

Interviewee: Norman Burns (NB)	Interviewer: Betty Hudson (BH)
Date of Interview: 26 September 2014	Ref: DG27-5-1-1-T

Interview No.	DG27-5-1-1
Interviewee:	Norman Burns
Interviewer:	Betty Hudson
Date:	26.09.2014
Location:	
Region:	Dumfries and Galloway DG4
County:	
Town:	Sanquhar
Keywords:	
00:00 – 05:00	Sanquhar; Norman's home birth, lived in Sanquhar all life. Father was a miner, killed in mining accident. Mother from Glencaple. Family of 11 lived in bedsit in Howie's Road. Brothers worked in the mines. Sanquhar primary school; class sizes.
05:00 – 10:00	Sanquhar Academy after Kirkconnel School closes. Classes graded to performance. First job as apprentice joiner/undertaker at 'Edward Turnbull'. Release to college to gain qualifications. Joinery trade transition from hand to mechanical tools.
10:00 – 15:00	'Century Aluminium' factory opens; Norman's work there as draughtsperson. Playing football to pass the time. Joins Boys' Brigade. Work with Dumfries and Galloway Council; repairs grants for modernising houses. Many in the region live in squalid conditions.
15:00 – 20:00	Council vote on housing stock. The change in social housing. The Riding of the Marches.
20:00 – 25:00	As a member of the Children's Panel: poor social housing and impact on child welfare. High incidence of referrals to child panel in prosperous areas of Dumfries. Working for Sanquhar fire service; description of the retained fire service; being stuck in a four foot snowdrift in the middle of June. The other crew were local tradespeople.
25:00 – 30:00	Singing in a vocal group. Bringing popular groups to Sanquhar: 'Middle of the Road' (<i>Chirpy Chirpy Cheep Cheep</i>) and the 'Bay City Rollers'. Candle shortage during the miners' strike: importing candles from Germany, driving down to Manchester to collect them, and bringing them to the local shops. Retires 2014. Work for the community council. Sanquhar's 'oldest post office in the world' threatened with closure.
30:00 – 35:00	Sanquhar museum. Sanquhar celebrates 400 years as a Royal Burgh. Princess Anne visits during this year of special activities. Norman is her guide. He receives Queen's Fire Service Medal from Prince Charles. Encouraging young people to join the community council.

35:00 – 40:00	Population of Sanquhar remains steady at around 2000 (Norman worked as Registrar). Sanquhar bricks/brickworks. Reusing the remains of the brickworks to attract visitors, like with a private fishing pond. Bricks used e.g. at Ibrox stadium. Use of LEADER funding in local projects.
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DG27-5-1-2 Betty Hudson interviews Norman Burns (26.09.14)

Betty Hudson: Right, this is Betty Hudson in conversation with Norman Burns on the 26th of September 2014; hello Norman-

Norman Burns: Hello.

BH: The study is Dumfries and Galloway and Norman you live in Sanquhar, in fact, this has been your home all your life.

NB: That's correct.

BH: So, let's start as early as we can, I mean what- you were born in Sanquhar, do you want to tell me a wee bit about what you can remember of your early life, or what you were told about your early life...

NB: I can't remember when I was born but I was born at 13 Deer Park which was the family home, and I was born in the home in the living room in a bed-settee... and I was then the youngest in a family of ten, so I'm a true Sanquharian; so I lived in that house until... til I got married, and still live in Sanquhar now, so I'm a Sanquharian. [1]

BH: Good, good. Right, tell me about your parents- what did your father do?

NB: My father was a coal miner but sadly he got killed in a coal-mining accident at Gateside Colliery, and I was only four years old, so my recollection of my fathers not very... very bad-

BH: Yes, yes.

NB: My mother came from Glencaple and she always used to come over- the stories they used to fish for flounders and aw the rest of it there, and then she moved to Sanquhar, worked in a farm at Whitehill, and met my dad and then got married.

BH: Right, good. So you were the youngest of a large family... what do you remember, say, about family life? You know, what- it was a large family in what size of house?

NB: As I said I was born in 13 Deer Park but we had just moved into the flat- a new house that was built after the war to allow the miners from Larkhall area and that to come to Sanquhar, for they needed miners... prior to that my mother and the rest – the other [2] nine – mother and father and the nine siblings stayed in Howie's Road, and that was just a bed-sit, so I don't know how they managed to accommodate-

BH: My goodness.

NB: -everybody in there.

BH: Right, yes.

NB: And the house - the luxurious house - that was the council house we moved into, that was two bedrooms and a box-room, and that had to accommodate ten.

BH: Really. Good heavens. So life, presumably, was hard for your mother then when she was left on her own to bring you all up-

NB: Yes, she-

BH: -did she then have to work, or?

NB: No, mother never worked, no, but she'd have a hard life bringing everybody in... in these days everybody worked in the mines, and that was just part of life cos that was the only opportunity to be had in the town for employment, and she always maintained - cos I was the youngest - that I would never work in the pits-

BH: Really.

NB: -in the coal mine, so that was always she vowed- it was a very hard life but- the second oldest brother, Jim, was never married, he took on the sort of role of father in the house [3] so I think that was a big boon to my mother.

BH: Right. Uh-hu. So, in fact, did any of your siblings go in to work in the mines?

NB: Yes, all my brothers worked in the mines-

BH: Really, right.

NB: -some of them just for a short time and then moved to other jobs-

BH: Uh-hu.

NB: So that was just part of life in Sanquhar in these days-

BH: Yes, yes. Mm-hm. And, of course, mining now- is there any mining locally?

NB: All the mining now is an open-cast mine that just recently became redundant because of the company went bankrupt and now its been resurrected again but it's a totally different type of mining and it just blots the landscape, it just tears the hills and the greenery to bits and your left with this awful mess, and it employed very, very few people-

BH: Compared to what it-

NB: -and there's no underground mining-

BH: No, no. Right, okay. So, your mother didn't want you to become a miner, did you ever think of being one yourself?

NB: No, I'd never wanted to be one-

BH: Never wanted to be, right-

[4]

NB: I think it was because of my father being killed in the pits, its just, nat, I didnae want to do it.

BH: Yes, yes. So what about your early schooling?

NB: Well, schooling was Sanquhar Primary School, and it's sad to say the old primary school that I went to- part of it is still there because it's a listed building- they moved to a new school in the eighties-

BH: Mm-hm.

NB: -but the old schools still there; these were happy days-

BH: What sizes of- what was the class size like?

NB: The classes were- in my class most of them then were always over forty, about forty-five, something like that, big classes-

BH: Really, yes.

NB: And I was just speaking to my granddaughter the other day- that she was comparing teachers nowadays all being young and good-looking and all the rest ay it, my recollection is there were always old ladies or old men, and, so it's totally different.

BH: Yes-

NB: But the education-

BH: And do you remember any of your- any particular teacher for whatever reason?

NB: Yeah, there was a Miss MacMillan, she was- she's one that always- she was the first teacher for P1, I can still- I can still see her quite clearly, she was one that stuck in my mind- [5]

BH: Uh-hu.

NB: -I thought she was a very good teacher.

BH: Yes. But strict.

NB: Strict, oh yes. That's sort of lapsed nowadays, I think they were very strict in- the discipline, it's just not-

BH: Mm-hm.

NB: -doesn't seem to be present in present education.

BH: Yes, yes. So after the primary school what was your secondary education- that was carried on in Sanquhar?

NB: Secondary education- to Sanquhar Academy, and it was shortly after that, in fact, the first year it was that Kirkconnel School closed, so that any academy pupils from Kelloholm or Kirkconnel came to Sanquhar, so it made it quite a big school.

BH: Mm-hm.

NB: But it was a good school, and it was- in these days it was all split up into A's and B's and C's and D's, and the D's were the ones that just were a total waste of time, and the A's and B's were the ones that were wanting to work, and these were eager to learn- [6]

BH: Uh-hu.

NB: -and to gain- and I think, I sometimes think it was quite a good system, rather than nowadays they try to mix everybody together and it's- it must be quite difficult to get-

BH: Mm-hm.

NB: -to get the people who do want to learn- get them going- but the ones that don't want to learn, I don't think you'll ever motivate them-

BH: Yes, yes. That's true. So- and you stayed at school until what age?

NB: Fifteen years, I left at fifteen, yeah, and-

BH: Right. And what was your first job?

NB: My mother always wanted me to be a painter – as I said, she didn't want me to be a coal-miner – but I went into a local joinery business and was a- an apprentice, it was a five-year apprenticeship with Edward Turnbull, and these were-

BH: This was a local business?

NB: -a local joiner/undertaker, yeah- and he was a- Eddie was a kind of elderly gentleman, and his brother worked with the firm as well, and there was only another two joiners- but I think the discipline and the learning, again, from the older person – Mr Turnbull – stuck with me for the rest of my life- [7]

BH: Right.

NB: -taught you manners, and taught you just how to behave and with people- in people's homes, and just to be polite, and so I think that was a great- although you learned your trade but you learned all that as well.

BH: As well. And as you say it was joiner and undertaker-

NB: Yes.

BH: -were you then maybe exposed to- I suppose from the start, were you exposed to the undertaker side of the job? And was that daunting?

NB: Yes, that was part of it but he didn't force it on you, but I think it just became natural if you were- and he could see if you could take to it and it didn't affect you in any way-

BH: Uh-hu.

NB: -so you were involved with that, and I was a-

BH: Yes.

NB: -that was my first time of seeing- in fact, it happened during one of our local riding the marches – which is a gala day – and there was an accident, and there was three people died that day, and that was my first instance of seeing road traffic accidents and what can happen with it-

BH: Mm-hm.

NB:-so I was involved with that, and it was- it does affect you, but it's- that's part of life.

BH: Yes, yes. And do you think undertakers now- is it very different, do you think, from [8] when- we were talking about, almost about fifty years ago, was it different?

NB: I think it's quite similar, but the only thing is, I think a lot of the local joiners are not doing that side of it, and it's more of a bigger- co-operatives and bigger firms that are doing the undertaking, so [xxx]- it's possibly changing a wee bit-

BH: Mm-hm, right. So, you spent five years learning the trade- what did you enjoy doing? Was it- did you make furniture at all? Or was it all in houses, creating- or building houses, or whatever?

NB: Well, doing my five-year apprenticeship with a small joinery firm like this, you covered all aspects of joinery, so one week you could be working on a farm making sheep-dippers or repairing hay-sheds, and the next week you could be in a house sorting a door or whatever, so we covered all aspects of joinery- [9]

BH: Mm-hm.

NB: -plus we made everything ourselves- we were making doors, windows, then fitting them, so- you covered absolutely everything to do with joinery.

BH: Good, good. So that was a good grounding- so after the five years was up what happened then?

NB: Well, I would say about the five years there with- encouraged them to send me to college, so my boss sent me on day release and sometimes evenings, so then- to gain the paper and have the qualifications for being a joiner-

BH: Mm-hm.

NB: -so when you went to the college, you then were mixed with the larger firms – with their joiners – but they had only experience of maybe doing one job, likes of fitting doors, whereas my experience was wider than that, so it became noticeable that you were-

BH: Mm-hm.

NB: -far, far different from the rest of them-

BH: Mm-hm.

NB: -but you gained great experience- and that passed back, because my employer was always interested what you learned today and what you were doing, and- cos our [10] workshop was all- everything was made by hand, so that was the transformation time for my boss to start introduction machinery and saws and morticers and all the rest of it, so it then benefitted the firm.

BH: Yes. Good, good. So after the five years was up did you stay with them? Or what happened?

NB: I stayed with the firm a couple of years, and then I felt I needed to try and- just try something else, so the local factory started up, it was *Century Aluminium*, and that was 1968 I think it was- so that was a major employer coming to this small town, and they were looking for a draughts-person- so this was before the factory was started they were interviewing- so I was lucky to get that post; so although it wasn't connected to joinery, but it was still part of the skills that I'd gained at the college, and at my education at school, [11] so I employed by that for a couple of years, and it was really- what you were doing, you were designing aluminium sections, and that, for houses, for greenhouses, for conservatories, for windows and- so it was all still very much building trade-

BH: Yes

NB: -and that was a great time of my life that, for- enjoyed the experience and working with different people.

BH: Yes, Good. And at this sort of- so you were twenty-ish? Or about twenty? Early twenties, by this time?

NB: Yes, yeah. Mm-hm.

BH: So, apart from work what were you- what- did you have hobbies? Did you play football, or what did you do?

NB: Yes, from the early days at school it was football – everybody then played football – and in the evenings you went to the- our local park was to the Lorimer Park, and the younger ones had always to wait outside until the bigger boys said, 'right, you can have one on each side', and that's the way – but it's just, they taught you to hang back, and you'd played football, and that's how you passed the time- there were no television and no electronic [12] toys, or anything like these days-

BH: Mm-hm.

NB: I also joined the Boys Brigade, and that was- that was a good grounding between the Church and just learning discipline and all that, again-

BH: Yes.

NB: -and you got the strict discipline to start the evening and then you got your playtime at the end of the night, so I always encouraged it- and encourage even youngsters nowadays to be part of an organisation like that-

BH: Mm-hm. So the Boys Brigade still in operation?

NB: The Boys Brigade is still in operation- there's fewer numbers nowadays but it's still there, it still serves that purpose in the community-

BH: Good, yes. Good. And then, jobwise, after the aluminium factory where did you go?

NB: Yes, so I went back to joinery, for a small firm in Cumnock for about a year – just over a year – and then an opportunity came up with the Council for repairs and maintenance officer-

BH: Right.

NB: -and I was successful in that.

BH: Mm-hmm. And this was Dumfriesshire Council, yes?

[13]

NB: This was Dumfries and Galloway Council, yeah.

BH: Mm-hmm, good.

NB: So, working at that job I was based at Sanquhar which saved on the travelling.

BH: Uh-hu, yes. So, this was looking after mainly housing?

NB: It was-

BH: Or any properties?

NB: No, it was for Council rented properties- social housing, to start with-

BH: Uh-hu.

NB: -and then I got involved with the grants- repairs grants for houses- so that was for private owner-occupiers-

BH: Right.

NB: -so I was responsible for repairs grants, up to ninety per cent some of them were- to encourage people to modernize their house-

BH: Their houses- so was it quite- what were your experiences? Can you remember any particular ones that were- you know, going into some of the houses that you were responsible for?

NB: Oh yes, there's loads of sights- you'd go into houses and the conditions that people were staying in- their beds and all the rest of it, it's- I think the system has let them down- when you see, like, children living in the conditions with no sheets on the beds, and the filth [14] was really unbelievable, and I don't think that children should leave school without the skills to- basic skills to clean your teeth, to wash your clothes, to wash the beds, but that's a fact of life, and that's what- I see that day-in-day-out, and I think it's a failure on society-

BH: Mm-hm.

NB: -that these children are living in these conditions.

BH: Yes. Right. So- and you're still with the- like, in that, sort of, same job, or almost-

NB: Well, that time – I've got to say – with the Council, as well- the other job I got was registrar, and that was- so it was just because it was a Council duty, so you got- you carried that out, so you would register for births, marriages, and deaths-

BH: Uh-hu.

NB: -and that was quite an interesting job, although it was- sometimes you just had to drop everything else, and carry out if someone has died, or a birth, and- but the marriages were good, and we had some quite good fun with marrying couples, and coming in- the very [15] first marriage, I can always remember, the bride- the piper at the door, piping them up the stairs to the Council Chambers, and then the bride came in in white, and this almighty bump in front of her, she was just about nine months pregnant, and that was my first white bride that I married-

[Both laugh]

NB: I think she had the baby about a week later.

BH: Yes.

NB: So it was quite good fun, and quite often they would ask you to- if you'd like to come to the reception, so you'd to be- well, sometimes you went along but a lot of them didn't have a clue, you'd to- they thought you were, like, the minister and say grace, and then you'd to-

BH: Oh yeah.

NB: - tell them what to do for they had no idea about speeches or anything-

BH: Yes.

NB: -but, I had some quite good- I enjoyed it, that was just part of life, it just highlighted the sort ay, the area that I'm living in- it's high in depravation, and the mentality and education, their level is very low-

BH: Uh-hu.

NB: -and I think you've just to try and- go along with that and try and learn them a wee bit of what you know and try and encourage them a wee bit. [16]

BH: Mm-hm, mm-hm. Good, right. So that was in- that was along side your work with the Council, yes- as part of the job-

NB: Yes, aye- following that the Council decided- took a vote on the tenants of the housing stock, whether they wanted to stay with the Council or go with a new social housing landlord; so the vote was they wanted to change their landlord, so it then became just social housing, it was Dumfries and Galloway Housing Partnership-

BH: Uh-hu.

NB: -so I transferred to that-

BH: Yes. Why do you think the vote went against the council?

NB: I think because that they were getting the promise if they moved to the housing association they would get new kitchens, new bathrooms, so that was the carrot, and that's why they went for it-

BH: And was that the case?

NB: Yes, yes; they fulfilled their promise-

BH: Yes, good.

NB: Yeah, so-

BH: Right.

NB: So with that transformation to that, I then moved job, and moved to Dumfries, and then was in charge of a team of eight inspectors, so-

BH: Yes.

NB: -it was a challenging time for me, and it was a change, and it was- it's been a great [17] period.

BH: Yes, yes. Good. Now, I know- away from work though-

NB: Yeah.

BH: -you've been involved in quite a lot of- in fact, have done quite a lot for the community: the Riding of the Marches is one of the things that I know that you've been involved with since-

NB: Mm-hm, yeah... 1969-

BH: Really. Right. So what was your first involvement?

NB: The Riding of the Marches- each year we pick a- we choose a cornet, cornet's lass, and an ensign, and these three elected principals then ride the borough boundaries- we re-enact

the old and ancient tradition of riding the marches, which is to check the boundaries to make sure that none of the farmers or landowners have encroached and stolen some of the ground, so that's the theory behind it-

BH: Right.

NB: -so we do that on the Saturday, and it's done on horseback, and there's normally a hundred or more people on horseback, so it's a good tradition- [18]

BH: That's good.

NB: -it's nice to keep it going-

BH: Yes. Good.

NB: It's now expanded to a ten-day programme of activities, but that is the main part of it- is the tradition of checking the boundaries making- no encroachments have been carried out.

BH: Good. And do you- so, 1969 you said was your first involvement-

NB: Yeah.

BH: -did you- were you one of the principals then? Or-

NB: I was the cornet in 1969.

BH: Right, uh-hu.

NB: Again, that was because of my-

BH: Was that elected by the town? Or how did it come about? How was that-

NB: At that date it was elected by the town council-

BH: Right.

NB: And luckily my boss at the joiner – Edward Turnbull – he was a past principal as well, so it was- he asked me if I would like to do it, so he proposed me to the council-

BH: Right.

NB: -and that's why I got it; so he encouraged me to do it, so-

BH: Mm-hm, mm-hm.

NB: -and I've loved every minute, I've never looked back, because I now work continuously- as I say I work for the committee and I've been chairman- vice chairman... and [19]
continued to work for them.

BH: Right. And do you find that- I know that you've mentioned that it is an area with a lot of people living in depravation, but in spite of that is there still a lot of interest from the whole community-

NB: Oh yes.

BH: -would you say they all turn out to see the various events over those ten days?

NB: With working in a lot of the communities in Dumfriesshire and Nithsdale area, I've found that the community spirit in Sanquhar is extremely high-

BH: Good.

NB: -and that's one of its strengths, I think, if they can rally round and offer support and help everybody out, and I think that is a strength- it keeps [xxx]- the community spirit is-

BH: Uh-hu.

NB: -so if something happens, and you're needing them to rally round, they support you-

BH: Good.

NB: -so I think that is-

BH: And do you find that people are willing then to get involved in the organisation because, obviously, a ten-day programme-

NB: Yeah.

BH: -requires a lot of effort-

NB: That's right, it has to be: one person or a team of two or three cannae do it, so it's teamwork-

BH: Uh-hu.

[20]

NB: I think what's [xxx] it's the same everywhere, it's people maybe don't want to take an office bearer but it's no problem getting workers [xxx]

BH: That's excellent.

NB: I'm lucky for that.

BH: Yes. Good. Now, what else-

NB: Another-

BH: Have you been involved in either-

NB: One of them-

BH: -part-time or as a hobby-

NB: For fifteen years I was a member of the children's panel-

BH: Mm-hm.

NB: -I was chairman of that... that's- again, that's voluntary... position with them-

BH: Right.

NB: -but it was- I felt there was great satisfaction of it-

BH: Can you remember any – without mentioning names – can you remember any particular cases that were either worrying or interesting or whatever?

NB: I tend not to do panel hearings for Sanquhar/Kirkconnel because I knew- cos in an out the houses I knew everybody, so I carried about in Kirkcudbright, Castle Douglas, Annan, and Dumfries-

BH: Yes.

NB: -and most of the problems were coming from the houses that have major problems [21] with the tenancy of the house, it seemed to go hand-in-hand with the children being neglected or not looked after, so... the to seemed to go hand-in-hand, with the poor social housing-

BH: Mm-hm.

NB: -and the children; but there's very, very many cases of neglect that seemed to be common, and children left unattended, and the parents go away to the- socialising and all the rest of it- was a very, very common problem; and that's every town, it disnae matter where ye were-

BH: Yes. So no matter- even, you know, the places you've mentioned are not necessarily- high proportion of deprived circumstances-

NB: No, no. That's right. No, no. And one of the areas we discussed as well, in Dumfries there's an area that gets a bad name: Lochside area, and it's an area that's involved with drink and drugs, and a high unemployment area... and we done a sort of survey with the reporter to the children's panel, and we found that there's an area in Dumfries where [22] the better off- they all own their houses and all the rest of it, and compared with Lochside there's more referrals from the area with the private dwellings than there were per head in Lochside area-

BH: Really.

NB: -and that was really an eye-opener to us all-

BH: Mm-hm.

NB: -so these were people that are husband and wife, or partners both working and out and just leaving their children to do as they please-

BH: Really, yes. Gosh.

NB: They were being neglected.

BH: Mm-hm. Right.

NB: Another hobby- talking about hobbies, I was in the fire service as well; it was a-

BH: So in a place like Sanquhar you have- what is the set up with the fire service in a small town?

NB: It was because of the population just being over two thousand it cannae support a full-time fire station-

BH: Right.

NB: -and the nearest full-time is Dumfries, so Sanquhar- we have a retained fire service which... which is made up of ten part-time firemen or women- [23]

BH: Right.

NB: -and it provides a great service to the... to the town; and it also covers Kelloholm, Kirkconnel – which is another- four mile up the road, with a population about the same again, so-

BH: Uh-hu, right.

NB: -it's a great service that saves lives and property-

BH: Yes.

NB: So it was-

BH: Can you remember any particular call outs?

NB: Well, I was in it for thirty-seven years and I was in charge of the station as well for fifteen of these years, but there's one call that sticks out a mile- in fact there's two- the one- the simple one was going to Leadhills, which is between the highest village in Scotland, which is Wanlockhead- and it was to the radar station which has all the equipment for Prestwick- for the flying- for the control- and we called up there – and this was towards the middle of June – and we had to radio back to control saying we're stuck in a snowdrift, it was four feet deep, and they thought we were lying – it was the middle of June – but we were-

BH: [Laughs] Good. [24]

NB: Another one was, we were sent out to rescue a sheep that had been stuck in a burn-

BH: [Laughs]

NB: -in a part of Sanquhar, so I went up there, and I radioed back to control – trying to make a bit of fun out of it – that we were okay, we would be able to cover all the eventualities, whatever happens to it because the driver is a- he's an undertaker- I was the officer in charge- in front- I was the registrar-

BH:[Laughing]

NB: -the gravedigger was in the back, and the other person in the crew was the butcher, so we could cover all eventualities if we had to do anything, so we had a good laugh about that-

BH: Yes. Good, good.

NB: -but there's many, many stories that are- have been pretty grim, and put life in perspective when you're having fatalities and bringing people out from fires but it's- that was all part of the community service that we done with the fire service-

BH: And rewarding, yes-

NB: Yes, very rewarding-

BH: Yes, yes.

NB: And the most rewarding was in recent years before I retired, that it then became compulsory to have smoke alarms in every house, and when I speak to the boys [25] nowadays they reap the benefit of it because there's next to no fires, they're only getting turned out to automatic fire alarms that went off, faulty-

BH: Right, yes.

NB: -the road traffic collision or something like that, but fires have just about disappeared altogether-

BH: That's interesting.

NB: -which can only be good.

BH: Yes, yes.

NB: -cos it saves lives and saves property.

BH: Good. Mm-hm. Right.

NB: One of the other things I should maybe mention was the melodies as well- before I was married, there was three of us – three of my mates – and we formed a wee group 'DNR', cos it was David, Norman, and Robert, so we called ourselves 'DNR' -

BH: Yes.

NB: -so we decided- there was- kids were always saying there was nothing to do in Sanquhar... nothing to do in Sanquhar, so we started bringing pop groups to the town, and

we run this agency, and we had this group 'Middle of the Road' booked, and all the rest of it, and here they had got a record out and it was number one in the charts- [26]

BH: [Laughs]

NB: -so this was like the late sixties¹- so here they were in Germany, but because we'd booked all the bands through an agency, they were contracted- so they had to come in- so they flew in all the way from Germany, played in Sanquhar, and they were number one in the charts, and it felt really quite unique-

BH: My goodness. [Laughs]

NB: -quite unique; and we also had the likes of the 'Bay City Rollers', they played here before they became really top-notchers-

BH: Yes.

NB: -so I was proud of that time – that was two or three years – and we used to have discos and bands, but we- it gave the youngsters something, somewhere to go-

BH: Good. Yes.

NB: -and it was- and I look back and it was really good, the fun they had, and there was no alcohol involved, it was just clean fun-

BH: Yes, good. And does 'DNR' still exist? [Laughs]

NB: No, no, we all sort of went our own ways, and sort of-

BH: And you can't- nobody's taken it over—[Laughs]

NB: No, no, nobody followed suit- but it was really good-

BH: Uh-hu.

NB: -in fact, the one thing we did do – just to finish off with that, was – I went on then working in *Century*- and the three of us were there at that time, and it was the miners' [27] strike, and yeah, there was a shortage of candles in Scotland – in Britain, in fact – so here, through our contacts and all the rest of it, we found out there's candles in Germany, so we got them shipped over to Manchester-

BH: [Laughs]

NB: -and borrowed the local furniture van, which is *Norman Furnishings* nowadays, used to be *Queensberry Furniture*- straight down to Manchester, brought them up, and then we spent two or three days going to shops in Dumfries, and the ironmongers, distributing them- and it was for the miners' strike- so it was German candles-

BH: Really.

¹ The song 'Chirpy Chirpy Cheep Cheep' as performed by Middle of the Road was, in fact, number one in the UK between June 13 and July 17 in 1971.

NB: -so we did our bit for our community in another way-

BH: Uh-hu. Yes, yes, good. Very good. So you've put a lot into the community-

NB: Yeah.

BH: -which... that's really good. What about- I mean, retirement? Well, I don't think you- it's maybe not going to be sitting back and just sitting by the fire-

NB: No.

BH: -so, can you see-

NB: I retired in May this year, and I omitted to say that I've been working with the community council for quite a number of years as well, again, that's voluntary- [28]

BH: Ay, yes.

NB: -and I've been chairman; I'm now vice-chairman at present... but since I retired in May, I've been more involved with the community council, and... we've the oldest post office in the world in Sanquhar, and it's been threatened with closure, so we've been in negotiations with the Post Office Counters and various other groups to try and see if we can have a business plan to try and take it over-

BH: Right.

NB: -so we're pursuing that at the moment, and we're dealing with *The Royal Bank of Scotland*, various other organisations to try and get that-

BH: Yes, so it's the oldest post office in the world... why do you think it survived? And why does anybody know why Sanquhar was the- you know, was the one to survive? Do you know about the history?

NB: Well it just seemed to be it was- it was something to do with the... some of the pre-wars that was going on, and Sanquhar was linked, because it was the first pony-and-trap that took mail and done deliveries, and that was the connection, and then it was- shortly after that it became the *Royal Mail*- so it was then tagged on that that was part of the history, and it was the oldest working post office- [29]

BH: Yes.

NB: -cos that's the same building where the horse-and-cart used to work from-

BH: Right.

NB: -so that's maintained-

BH: Yes, yes.

NB: -and if it closes – which they've threatened to do – it would then go to a *Spar* shop, because they see that as being longer hours, it's better service for the customer, so it'll be open from ten- seven in the morning til ten at night... but it would lose the post office-

BH: Yes. So you've-

NB: So we're fighting strong to try and maintain that- although it's still the oldest post office in the world for Sanquhar, but it's really for the whole of Britain-

BH: Yes, yes.

NB: -otherwise it'll be lost to Finland.

BH: Ah, right. So tell me, do you find that visitors travel- tourists come, knowing about [30] the history of this building?

NB: Oh yes, there's a large sign out- and you see that any tourist what you get- they come, and hey want to see Sanquhar knitting, but they always see them in front of the post office, with their photograph taken in front of the sign-

BH: Yes.

NB: -so it is a tourist attraction- but I think Sanquhar- I think that's one of our failings: we could sell it more, I think we need to try and get the more- and get it- promote Sanquhar and what we have-

BH: Yes.

NB: -the history part of it; the Sanquhar knitwear, the post office, and we've got e remains of Sanquhar castle-

BH: Yes.

NB: -there's lots of history about the area.

BH: Right. And what about the museum? Have you had any- is that- there is a small museum in the town-

NB: A small one, yeah; a small museum, and that's- we're lucky again because it's run by the Council so we do need- it's it's lucky- it's open, seasonal from spring and Easter to October-

BH: Mm-hm.

NB: -and, again, it's very small but it's part of the old tollbooth which is, in itself, is a lovely building, and it's really an icon for the area, it's really an outstanding structure- a great- [31] so the museum is manned with two people in it, and it's only closed on a Monday- but they've got some lovely parts of Sanquhar history: the brickworks, the War, the miners, the Riding of the Marches, all on display, and then a separate case for the Sanquhar knitwear which is really quite unique... and this year because of the celebrations for the end- the start of the War- hundred years, so they've had a case showing all the examples, and the local people involved, and some memorabilia from there, so-

BH: Yes.

NB: -it's yeah- it's a good wee museum.

BH: Right. Good. And then am I right in thinking that you were- were you chairman of the Riding of the Marches when the Princess Royal visited? Or was it-

NB: Yes, I was-

BH: Can you tell us about that?

NB: Yeah, the Riding of the Marches and everything at that time as well we had a Sanquhar events group, and which was really a subsidiary of the Riding of the Marches, and I was [32] chairman of both of them, and it was to celebrate four-hundred years Sanquhar becoming a royal burgh, so part of that celebrations we had a- decided instead of having two or three activities we had a year of activities-

BH: Gosh.

NB: -and it started off with giving school children, and all the rest of it, a commemorative mug with a coat-of-arms on it, and all the rest of it, so it was really- one of the events was we had the Princess Royal- Princess Anne came to visit us: she landed in Lorimer Park in Sanquhar, so I had the pleasure as being chairman to show her around the royal burgh, and that was really quite a... quite a- something that'll stay with me for the rest of my life as well-

BH: Yes.

NB: -so it was- I must say, she was really very easy to speak with, and easy to walk along- it was one of the easier tasks-

BH: Yes.

NB: -I was very, very proud of that day.

BH: Good, good. Excellent. You have put a lot into Sanquhar, yes; but get a lot out of it- [33]

NB: Oh yes, yes. It's very rewarding.

BH: Uh-hu. Good. Anything else you'd like to mention?

NB: Maybe- we've mentioned the royal- but part of the... part of the royal visit, and then with the fire service- I mean, I retired from the fire service, I was very lucky, and I gained Queen's Fire Service Medal-

BH: Ah.

NB: -and so... that's normally awarded to fire masters, and there was only one-

BH: Who were in a position-

NB: -position in a whole region-

BH: -yes, not just a part-time- retained-

NB: -full-time, so there's only one part-time fireman received it prior to me, so it was really... honour to get that award, so-

BH: Yes.

NB: -my wife, Betty, and I, and Michelle, went to London, and got it from Prince Charles, so that was really a memorable few days-

BH: Yes. Good.

NB: -to get that award-

BH: And when was that? Don't worry...

NB: I dinnae remember.

BH: That's- well done, yes.

NB: So that was really another- so that was an achievement and thanks for being in the [34] fire service, so-

BH: Yes. So, as I say, you put a lot into Sanquhar, you get a lot back, do you- and, there is a good community spirit- so do you think there are younger people now coming along and prepared to do the kind of- to put in the sort of effort that you've... put in?

NB: I keep thinking there isn't, but I think there are- but we're getting some youngsters, but we elect principals each year, as I say, [xxx] but we lose them- but the odd one keep working with us, but- I think the Riding the Marches and all these things that- they'll still continue- I'm quite sure of it-

BH: Yes, yes.

NB: -we must ensure that they continue- community council as well, we're trying to draw in younger people, we're trying to encourage school children- try and get the- cos the vote had dropped to sixteen, we're feeling we could try and encourage the fifteen and sixteens to come to the community council and be members-

BH: Yes, yes.

NB: -so that's the sort of vein we're trying to- that's all for the future as well- encourage- make sure that-

BH: Yes.

NB: -they continue for all these things. [35]

BH: Good. And does the population- has it varied much over the years?

NB: No, Sanquhar's-

BH: You said about two thousand-

NB: -Sanquhar hasn't, no, and that was one of the things that even though with the registration, when they used to register the births and the deaths, and at the end of the year they always seem to tally up-

BH: Right!

NB: -which is very unusual, but I'd looked back a number of years to see, and it was always the same, and the numbers were about forty, and whatever deaths, the births were similar-

BH: Yes.

NB: -and the population's been very, very steady over the years-

BH: Mm-hm.

NB: Once the mines closed there was a sort of drop, some of them went to Corby and some went up to Lothians, but nothing- no major impact at all-

BH: No, no. You mentioned the brickworks, they- that's not in operation now-

NB: No, no.

BH: -but when did that- was that a long established-

NB: Yes, aye-

BH: -when would they have started?

NB: And the Sanquhar- got a great name that- for the type of brick- cos of the clay [36] that's round about Sanquhar, it's very hard, so the type of brick was a very, very hard brick-

BH: Mm-hm.

NB: -and there's some prominent buildings been built with it- it closed in the early sixties, and the remains of it are still in place, and, in fact, it's- because in the future we're gonna be surrounded with windfarms, which seems to be a very forward- whether we like them or not, they seem to be getting planning permission-

BH: Yes.

NB: -but the only thing is we're going to be- windfarm benefits- so the communities are going to get a lot of money from them- so that was one of the projects- was to try and do something with the brickworks-

BH: Mm-hm.

NB: -cos one of them, there's a great big pond, so we're thinking about making it, like, for fishing, and trying to attract fishers to it, and have it private and have it stocked privately with fish-

BH: Yes.

NB: -and then also give them some memorabilia about the brickworks, cos-

BH: Good. Yes.

NB: -we're in the process of doing brochures and all that at the moment for it.

BH: So you- and you mentioned special bricks because of the type of clay... and used in [37] certain buildings, can you-

NB: One that sticks out to mind was Rangers Football Club, the frontage of the ground- you always see it on the news- and it has been on the news a lot lately for various reasons, but the frontage is all facing brick, which is Sanquhar-

BH Right. Used for- that's the Rangers Club, ground-

NB: Rangers Football Club- Ibrox Stadium-

BH: -Ibrox- Rangers Stadium- Right. Oh. Interesting... right, well this has been very interesting Norman- a final word? What would you like to finish off with... anything?

NB: Just, I hope- I said the community spirit- and I think because- the other week we had a Day of the Region, which was another event that I've been involved with, which is funded by European funding through LEADER, and that was the strength- so there was people [38] from Ireland and from LEADER down in Nottingham, but they came- and that's the- what they went away with was- Sanquhar, what a community spirit they have, and they just were fair amazed at the- speaking to everybody, and the enthusiasm for doing all these things, and community spirit; so we cannae sell it enough that that is a strength- community sprit-

BH: Good.

NB: Yeah.

BH: Good. Well that's a good not to finish on.

NB: Yeah.

BH: Thank you very much.