and asked for volunteers who wanted to be interviewed and ah got a list of about nine at that time.

MM: Right.

KR: And ah've been in, I can't remember how many times now, four, or something?

**04m 59s.**

MM: Uhuh.

KR: And ah've got different people, it's engendered a bit of interest in, and the people who are there have become curious about it and have asked about it and have volunteered to be interviewed.

**Interviewer experience 05m 05s.**

MM: Oh good, good. So what would you say you've learnt from the experience, so far?

KR: Well, what I've learnt most of all is you can't ever predict what you're going to get.

MM: No.

KR: You can't ever predict what you're gonna get and in the case of one particular lady who appeared quite willing, she was the unfortunate where I forgot, I didn't turn the recorder on properly...

MM: Right, uhuh.

KR: ...and I asked her, oh she was tremendous, she had tremendous, tremendous memories and a wonderful voice and everything, and when ah said to her 'Would you mind if I did this again' with abject apologies and all that. She said 'Yes, that would be fine, that'll be fine'. So ah went in another day and as ah approached her she just turned on me and said 'No, I'm not doing that again' and she said, 'It brought back so many dreadful memories.' I thought 'Oh crikey'. I felt awful, in fact I was reduced to tears.

MM: Yes.

KR: But later I spoke to her again and she was very apologetic and she explained that she'd had this horrendous history of depression, oh it was awful...

MM: Oh right.

KR: ...what she had gone through and it just was too painful. I thought 'Well, I can relate to that'.

**06m 26s.**

MM: Yes.

KR: But that was really quite upsetting for all concerned.

MM: It would be and unexpected as well.

KR: It was very unexpected because she had said she was willing to do it again and of course I tripped in gaily thinking 'I'll get it right this time'.

MM: Well that's a very, very, rare occurrence that you get that sort of reaction, you know, you've been particularly unlucky in that regard. I mean, it is a powerful process when you ask people to remember, especially older people, because it does become alive to them again, the whole past, not just what you're talking about.

KR: Yes, that's right, that's what it was.

MM: But it's, in all of our experience we've never encountered that. We know it's a possibility so you've been really very unfortunate that that's happened so, you know, that's just a life that you've-

KR: No, it was, I was glad that she talked to me about it later.

MM: Yes, yes.

KR: And ah felt that was quite, it was certainly good for me and it was probably quite good for her.

MM: I'm sure it would be.

KR: You know, to be able to face up to it and talk about it. And she talked about it at great length.

MM: Right. So did she, do you think she left, she left feeling resolved about it?

KR: I think when I spoke to her the second time, certainly she was and then I forgot her name [*laughter*]. God, oh I could just have gone home and stuck my head in a gas oven. I called her the wrong name, I said 'Thank you very much Mary', she said 'It's Sheila'.

MM: Oh Lord. See, that's the sort of thing I would do [*laughter*].

**08m 05s.**

KR: Is it? I thought only I could do things like that. Oh gee, it was awful.

MM: Oh dear. Well that is all part of this process.

KR: It's not life threatening.

MM: But that happening, that hasn't put you off at all?

KR: Oh, no, no, no. I think it's absolutely magic.

**Use of interview 08m 27s.**

MM: Yea. Right, good. And what do you hope would happen with the interviews that you've done?

KR: Well I don't know. What we, what we would like is, if it's possible, for the day centre to get copies or whatever of whatever is produced from it all. And I'm thinking it would be a good project to do in connection with the museum.

MM: Right.

KR: We could maybe get around to that too, you know.

MM: To tie it up to some of the objects or-?

KR: Yes, at least to have the recordings as a resource in the museum.

MM: Yes, ok.

KR: Possibly in the little section about the kitchen where people could listen, could switch in something and hear.

MM: Yes, uhuh.

KR: I think that would be, I think there's a great local interest and I think to have it, to have it available in some way locally to more people rather than, not everybody looks at the internet, not everybody would buy a book.

MM: Exactly.

KR: But I'm sure there are possibilities to have this material available on the ground, locally.

**09m 44s.**

MM: Well, we'd certainly be open to that and there's a great power in having sound but if you've got a range of objects there, if you have people talking about the use of those objects, that becomes much more than just looking at what might be an interesting thing.

KR: Yes.

MM: But if you hear somebody talk about how they used it or...

KR: Especially younger people.

MM: Uhuh.

KR: Because this is where I feel is the real worry, I think things are changing so fast.

MM: Yes.

KR: You know, young people, you might hear about it at school and so on but they probably aren't listening [*laughs*]. So you know, it's got to be made available.

MM: Yes, because it sounds like a long distant world to them and it's not, it was only yesterday, you know.

KR: Yes, it was, it was.

**Interviewee experience 10m 30s.**

MM: Right, good. What do think those that you interviewed got out of the experience?

KR: Oh, I think they enjoyed having someone listen and they enjoyed talking about their past, well most of them did. There was another guy, Dixie, who, he didn't, I don't think, but he was, well he must have got something out of it or he wouldn't have done it or he would have, when I, in the little room where we did it and I tried to explain it more, in more detail, he would just have said 'Well, this isn't for me', he didn't do that, so, and I think they're aware of the fact of how different things are now and they want people to know that because they know.

MM: Mm.

KR: I think they enjoyed that and they just enjoyed a change because they come along to the day centre and I mean it's marvellously well run and so on but it is a novelty to have someone take you out and talk to you and listen to you. And everyone enjoys a little attention [*laughs*].

**11m 54s.**

MM: Yes, yes absolutely, yes. And would you, having done the first set of interviews, would you be encouraged to do more?

KR: Oh yes, yea, yea. I was expecting to do more, I didn't know what the set-up was.

MM: And on the theme of the kitchen?

KR: Well, Susan, who's the manager, is so keen. I said 'Well this is just a start, this is just an idea, I really don't know how this'll go.' But I mean there's people there, one guy I spoke to, who had, his father was a shepherd up behind Glenluce and he, I think that he talked about that, he has amazing memories of, you know, the shepherding life and so on, and there's quite a few men go in there so I would have to find out what their backgrounds were and the kind of things I could talk to them about. I just chose the kitchen because I thought there was a connection with the museum and the fact we had all these artefacts that were easily moved down. But I could talk about anything [*laughs*].

MM: Yes, well it's the...

KR: And I can listen about anything.

MM: That's good because it's everyday life that we're interested in.

KR: Yes.

MM: Which can be almost anything. But the kitchen was a good thing to start with because it's quite interesting, in the interviews that you've done, how you would imagine for some reason, I would have imagined people would have had very intense memories about the kitchen but some of them seem quite indifferent to it.

KR: Yes. Oh May [?] was a star, oh you'd love her she's such a twinkly lady.

MM: Is she?

KR: Oh yes, she's a twinkly lady. And obviously given different circumstances, you know, she would have made a career for herself.

**13m 44s.**

MM: Yes.

KR: But, you know, she was in the first group I started with and of course, and then trying to be terribly encouraging and everything.

MM: Yes.

KR: I'm saying 'Can you tell me what are your first memories of, blah, blah, blah.' 'I really don't have any, I wasn't interested in cooking', I thought 'Oh God. [*Laughs*] this is great? What do we do now?'

MM: Well, in that situation that's fine. In that situation, if she's saying she's not interested in food, she's probably not interested in the theme of the kitchen. Just ask her about her life.

KR: Yes.

MM: And let her say what she wants to say because people, no matter what you are ostensibly going to talk about, they kind of want to say what they want to say.

KR: Yes.

MM: And if she wants to say nothing about anything, that's fine.

KR: Right.

MM: But if she did want to talk about, I don't know, her kids, or her work or whatever, that's ok.

KR: It's the fact she worked in the station, her father was the station master, can't remember, and she worked in the station during the War and she remembered all the troops coming back and forward and I thought 'I should really talk about that.'

MM: She was fascinating.

KR: But, I mean I can go back to her, she'll, we're quite chummy now. Because I didn't know how closely you had to stick to the theme. There was another old bloke, John what's-his-name, he was the Provost of Whithorn and he wanted to talk about was farming. I thought 'I'm no supposed to talk about farming' so had to kinna haul him back but I'll know better.

**15m 22s.**

MM: Well, that's the thing, we allow people, if they're determined to talk about what they want to then go with it.

KR: Ok.

MM: There's no harm in doing that because we're trying to survey the whole of Dumfries and Galloway, anyway, and try and find about life and we want the people to say, we want to know what's important to them so if somebody wants to talk about farming, that's the importance to them.

KR: Ok, ok. Well that's good to know.

MM: But it's still good to have a theme, a direction.

KR: Yes.

MM: Otherwise you just switch the machine on and say 'Well, tell me everything', you're not going to get very far or you'll get too far. So that's all the questions I had, I'll just finish off by asking if there's anything else you'd like to say about the process?

KR: I wrote something down.

MM: Uhuh.

KR: Oh yes, what I was, I don't know if you want to record this or not.

MM: Mm.



**Transcribing material 16m 23s.**

KR: What I wanted to find out about is how you actually transcribe all this, you know, how you select what you're going to select and I mean if I was ever to do a project like this with the museum, what would be the kind of nitty gritty, what you do next.

MM: Well, what you have to start off with is your concept of where you want to end up, by which I mean, what are you going to use the interviews for? Are you gonna put sound clips in amongst the objects? You'd only do a full transcription if you were going to do a book or-

**17m 07s.**

KR: Right.

MM: There's no point in transcribing it if you're not then gonna use that text.

KR: Right.

MM: Or if it's not going to be useful. If you were gonna use it for an exhibition you might want to identify some interesting sound clips and then maybe just transcribe a small paragraph from each because that can be even more powerful in a museum setting, to have the objects, the sound and a wee bit of the written text. Because it's very time consuming, transcribing.

KR: Yes, Alison explained that.

MM: And representing the spoken word, Scottish accent and dialect, can be problematic, so we're not quite sure what to do with the transcribing yet but it does, the level of transcription you do depends on what you want to do with the material you've got. So if you develop your ideas for an exhibition or for doing something like that then we'll know what we're aiming towards and then we can work together about how to best arrange it but it does take a long time to transcribe. It used to be the practice years ago when recordings were done on tape and record to transcribe everything immediately, to keep it safe, but with these digital recorders that's not the concern any more, its predated, [ ? ]. And we do intend to have a website and so forth but I like your idea of an exhibition because we do, I'm hoping to sort of mount a very small scale travelling exhibition this winter drawing on some of the field work that we've done so far to show people what we're doing and to encourage those that haven't become involved to become involved. Because I think to a lot of people it sounds like quite a highfalutin process.

KR: Oh, you never use the word ethnography.

MM: No.

KR: Oh no, no [laughs].

MM: No, no, no.

KR: I don't even say that to my friends.

**19m 13s.**

MM: No. I think it either sounds highfalutin or a waste of time to people. They think 'Well, I've no got anything interesting to say' but they do, of course, you know. So maybe if we hit the idea of this exhibition is to [?] and see the value of just talking about an aspect of your life that's of importance. So what you're thinking about for your museum, we're sort of thinking about similar lines, anyway.

KR: Whether it ever comes to pass is another thing but that would be ideal.

MM: Right, well I'll turn off the recorder at this stage because that's the formal bit of it done. Thanks very much.

KR: That's a pleasure.

**End of interview.**

**Selected extract: 08m 42s – 10m 30s.**